

Gaudium et Spes, Luctus et Angor:
The Dramatic Character of the Human Condition

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CATHOLIC diagnoses of the pain and damage proper to the human condition after the fall can be arranged on a gamut. At one end are those that depict us as utterly corrupt, constantly groaning at the agony of our condition and incapable of seeing or responding to the beauty of the creator's trace in the created order. At the other are those that depict us as superficially damaged, easily and naturally capable of perceiving and responsively resonating to the Lord's presence in the world, and suffering moderately, comprehensibly, and sustainably. Positions that approach either of these extremes tend to have more or less deep systematic difficulties and in the end not to be defensibly Catholic. But between these there remains a broad range of possibilities, most of which have found a place within the tradition. Pascal's analysis of the human condition, for example, or Newman's, or Augustine's (in most of his moods), has a very different tone than does Bernard of Clairvaux's, or Thomas Aquinas's. Temperament no doubt has a good deal to do with what a particular Catholic thinker is drawn to emphasize when offering such a diagnosis; but so do differences on other theological questions.

Answers given to the question of the extent to which, if at all, the human condition can properly be said to have improved over time since the fall are intimate with, even though analytically separable from, conclusions about the extent to which we are damaged and subject to pain. Those close to the positive end of the pain-and-damage gamut are drawn to a progressive view that emphasizes both the possibility and the reality of improvement in our condition. We are capable, according to such views, of self-improvement both materially and morally; and not

only are we capable of it, we have actually done it. Human history, on extreme versions of this view, has been an upward trajectory toward where we now find ourselves; and the human future will be more of the same, onward and upward into an inconceivably better future. The opposed view is that there has been and can be no improvement in the fundamentals of the human condition, and that while we may see occasional and local changes for the better (polio is eliminated, slavery locally abolished), these are always inseparable from unanticipated worsenings of our condition (polio's elimination is among the conditions of the emergence of some new, much worse disease; the local abolition of slavery causes its increase elsewhere; and so on). Misery remains constant and progress an illusion, according to advocates of this family of views.¹

On this question of progress and improvement in the *post lapsum* human condition, too, the Catholic tradition has been hospitable to a broad range of opinion. It has, however, not usually been so to an unnuanced optimism about progress. That family of views is more at home in secular conceptual settings: it sits well with a certain kind of old-fashioned evolutionism,² and it has a special affinity with the economic forms of life that belong to late modernity, according to which anything less than constant growth and improvement (in economics, in medicine, in technology) is a disaster. Catholics are more likely to acknowledge the possibility of local improvements in the human condition, while being skeptical about the possibility, much less the likelihood, of fundamental or systemic improvement.

These matters, the extent to which and ways in which pain, damage, and improvement ought to be thought to belong to the human condition since banishment from the garden, are relevant to a consideration of *Gaudium et Spes* almost 45 years after its promulgation (I write in 2009),

¹ Neither of these positions is much nuanced, and many distinctions could be applied to make them more so. The first and most obvious one is to distinguish *in extenso* and with precision between local and universal improvement: it is possible to think that there are many instances of local progress while at the same time denying that universal improvement, progress across the board, ever happens. An important nontheological treatment (and critique) of the idea of progress is Christopher Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991). Some Catholic interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes* stand in considerable danger of captivity to a narrative of progress. The notion of the normativity of the future, in Mary Elsbernd and Reimund Beringer's "Interpreting the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel," in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 43–97, moves in this direction.

² Evident in peculiarly intense form in George Bernard Shaw's 1903 play *Man and Superman*.

because for most of that time both its supporters and its critics have attributed to it a position close to the positive end of the gamut on all three topics, and have variously approved or disapproved of it because it accords, or does not, with their own preferred position on these questions. But is *Gaudium et Spes* in fact positive in an unnuanced way—or at all—about the possibility and reality of improvement in the human condition? Does it minimize the depiction of damage and pain in its depictions of the human condition? I shall try to show that the answer to these questions is no, and that therefore those who either dislike or like the document because they take the answers to both questions to be yes are confused. It is in fact remarkable how little has been written about the emphasis *Gaudium et Spes* places upon anguish as intrinsic to the human condition;³ the same is true about its clear and repeated statements of the fact that apparent improvements in the human condition are always local and always ambiguous.

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Gaudium et Spes was promulgated on 7 December 1965, as the last of the Second Vatican Council's texts. It is the Council's only pastoral constitution (*constitutio pastoralis*). There are, apart from it, nine decrees (*decreta*), three declarations (*declarationes*), one constitution (*constitutio*) simpliciter, and two dogmatic constitutions (*constitutiones dogmaticae*). The distinctions marked by these labels are important, and while this is no place for a full discussion of their meaning, which is in any case disputed,⁴ it is relevant to the topic of this essay to note that the Council Fathers drew explicit attention to what they meant by categorizing *Gaudium et Spes* as a pastoral constitution in the first note to the text; in that same footnote they also had something to say about what effect calling *Gaudium et Spes* a pastoral constitution ought to have upon how the text is read and interpreted. Here is the note in full:

The Pastoral Constitution "On the Church in the Contemporary World" consists of two parts [i.e., §§11–45 and §§46–89], which together form a unity. The Constitution is called 'pastoral' because it intends, in dependence upon doctrinal principles, to express the relationship of the Church to the world and its contemporary inhabitants. However, there is lack neither of a pastoral intention in the first part

³ A notable exception is Paul Bordeyne, *L'homme et son angoisse: La théologie morale de Gaudium et spes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2004).

⁴ For the details of the discussions at the Council about whether the category "pastoral constitution" is the right one for the document, and what it might mean if it is, see Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 77–82.

nor of a doctrinal intention in the second. In the first part, the Church develops its doctrine about human beings and the world in which they find themselves, together with its own relationship to these same things. In the second, it concentrates upon diverse aspects of contemporary life and human society, and particularly upon questions and problems that seem urgent in our time. As a result, there is in this latter part material which, though subject to doctrinal principles, has to do with both permanent and contingent matters. Therefore, this Constitution should be interpreted according to the usual norms of theological interpretation, and with proper regard, especially in the second part, for the inevitably changing circumstances inseparable from the matters there treated.⁵

This programmatic statement is important in several ways.

First, the pastoral nature of the text is located in its concern to “express the relationship” (*habitudinem . . . exprimere*) of the Church to particular transient and contingent states of affairs—matters of social and political organization, for example, or of local history, or of advance in scientific understanding or technological capacity. It is the fact that the text makes judgments on these matters, mostly in its second part, that makes it pastoral. In making such judgments, and in making recommendations that flow from them, the Church offers guidance, but not prescriptive teaching, to the faithful about how they should respond to the world in which they find themselves. The Council Fathers here function principally as *pastores* rather than as *doctores*; and they signal this in the status allotted to the text.

Second, readers of *Gaudium et Spes* need to show “proper regard” for the “naturally changing circumstances of the matters treated” in the second part. They ought, that is, sit a good deal lighter to what the text says about such matters than to what it says about matters of doctrinal principle. This is because the Church has no special diagnostic expertise: rather, the descriptive claims it makes about the present economic or political condition of the world and the prognostic ones it offers about the likely near-term future of such matters are as likely to be wrong (which is to say very likely) as what the (often secular) authorities upon which it

⁵ My translation from the Latin given in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 1069. I assume, though I am not sure I am right to do so, that the magisterial weight of notes to conciliar documents is the same as that of the text. On the meaning of the characterization of *Gaudium et Spes* as a pastoral constitution, and the significance of its title, see, usefully, Hans-Joachim Sander's analysis in Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, eds., *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, 5 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), vol. 5, 691–710.

draws in making such judgments themselves claim. It is not, therefore, to take a couple of instances almost at random, *de fide tenendum* that “the modern economy is characterised by our growing mastery over nature” (§63)—the reverse may well be true—or that it is “obviously” the case that we should seek “the establishment of a universal public authority” (§81) to safeguard international peace. If it is true (I think it is) that we should seek the establishment of such an authority, it is not *de fide tenendum* to think it obviously so. These are prudential, pastoral judgments by the teaching Church, to be accepted precisely as such.

But, third, there can be no sharp or final distinction between the pastoral and the doctrinal. The first, largely doctrinal, part has pastoral intent and implications; and the second, largely pastoral, part has doctrinal intent and implications. Judgments about what belongs under which head, and the extent to which pastoral recommendations can be separated from teaching with doctrinal weight, are not easy to make and must be made with care.

These first three points, and the passage from which they are drawn, are substantively important. They might, if taken seriously, moderate some of the disagreement about how to read *Gaudium et Spes*, for that disagreement is, among Catholics, more often about the text’s pastoral recommendations than about its substantive doctrinal claims. If it were better understood that the text’s status as a pastoral constitution, and the guidelines it offers as to how it should be read exactly as such, permit (indeed, probably require) a broad range of positions among Catholics on some of the particular recommendations it makes, a good deal of the odium would be removed from disagreements about how to read and implement it.

It is not rare for magisterial texts to provide explicit, self-referential guidelines to how they should be read. But it is rare—I suspect that *Gaudium et Spes* provides the first instance—for such a text to make an explicit distinction between its pastoral and its doctrinal content, with all the qualifications noted, and to signal thereby a mode of reading attentive to just that distinction. For that reason alone, more attention should be paid to the text’s opening footnote.

But even that is not all. If I read the footnote correctly, it makes no reference to the *Prooemium* (§§1–3), the *Expositio Introductiva* (§§4–10), or the *Conclusio* (§§91–93), for these parts of the text belong neither to Part One nor to Part Two, which are the only segments of the text given explicit mention in the footnote. The footnote’s hermeneutic, then, leaves aside perhaps one-tenth of the work, thus providing no guidance as to whether these sections should be thought of as principally doctrinal, principally pastoral, or something else altogether. I suspect that the right answer is

“something else altogether,” and in what follows I offer a close reading exactly of these parts of *Gaudium et Spes* with two questions in mind. The first is this: where does the diagnosis of the human condition, both Christian and pagan, offered therein belong on the earlier-identified gamut of seriousness about pain, damage, and the prospect of improvement? And the second is: what is the magisterial status of that diagnosis?—Or, put slightly differently, what kind of assent does the diagnosis demand of or suggest to Catholics reading it now, almost two generations after it was composed and promulgated? In dealing with this second question, the guidelines of the opening footnote provide some help.

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The Pastoral Constitution’s first three words are *gaudium et spes* (joy and hope); its second three are *luctus et angor* (sorrow and anguish). The history of the text’s reception and use would certainly have been very different if this order had been reversed. The judgment that *Gaudium et Spes* is fundamentally and essentially optimistic about the human condition here below is one readers are predisposed to make by the text’s title; it is one even more attractive to those who have not read the text, but who are nonetheless sure they know what is in it.⁶ A work titled “Sorrow and Anguish” necessarily signals a different angle of vision upon the human condition than does one called “Joy and Hope.” In fact, *Gaudium et Spes* balances its attention to the positive and negative aspects of the human condition fairly well. It is certainly not unrealistically optimistic, or optimistic at all, about that condition.

The sorrow and anguish mentioned by *Gaudium et Spes* in its second clause, as well as the joy and hope mentioned in its first, belong to those addressed by the text, those who live in the world of the early 1960s. That joy, hope, sorrow, and anguish are shared, the text goes on to say, by the disciples of Christ, for there is nothing human “which does not also echo in their hearts” (§2). So far, then, a balanced evaluation of the human condition: both its delights and its horrors are acknowledged from the outset, and both together are said to order the relation of Church to world. *Gaudium et Spes* says of itself that it speaks not just or even principally to Christians, but to all of humanity; it has in view the entire world, “the theater of human history, marked by its labor (*industria*), its

⁶ On this see Richard Schenk, “*Officium signa temporum perscrutandi*: New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelisation,” in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Leuven: Leuven University Press; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 167–203, at 176ff. Schenk’s treatment of Lukas Vischer’s memo of 1963 on an early draft of material that was to become *Gaudium et Spes* is especially helpful.

tragic disasters (*clades*), and its triumphs (*victoriae*)” (§2). This world has been created and is sustained by God’s love, but has fallen into sin’s bondage (*sub peccati quidem servitute positum*) from which it is now liberated by Christ, crucified and risen, so that it might be transformed (*transformetur*) and brought to its consummation (*ad consummationem perveniat*) (§2). The power of the evil one (*potestas maligni*—“power of evil” is an equally possible translation) has been broken but is still active.

Again, a balanced vision: things are very, very bad, as they always are—sorrow, anguish, tragic disaster, sin’s slavery—but (and) there is hope for their improvement. Joy and hope are braided together with their opposites, as is entirely normal in Catholic diagnoses of the world’s condition. Hope is present and real; but at the same time the world teeters on the brink of the precipice.

In its third section, the last of the Prooemium, *Gaudium et Spes* identifies what the Church has to offer to the joyful and suffering humanity to which the Church itself in part belongs. This offering is one of service (*ministerium*) to a *genus humanum* that is at one and the same time fascinatedly admiring of its own achievements and powers and anxious in its questioning of contemporary changes and their implications. To this admixture of self-regard and anxiety, the Church offers colloquy *de variis illis problematibus*, bringing the light of Christ to these problems in a spirit of humble service so that people might be saved and human society renewed. This prospect of salvation (*salus*) and renewal (*instauratio*) is the highest calling (*altissima vocatio*) of human beings, and in acknowledging its possibility, the Church also acknowledges “a certain divine seed, implanted within” (§3) each of us.

So far *Gaudium et Spes*’s Prooemium. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the preliminary diagnosis of the human condition given here is of society moving headlong forward toward it knows not what, of its members profoundly anxious about that lack of direction, and of the Church, itself implicated in the condition of all humanity, offering the light of Christ to show the people the way forward. The use of the word *admiratio* in §3 to label the regard the people have for their own achievements is especially striking: to say that the people are *admiratione commotum* for their own achievements is to say that they are transfixed with fascination by them. This is not a good thing.

The Introduction (§§4–10) begins by affirming, in words that have become the work’s best known, the Church’s *officium . . . signa temporum perscrutandi*, its office of examining or scrutinizing the signs of the times in order that it might properly serve the world of its time. What follows is a depiction of those signs as the Council understood them.

First, this is a time of rapid change, of “real social and cultural transformation” (§4). Such change introduces difficulties, and *Gaudium et Spes* treats these first as a series of contrasts. We have extended our power, but we can’t always use it for our own good; we have greater knowledge of the intimate depths of the mind, but are uncertain about ourselves; we are uncovering the principles of social life, but don’t know how to use that knowledge; many of us are richer than any humans have ever been, but far too many are poor and hungry; we value freedom, but “new forms of social and psychological slavery are developing” (§4); we value unity, but are deeply and bitterly divided politically, to the extent that we threaten ourselves with a war that will destroy everything; our means of communication increase in efficiency and scope, but the content of that communication is vitiated by ideology; and, most generally, we seek the perfection of the temporal order without equally seeking spiritual progress. The result is that many of us “fluctuate between *spes* and *angor*” (§4) and suffer from a deep disquiet.

This deep disquiet is also characterized as *hodierna animorum commotio*, today’s unease of souls, or spiritual commotion (§5). This description is conjoined with a strong affirmation of the goodness and importance of technological advances; but it is also said several times that these advances are the principal causes of today’s anguish. *Gaudium et Spes* also identifies increasing migration, whether across national boundaries or from rural to urban areas, as contributing to spiritual disquiet. There are, it claims, currently *gravis perturbationes* (§7), serious disturbances, in modes of social behavior and in the norms thought to govern such behavior. Correspondingly, there are changes in the *vitam religiosam*, by which *Gaudium et Spes* does not mean the lives of those vowed to particular religious communities, but rather the ways in which people practice Christianity. Some of these changes are good, for example the removal of some superstitions; but some are bad, for example the increasing frequency with which the abandonment of Christianity is publicly advocated. By this last, *multi perturbentur*, many are disturbed and upset (§7).

All the things mentioned in the two preceding paragraphs lead to *discrepantiae* and *inaequilibria*, discrepancies and imbalances, of various kinds: between rich and poor, between powerful and weak, between concern for practical success and “the demands of the moral conscience” (§8), and among races and social classes. *Gaudium et Spes* summarizes these imbalances in this pregnant sentence: “Hence the mutual mistrust, enmity, conflicts, and sufferings, of which we are simultaneously cause and victim” (§8). This mutual mistrust works itself out in part in increased demands for those advantages of which disadvantaged groups are “vividly

aware that they are deprived" (§9). *Gaudium et Spes* judges these demands in large part to be good because they show that those who make them are eager for a "full and free life worthy of humanity" (§9). Nevertheless, these demands and the strife to which they often lead contribute to the disturbances of the world of *Gaudium et Spes*'s time, and in those circumstances it is increasingly evident that the world "faces the road leading to slavery or freedom, progress or regress, fraternity or hatred" (§9).

Finally, as a last note in *Gaudium et Spes*'s Introduction, there is emphasis upon the "dramatic" nature of the human condition.⁷ We are finite but have infinite appetites; we do what we think we should not; and these facts about us show that we are subject to an internal *divisio* which obscures itself from us so that we cannot clearly see it. Some respond to this by seeking to perfect the temporal order, truly believing that this can be done by human effort; others despair of any improvement at all, and think that all meaning and purpose is the product of human decision, with no reality greater than the fictive. The light of Christ, *Gaudium et Spes* affirms, can overcome these errors, and it is the Church's continuing task to offer that light to the world (§10).

So far *Gaudium et Spes*'s Introduction. It, too, is far from optimistic. I have emphasized its negative notes in the summary just preceding: the dramatic character of human existence, poised between finitude and infinity and balanced between a desire for good and an incapacity to do it; the difficulties connected with rapid and dislocating change; the deep disquiet suffered by many; the political, ethnic, and economic polarizations of the time; disruptive change in the norms governing ordinary social behavior; and the possibility that the world will choose the path of slavery rather than that of freedom. All these themes are taken up in one way or another, some at considerable length, in the body of the work, which is by a considerable margin the longest of the Council's texts; but it is not my purpose to consider and analyze those more lengthy treatments. Instead, I now turn to an analysis of that other part of *Gaudium et Spes* apparently not mentioned in the work's footnote, that is its Conclusion (§§91–93). What has this to say about the human condition?

The first note struck in the conclusion is that of incompleteness. What *Gaudium et Spes* has offered is necessarily incomplete because of its inevitable generality: if the whole world, in all its variety and with its vast range of particular local difficulties, is to be addressed, that address must be of an *indoles generalis*, a general character, and will require much more

⁷ The adjective *dramaticus/a/um* is used twice in the introduction: in §4, the *mundus* is said to have an *indoles dramatica*, a dramatic character; and in §10, the *inaequilibrium* rooted in the human heart is said to yield a *status dramaticus* for our lives.

to be said before it can be applied in particular cases. That more will need to be provided by the faithful in particular situations. *Gaudium et Spes* then turns its attention to particular audiences: Catholics; other Christians; and pagans (this is not a word *Gaudium et Spes* uses), whether sympathetic to the Church or opposed to it. To all these, the Church offers cooperation and support in working toward the goals identified in the body of the work, especially in its second part. It does this under the sign of hope, and with a responsive return of thanks to the Lord who makes everything possible. There is not much here of explicit relevance to the diagnosis of the human condition: conciliar documents typically end, as this one does, with a gesture of obeisance.

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What, then, do we have here? A diagnosis of the human condition, certainly, and one in many respects closely indexed to the particulars of the first post-war generation. Advances and improvements of many kinds are acknowledged glancingly in the Prooemium and Introduction, and are acknowledged as such in more detail in the body of the document, sometimes in glowing terms. But in the Introduction, such improvements are without exception treated as ambiguous. A clause mentioning an improvement or an advance is typically at once balanced by one depicting the negative concomitants of exactly that advance. The atmosphere is one of tension.⁸

There is moral and existential tension, certainly: as we welcome, for example, technological advance, we welcome it as Catholics under the guidance of *Gaudium et Spes* with the certain knowledge that it will bring in its train unanticipated negative consequences. This dual welcome—the simultaneous warm embrace and the suspicious stiff-arm—creates tension in us, as it should. For example, technology has made speedy communication across long distances vastly cheaper and easier than it was even at the time *Gaudium et Spes* was composed. This is a good, to be applauded, and used by the Church for its own purposes—an example of such use being the instant and free availability of the text of *Gaudium et Spes* on the Vatican's own website in a number of languages to anyone with an internet connection. But along with this good go, symbiotically and inseparably, numerous evils, for example, the massive presence of pornographically violent images and text on the Web, and of noxious and

⁸ Many interpreters take the Introduction to provide an empirical analysis of the state of the human race circa 1965. See, for example, Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 2005), 41ff. This is odd. It is in fact theological from beginning to end: it provides a set of tropes for the framing of an empirical study.

dangerous political propaganda of various kinds. Or, consider the genetic modification of crops grown for food: this has increased yields and made it possible to feed many more people than would otherwise have been the case. This too is a good, and a great one, to be delighted in. But along with it goes a loss of genetic variety and an accompanying increase in likelihood that catastrophic and irrecoverable loss might result from new kinds of plant disease. In both cases (and there are many others) Catholics taught by *Gaudium et Spes* ought to find themselves simultaneously welcoming and rejecting, and aware of the tension in such a mixed response. This is one aspect of the imbalance of which *Gaudium et Spes*'s Introduction speaks so lyrically.

Fortunately, *Gaudium et Spes* provides a conceptual device in its Introduction to frame this tensive imbalance in such a way as to make an iconic tableau of it. I mean the idea that human existence is essentially dramatic in character. This is most striking in §10, where we read:

The imbalances under which the world labors today are connected with a more fundamental imbalance rooted in the human heart. There, many elements oppose one another. On the one hand we are creatures who experience our limitations in many ways; while on the other we are aware of the limitlessness of our desires and of our calling to a higher way of life. Attracted by many urgent solicitations, we are forced to discriminate and to renounce some of them. Also, being weak and sinful, it is not rare that we do what we would not and do not do what we would. And so we suffer an internal division from which many and great societal discordances come. Many, certainly, whose lives are infected by a materialism of the practical order are thereby turned away from a clear perception of this dramatic situation; and others are so overcome by wretchedness that they are prevented from appreciating it.

These are, first, claims about the human condition as such: it is dramatic because it is divided against itself while at the same time aware of being so. This internal division has at least two facets: the tension between our limitless appetites and the fact that we can satisfy only some of them; and the tension between what we want to do and what we find ourselves doing. We are, *Gaudium et Spes* claims, aware of both these tensions, which makes their effect upon us all the deeper: this reflexive awareness of our divided nature is what makes our situation dramatic. We live our lives on a small stage, parts of which are lit brilliantly and parts of which languish in deep darkness; we move back and forth from light to dark while wanting to stay in the light; and we constantly seek to make the stage larger in order that we might be less trammelled, that our strutting and fretting on it might have

larger scope. That desire—the desire to increase our scope—is, *Gaudium et Spes* implies, among those that inform and motivate our work for technological, societal, and political progress. The extent to which this is the case is also the extent to which our internal divisions get incised into the social and political spheres: those spheres become dramatic in the sense given just to the extent that our lives as human beings are dramatic.

This is certainly no facile endorsement of progress and improvement. It is also very far from a minimization of the grip that pain and damage have upon the human condition. The drama of human existence cannot be made undramatic or meliorated by any of the particular advances and improvements mentioned and often endorsed in Part Two of *Gaudium et Spes*; they find their place as acts in the drama, tensively self-divided and productive of at least as much *angor* and *luctus* as *gaudium* and *spes*. And this is a peculiar and particular emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes*: it is the only one among the Council's documents to characterize the human condition as dramatic.⁹

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This depiction of our condition as dramatically poised between good and evil, and as a fabric necessarily woven from rejoicing and anguish braided tightly together, provides *Gaudium et Spes*'s framework. It is not precisely a doctrinal analysis of the human condition or a theological anthropology—something approaching that is found in Part One. Neither, certainly, is it a set of diagnostic or prognostic claims about the present condition and likely future of human work and modes of organization—something approaching that is found in Part Two. Nor does it exhibit an understanding or analysis of culture as formative of human activity and self-understanding.¹⁰ It provides, instead, scenery and lighting for the stage upon which those two enterprises are then undertaken in the body of the text.

⁹ There are four instances of the use of the adjective *dramaticus/a/um* in the corpus of conciliar texts. Three of them are in *Gaudium et Spes*. In addition to the two already mentioned, there is the phrase *luctatio dramatica* in §13 to describe the tension between good and evil in human beings. That entire section repays close attention as supportive of the interpretive line taken here. The only occurrence of the adjective outside *Gaudium et Spes* is *Inter Mirifica*, §7, where the term is applied, revealingly, to the effects with which the mass media might depict good and evil. I rely here upon Philippe Delhay et al., eds., *Concilium Vaticanum II: Concordance, Index, Listes de fréquence, Tables comparatives* (Louvain: Publications du CETEDOC, 1974), 211.

¹⁰ Tracey Rowland's analysis of the idea of culture in *Gaudium et Spes*, in her *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), ch. 1, is both largely correct and important. But she misses the importance of *Gaudium et Spes*'s provision of a set of terms and tropes for the analysis of culture—terms and tropes that are in fact in substantial harmony with the analysis she goes on to offer herself.

This (perhaps) is why the first note has nothing to say about *Gaudium et Spes*'s introductory and concluding sections: they are of a different order than what is in parts one and two. The audience for a play can (and should) forget that they are watching a play; and they are often properly unconscious of the effects carefully wrought by the play's lighting and scenery and blocking, even while those effects shape their response to what they see and hear. In the case of a written text, however, forgetfulness of the setting can go too far, especially when that setting is alluded to only rarely in the body of the text. We should, as good readers of *Gaudium et Spes*, take the dramatic tension of the document's frame seriously, and bear it in mind as we read and think about the particulars of the largely doctrinal analysis of Part One and the largely pastoral analysis of Part Two. Were we to do so, we would read every economic (§§63–72) and political (§§73–76) phenomenon treated by *Gaudium et Spes* as a dramatic figure, half in the brilliant light of progress and advancement, and half in the shadowy darkness of imbalance and deep disturbance. This reading would need to be maintained especially when *Gaudium et Spes* is very positive in its depiction of what we human beings make, as for example in §36 and §57, when language of beauty and autonomy is used in these connections.¹¹ We would, that is, do what *Gaudium et Spes* recommends, which is simultaneously to rejoice and weep over everything that is done and made and thought and said in the world. Confidence in progress and fascinated admiration of our achievements would be modulated and eventually overwritten by hope;¹² but hope requires and implies acknowledgment that what we do for ourselves requires not *admiratio* but, rather, a garment woven of *spes* and *angor*. That garment will be more like a hair shirt than a silken tunic. N.V

¹¹ Though even in these cases, *Gaudium et Spes* very soon qualifies what has been said along these lines, and turns the reader from the brilliantly-lit part of the stage to that in shadow.

¹² On this, see Bordeyne, *L'homme et son angoisse*, ch. 4. See also Lieven Boeve, "Gaudium et Spes and the Crisis of Modernity: The End of the Dialogue with the World?" in M. Lamberigts & L. Kenis, eds., *Vatican II and its Legacy* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 83–94. Boeve usefully shows how the reading of *Gaudium et Spes* into a late-modern narrative of progress has been called into question by the decay of confidence in such narratives. He is, however, insufficiently nuanced in his judgment that *Gaudium et Spes* is itself bound up with such judgments.