

Gaudium et Spes: The Task Before Us

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THE ESSAY by George Weigel presented to us here for discussion is representative at several levels of the current *status quaestionis* regarding the Second Vatican Council. The fortieth anniversary of Vaticanum II brought a good deal of detailed scholarship on the genesis and formulation of the Council documents.¹ As Weigel's essay suggests, by its dealing less with the process of writing the pastoral constitution than with its broader interpretative issues in the context of what is widely perceived as the post-conciliar transition from late modernity to postmodernity, the theological discussions occasioned by the upcoming fiftieth anniversary are likely to shift to questions concerning the most fitting hermeneutic of the Council. Anticipating the fortieth anniversary, the work of the Bologna school around G. Alberigo documented in generous and accessible detail the dynamic that can be described as an often less-than-pacific coexistence at the Council of two parties, the proponents of which admittedly could shift somewhat from document to document and issue to issue: a majority, willing to assert positions in significant discontinuity from the ecclesial and theological habits of thought and practice dominant in the decades or even centuries prior to the Council; and a minority, hoping to preserve the very continuity that the majority was willing to forego. The documents were a compromise between this majority position of—at

¹ Cf. esp. Giuseppe Alberigo et al., *History of Vatican II*, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1996–1998), vol. 1–5; as well as the more systematic and synthetic portrayals in Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, eds., *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004–2005), vol. 1–5.

times—wide-ranging discontinuity and a minority position of resolute continuity. The final acceptance of these dialectically weighted documents by the whole Council and the papacy is not usually referred to as the work of a (super-) majority, although at times Weigel's essay comes close to this kind of somewhat confusing, if understandable, language.²

The detailed historical analyses associated with the fortieth anniversary of the Council, despite receiving some polemical criticism, provide a reliable guide to primary source material and its place in the history. They also offer what is on the whole a plausible and well-documented account of the debates, bringing important nuance to the four older paradigms that used to dominate readings of the Council. Prior to these works, there had been two common readings by those who saw the Council chiefly as a break with the past: the reading of those who greeted the supposed break,³ sometimes going so far as to view the post-conciliar papacies as betraying the "Spirit" of the Council by repairing the breach, necessitating for the near future a still more novel Vaticanum III to make the rupture irreversible; and the view of those who regretted the alleged rupture, spawning schismatic communities that felt the need to deny the *de facto* exercise of the *Magisterium* in order to save its *de iure* possibilities. Prior to the fortieth anniversary, there had also been two common readings of the Council by those who saw it as largely in keeping with the past: the reading of those who regretted most of the post-conciliar developments in theology as a profound misrepresentation of the Council itself, not the result of the Council's own weaknesses; and those who regretted post-conciliar papal teaching and leadership as proof that the Council had not yet changed as thoroughly as the *pars melior* had intended

² Cf. the programmatic sentence from Weigel's essay: "The reading of *Gaudium et Spes* that follows assumes that the majority of the Council Fathers intended the Pastoral Constitution to be understood through a 'hermeneutic of reform'—and then asks whether *Gaudium et Spes* properly read the 'signs of the times'" (see Weigel, 253, n. 3). For the legitimate nuances introduced by the post-conciliar reception of the watchword "the signs of the times," by which later theologians combined the majority desire to look for God's presence in the world with the minority sense of how our world is often all too far from him, cf. R. 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, and Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 167–203.

³ For a recent, more moderate version of this hermeneutic applied to the conciliar innovations toward non-Christian religions, cf. John T. Noonan, *A Church that Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

to change the vision of the Church or traditionally Catholic views on faith, hierarchy, or non-Catholic religions.⁴

Since the historical work occasioned by the fortieth anniversary of the Council, two more nuanced paradigms have come to the fore. Unlike the trend of many, perhaps most, earlier works, both of these newer readings stress that the Council documents are *de facto* a blend of innovation and preservation *vis-à-vis* traditions dominant just prior to the Council. They differ, however, in this: one interpretation tends to view only the majority position as normative and legitimate, while considering the minority position regrettable. This reading is most often proposed by writers who, having personally attended the Council, continue the debates in pretty much the same terms and alternatives familiar to them from the adversarial discussions at the Council. This interpretation rejects as normative the *de facto* compromise it describes. The frank account by Giuseppe Alberigo in *A Brief History of Vatican II*⁵ provided a helpful example of this tendency. Alberigo identified his circle of friends and mentors with the majority. Freely awarded modifiers, bluntly separating “fortunate” from “unfortunate” developments at the Council, underline the personal stance behind the book, based on memories of personal involvement in the events by the late author and his wife, Angelina Nicora, whose journals are cited here at length as authoritative.⁶ The book presents the majority’s successful interventions with the pope as something altogether positive. By contrast, the minority’s occasionally successful interventions with the pope are portrayed as nefarious and opposed to the conciliar dynamic. Official and spontaneous subgroups of the majority are portrayed as pro-conciliar; those of the minority, as anti-conciliar.⁷ A similar pattern recurs in other works of this school. Of the three “underlying issues” that John O’Malley identifies in the Council,

⁴ For the alleged but regretted continuity in the concept of faith, cf., for example, the critical remarks by Eilert Herms, “Offenbarung und Glaube als Gegenstand des ökumenischen Dialogs,” in *Jahrbuch des Forschungsinstituts für Philosophie Hannover*, vol. 7 (1996), ed. Richard Schenk et al. (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1995), 251–86.

⁵ Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); cf. in much the same vein John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); and the first essays in John W. O’Malley et al., eds., *Did Anything Happen at Vatican II* (New York: Continuum, 2008), which contain a sharp counterpoint to claims of continuity. A one-sided hermeneutic of continuity, though inadequate, is not corrected by a hermeneutic asserting the sole normativity of discontinuity.

⁶ For example, Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 52–54.

⁷ For the qualification as good of cases of influence and preparation by the majority or of papal intervention in its favor, cf. Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 5–6, 16, 19, 24, 27–31, 36, 52, and 61; for the opposite qualification of similar activities in favor of the minority, cf. 28, 47, 52.

namely, the nature of ecclesial change (*aggiornamento*, development or *ressourcement*), the shifting of power to either the periphery or the center, and the questions of style (for example, as regards definitive language), he sees the minority influence in the first and especially the second set of issues as a hindrance to the genuine conciliar dynamic.⁸ Arguably, interpreters can be still too close to the *de facto*, “political” reality of the Council to see its potential for a truth beyond the experienced conflict. Such a hermeneutic suggests a refusal of the breadth of the Council’s own decisions, the throwing of punches after the final bell had sounded.⁹

An alternative interpretation, while also accepting the overall account of events as portrayed in terms of divergent majority and minority voices, differs from this first new hermeneutic by accepting the promulgated documents as marking the received parameters of Catholic teaching, from within which a future synthesis should be sought. This hermeneutic proceeds from the expectation, documented in the conciliar texts, that both majority and minority positions point to elements deserving future development, to thoughts that should not be lost.¹⁰ What such syntheses will look like has been and will continue to be the task of post-conciliar debates, drawing on the new situations of subsequent times. These syntheses need to be developed from the unique thematic memory of each document. Just as the list of supporters for majority and minority positions at the Council could shift notably from text to text, so, too, the character of a synthetic development of the texts would and will continue to vary too widely to be deduced from common principles alone. The reflection on *Dei Verbum*, where the co-existence of differing voices in the final text is especially palpable, will seek a synthesis between the self-communication of God and the historicity of the people he calls, between revelation of

⁸ Cf. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 298–313, especially: “On the final outcome of the council the minority left its mark on the three issues—under-the-issues. On the center-periphery issue the minority never really lost control. . . . Collegiality, the linchpin in the center-periphery relationship promoted by the majority, ended up an abstract teaching without point of entry into the social reality of the church. . . . The majority was consistently frustrated in its efforts to make its will felt through the establishment of real structural changes.” By contrast, the majority often is shown prevailing over the minority, but it is never said to “frustrate” a conciliar dynamic nor to foster “abstract teaching” (311–12).

⁹ Cf. the analysis of the trend by Robert Spaemann, “Was heißt ‘das Zweite Vatikanum annehmen?’” *Deutsche Tagespost* 28 (April 2009).

¹⁰ Despite the dominant tone and direction of the work, cf. the more even conclusion to O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 312: “By their very nature the three issues do not in practice admit final and absolute resolution. Attempting such a resolution would in the long run spell disaster.” For “the validity of the contrasting values” in the third set of issues, cf. 307.

the Other and the self-experience of humans in various times and places. The still unfinished task of reading *Nostra Aetate* will be attentive both to the universal mediation of Christ and the growing appreciation that it elicits or acknowledges for non-Christian religions. The complementarity of voices in *Dignitatis Humanae*, speaking both for the toleration of the religious practice of others and the right to the free exercise of the *unica vera Religio* (§1), viewing as rooted in the conscience the dual freedom from coercion to practice or to abstain from religion, was arguably the most explicit synthesis of opposed (contrary, not contradictory) voices in any of the sixteen documents.¹¹ One of the least synthetic was *Perfectae Caritatis*, although the centrality of diocesan and parochial structures could underscore the importance and relative autonomy of the institutes of consecrated life needed by local churches, if the latter are ever to carry out effectively the *munera Christi* entrusted to them.¹² The ecclesial development since *Lumen Gentium* suggests the connection between the need to strengthen the mission of the local bishop and the vitality of the papacy, bishops' synod, and regional episcopal conferences on the one hand as well as the renewal of presbyterium, laity, and religious on the other. The way in which the Church of Christ "subsists" in the Roman Catholic community is one that does not deny the important witness of heterogeneous Christian communities. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, too, was most easily misinterpreted, when its internal tensions, including the demands of both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, were lost from sight.¹³

¹¹ Cf. R. Schenk, "Voices of the Conscience," *Villanova Law Review* 54:4 (2009): 593–607.

¹² Cf. R. Schenk, "Creative Fidelity: Remembrance and Forgetting, Renewal and Accommodation on the 800th Anniversary of the Foundation at Prouille," *Dominican Studies*, Inaugural Issue (2007): 4–16.

¹³ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "40 Jahre Konstitution über die heilige Liturgie. Rückblick und Vorblick," originally in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 53 (2003): 209–21, translated here from the Regensburg edition, Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie* (Gesammelte Schriften XI) (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 695–711, here 696–97: "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy drew together the manifold streams and rivers of the Liturgical Movement and united them into one deep river which 'brings joy to God's city' (Ps 46, 5). Of course there remained behind some residual, free-standing waters, so to speak, which couldn't be channeled into this river, and in the river itself the different tributaries united in it can still be identified. The currents still show where they came from. Internal tensions have remained, and we will need to discuss them: tensions between the desire to renew the liturgy of the ancient Church once again in its primordially and the need to situate the liturgy in the present age; tensions between the conservative and the creative element of liturgy; tensions between the worshipping character of the liturgy and its catechetical and pastoral tasks. These of course are tensions that are rooted ultimately in the very essence of the liturgy and

Weigel's chosen topic did not include an attempt to present in detail his sense of the wider hermeneutic of the Council. His reference to Pope Benedict's first Christmas allocution to the Curia from December 22, 2005, suggests, however, an intended direction. In that address, Benedict first recalled St. Basil's warning after the Council of Nicea against "falsifying through excess or failure the right doctrine of the faith."¹⁴ Benedict contrasted here two contrary hermeneutics: one, "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," which, while rightly identifying the mixed character of the debates and the texts they produced, claims that "the true spirit of the Council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts. . . . These innovations alone were supposed to represent the true spirit of the Council." Benedict's description of the second option, which he argues is the "right hermeneutic," does not endorse an assertion of mere continuity (equivalent to what Basil described as the "failure" to receive conciliar insights), but a "*hermeneutic of reform*, of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God." Reminiscent of J. H. Newman's insights in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, it is only by the change of surface habits of teaching and practice that a deeper continuity of principles and the preservation of characteristic types are attained.¹⁵ It is precisely

do not merely reflect different currents of liturgy. The Council sought in impressive ways to establish the right internal balance between these different aspects. But in carrying out the commission of the Council, it could easily happen that the balance of the conciliar text got dissolved in a one-sided way into just one particular direction. This is why there is always a need to reflect anew on the actual statement of the Council. The general ease with which anyone could lay claim to 'the Council' to support his or her own wishes led to a false reading of the great task which the conciliar fathers bequeathed to us."

¹⁴ Citing Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*, XXX, 77 (PG 32, 213 A; Sch 17 ff., p. 524). The address of Pope Benedict to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005, "Ad Romanam Curiam ob omnia natalicia," was first published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. XCVIII (Januarii 2006), 40–53 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), is also documented on the Vatican web-site: www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html. The address is cited here according to the extensive excerpt in Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (eds.), *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), ix–xv, here page ix.

¹⁵ Newman's terminology is reflected here at several points. Having highlighted "three circles of questions" raised by the Council as to ". . . the relationship between faith and modern science, . . . natural sciences but also historical science," "the relationship between the Church and the modern State," and "the relationship between the Christian faith and the world religions" (Benedict XVI, "Ad Romanam Curiam ob

in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists. This ideal of a “hermeneutic of reform,” a “synthesis of fidelity and dynamic,” is confirmed here by reference to the first conciliar addresses of John XXIII and Paul VI: “It is clear that this commitment to expressing a specific truth in a new way demands new thinking on this truth and a new and vital relationship with it; it is also clear that new words can only develop if they come from an informed understanding of the truth expressed.”¹⁶

George Weigel’s essay also does not attempt to describe in detail the tension that had surfaced during the genesis of *Gaudium et Spes* itself, focusing instead on the differences between the “worlds” of 1965 and 2009 and what the contemporary *aggiornamento* of *Gaudium et Spes* itself might look like. And yet closer attention to the conflicts around the text and the title of the Pastoral Constitution as it developed between 1962 and 1965 could help us elucidate how *Gaudium et Spes* might assist us today in engaging the world of our own time. Admittedly, the complex debates at the Council about what would become *Gaudium et Spes* began at the latest with the Aula address of Cardinal L.-J. Suenens on December 4, 1962, in which he called for the agenda of the Council to include reflection on the Church both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and it did not end until December 7, 1965, the day before the Council was brought to a close. These debates led to, accompanied, and followed the several remarkably different drafts.¹⁷ The various

omnia natalicia,” in Lamb and Levering, loc. cit. xii–xiii, the address continued: “It is clear that in all these sectors, which all together form a single problem, some kind of discontinuity might emerge. Indeed, a discontinuity had been revealed but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance” (xiii). “The Second Vatican Council, with its new definition of the relationship between the faith of the Church and certain essential elements of modern thought, has reviewed or even corrected certain historical decisions, but in this apparent discontinuity it has actually preserved and deepened her inmost nature and true identity” (xiv).

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, address in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition*, xi.

¹⁷ Cf. Hans Joachim Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Peter Hünermann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg: Herder, 2004–06), 581–869, especially the extensive section on the defining controversies concerning the text of the Pastoral Constitution: 616–91: “Die bestimmenden Auseinandersetzungen um den Text der Pastoralkonstitution.” Sander’s long and well-documented essay brings the additional challenge to the reader of following his own independent development of a “topological” pastoral-systematic method, one attentive to the dialectics of self and other, proper and alien “loci” or contexts, in light of which “every number, every chapter, every major section, and every major division” (702) of *Gaudium*

sides of the debates, which included such unexpected voices as Cardinal Spellman's support and Karl Rahner's critique of the *Gaudium et Spes* project, did not match what might be our easy pre-understandings of Council majority and minority. The voices shifted with the various sub-issues of method, content, and title. Even after its promulgation, *Gaudium et Spes* would continue to be viewed especially by German theologians with an uncommon ambivalence.¹⁸ Even a cursory review of those discussions is beyond the scope of these reactions; but perhaps a brief example of the controversies will be allowed. The challenges to *Gaudium et Spes* that the German bishops and their theologians articulated in the final weeks of the Council and the robust defense of *Gaudium et Spes*, especially by French theologians, might well overflow the familiar banks of Rhine-to-Tiber imagery, but these debates illustrate as no others the tensions within the Pastoral Constitution itself. The expertises prepared by the highly respected Jesuit theologians, O. von Nell-Breuning and especially K. Rahner, on the *Gaudium et Spes* document for the fall meeting of the German Bishops Conference at Fulda and their discussion on August 31, 1965 were highly critical of the nearly finalized draft of *Gaudium et Spes*.¹⁹ Rahner recommended that the text be left for a post-conciliar coetus to finalize (his preferred suggestion) or that at most it be demoted from a Constitution to the status of a mere letter. As he put it, the draft was flawed and nothing on which the Council could congratulate itself. Like most of the German reservations, Rahner's arguments had to do by and large with a critique of the excessive optimism in the document. Unlike Ratzinger, however, who, perhaps because more engaged with ecumenical issues, was critical of an overly optimistic view of human existence²⁰ and some ten years later would

et Spes, as well as the work of all other theologians, are viewed. While this systematic can lead to the impression of an excessive fascination with metaphors of localization and of an indifference to the dangers of self-alienation ("Fremdbestimmung"), Sander's methodology also suggests a rare possibility to move beyond the present paralysis of the grace-nature-discussion in Catholic theology.

¹⁸ Sander, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralconstitution," 844–53, exemplifies this post-conciliar ambivalence of proximity and distance to *Gaudium et Spes* in the theologies of J. Ratzinger, H.-J. Pottmeyer, and P. Hünermann, as well as in the works of K. Rahner and his students, J.-B. Metz, K. Lehmann, and E. Klinger.

¹⁹ Cf. G. Turbanti, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno. La redazione della costituzione pastorale "Gaudium et Spes" del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Società editrice Il Mulino, 2000), especially 617–27; Sander, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralconstitution," 650–74; and Gilles Routhier, "Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period," in *History of Vatican II*, ed. G. Alberigo, 49–184, esp. 136–77.

²⁰ Cf. immediately after the Council, J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils* (Köln: Bachem, 1966), in English translation in the collection *Theological Highlights*

describe the excessive optimism in and following *Gaudium et Spes* as a kind of “counter-syllabus” in favor of Enlightenment values,²¹ Rahner was worried about the appearance of all too optimistic claims by those with faith to solve the problems of the world shared by those with and without faith. His worries paralleled the concerns of many conciliar fathers of varied theological tendencies who were hesitant to apply the title of Constitution to concrete stances toward contingent events and complex problems. Rahner’s reflections on the limits of ecclesial insight might well have accelerated his shift into what Peter Eicher once described as the third phase or moment of Rahner’s thought, “the re-absorption of theology by common reason.”²² Rahner’s critique of *Gaudium et Spes* was soon reflected in statements by Cardinals König and Döpfner, as well as by Bishop Hengsbach. The discussions with French bishops and theologians that followed in September, 1965, and which *inter alia* brought Rahner into direct conflict with J. Danielou, M.-D. Chenu, and Y. Congar (who viewed the German criticism as hard but not unfounded) did lead to the decision by the German Bishops Conference to seek to amend but not to prevent or “demote” *Gaudium et Spes*. The more optimistic view of the world defended notably by the French-speaking side had been expressed in the shift away from the wording that had been in the draft prior to the Zürich text drafted in January, 1964 (possibly introduced by the Angelicum’s L. Dingemans), the shift namely from the early draft, “gaudium et luctus, spes et angor,” to the far more familiar final version, in which the “joy and hope” of the contemporary world, shared by the Church, became

of Vatican II (New York: Paulist Press, 1966); and Ratzinger, *Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute*. Erster Hauptteil: Kommentar zum I. Kapitel, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 14, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 315–54, English translation in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (London: Burns & Oates; New York: Herder & Herder, 1967–69). Admittedly, if one compares the criticisms of the *Gaudium et Spes* draft which Rahner and Ratzinger published just prior to the final session of the Council, it is clear that Ratzinger, too, by sharply contrasting the Christological and the ecclesiological presence to the world, is eager to show the limits of what the Church can be for the world: K. Rahner, “Über den Dialog in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 176 (August 1965): 321–30; and J. Ratzinger, “Angesichts der Welt von heute. Überlegungen zur Konfrontation mit der Kirche in Schema XIII,” *Wort und Wahrheit* 20 (August–September 1965): 49–54.

²¹ J. Ratzinger, “Der Weltendienst der Kirche. Auswirkungen von *Gaudium et Spes* im letzten Jahrzehnt,” in *Zehn Jahre Vatikanum II*, ed. Andreas Bauch et al. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1976), 40; cited by Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralikonstitution,” 657–58, n. 188; cf. also 838–44.

²² Cf. Peter Eicher, *Offenbarung: Prinzip neuzeitlicher Theologie* (Munich: Kösel 1977), 356–68.

more audible than any shared “tears and fears.”²³ The dialectic of majority and minority positions here was already implicit in John XXIII’s call for the Council to avoid condemnations of the non-Catholic world while showing solidarity in bearing its problems and worries. Too much celebration of the culture will gloss its problems; too much concern with its problems will lose sight of its strengths. The hermeneutic of reading *Gaudium et Spes* today in light of a text which pairs praise with concern for the contemporary world means that we would need to show a critical solidarity with the present day in its *gaudium et luctus* and in its *spes et angor*.

What G. Weigel’s essay provides best is a helpful account of the “tears and fears” which the advent of a perceived “postmodern” age has added to those of “late modernity” (and without prejudice to that debate about whether we have in fact moved beyond late modernity; it is notable that postmodern claims tend to say less about what they are seeking in the future than about what of the past they are fleeing). The less optimistic reading of the contemporary world, although it was the minor key of *Gaudium et Spes*, continues to have its legitimate place in reading the Pastoral Constitution in postmodern contexts. It belongs to the task of sharing in the *luctus et angor* of our own age. What would demand considerable more discussion, however, is Weigel’s account of the legacy of Pope John Paul II as the appropriate response of *Gaudium et Spes* to postmodern weaknesses. Weigel rightly notes, perhaps even understates, Wojtyła’s intense involvement in the process of *Gaudium et Spes* and his dual reading of the strengths and weaknesses of the modern world, though oddly enough the essay illustrates this chiefly by reference to pre-conciliar preparatory documents. The 1964 Cracow draft of an alternative text for *Gaudium et Spes*, prepared at Wojtyła’s initiative by members of the Polish Bishops’ Conference,²⁴ the important address that year by which the Archbishop of Cracow introduced the draft to the Council,²⁵ and the changes he made subsequently to the draft are all passed over here by his otherwise accomplished biographer. Weigel’s reference to the importance that John Paul II attached to *Gaudium et spes* §22 (and 24) is in no way overstated; even Hans Joachim Sander, who presents side-by-side two quite different portrayals of John Paul II’s take on *Gaudium et Spes*, terms *Gaudium et spes* §22 the “gravitational center” of his pontificate.²⁶ And

²³ Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution,” 624.

²⁴ AS III 5, 300–14.

²⁵ Ibid., 298–300.

²⁶ Cf. Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution,” 859–61, in contrast to 632–35, citing *inter alia* John Paul II, “Discorso nel XXX anniversario

yet, as Sander also points out in other terms,²⁷ these interventions at the Council do not show a clear sense of what J. H. Newman had called “the power of assimilation”: the Church is described here as a teacher, not a learner. Greater attention to Wojtyła’s address introducing the alternative Cracow draft for *Gaudium et Spes* could shed light on the interpretation of *Gaudium et spes* §22 urged by the most acerbic Catholic communitarian critics of Weigel who celebrate the alleged postmodernity (or merely the premodernity?) of “radical orthodoxy.”²⁸ The Cracow draft anticipated positions on religious liberty that would be promulgated in *Dignitatis Humanae*: the dignity of conscience demands freedom from the coercion to practice or to neglect religion. At the same time, the Archbishop of Cracow was proposing a dialogue that would not rely on faith and the faith community alone: “In Schema XIII it is necessary to speak in a way that lets the world see us teaching it in a non-authoritarian mode, searching together with the world for true and equitable solutions to the difficult problems of human life. . . . Such a method excludes, on the one hand, all things that display, as I might say, an ‘ecclesiastical’ mentality. Such things include, for example, lamentations about the wretched state of the world, but also those all too facile ‘appropriations’ for the Church of any good whatsoever existing in the world, merely verbal displays of a positive stance toward the world.”²⁹

In Wojtyła’s view, neither of these two extremes of distance or accommodation should replace true dialogue with the soliloquy of the faithful.

della proclamazione della Costituzione pastorale ‘Gaudium et Spes’ ” (November 8, 1995).

²⁷ Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution,” 632–35.

²⁸ Cf. especially Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), leading to the opposition between a faith-based involvement in statecraft and the affirmation of the Enlightenment notion of human rights. For a more detailed study of the Christocentric dimensions of *Gaudium et Spes* and the growing attempts to nuance the alleged optimism of a merely incarnational Christology by increased attention to a theology of the cross, cf. Thomas Gertler, *Jesus Christus—die Antwort der Kirche auf die Frage nach dem Menschsein: Eine Untersuchung zu Funktion und Inhalt der Christologie im ersten Teil der Pastoralkonstitution “Gaudium et Spes” des zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1986).

²⁹ AS III 5, 299: “In schemate XIII tamen oportet tali modo loqui, ut mundus videat nos ipsum docere non tantum modo auctoritativo, sed etiam simul cum ipso inquirere veram et aequam solutionem difficultium problematum vitae humanae . . . Methodus talis excludit una ex parte omnia, quae mentalitatem—ut ita dicam—‘ecclesiasticam’ ostendunt. Qualia sunt, v.g., lamentationes super miserrimum mundi statum . . . , nimis faciles “appropriationes” cuiuslibet boni in mundo existentis pro Ecclesia . . . , ostensiones omnino verbales benevolae erga mundum habitudinis.”

The talk continues: "On the other hand, that method of teaching that we call heuristic demands that the mind of those with whom we are in conversation be led by the power of arguments."³⁰ Unlike some of the recent fideist critics of Weigel, Wojtyła did not exclude the power of argument from the suggested ways to engage the sadder sides of our times.

Weigel's comments in this essay on the darker sides of postmodernism are perceptive.³¹ The need to engage that neo-Manichaeism of our own times described by the essay is part of the task of receiving *Gaudium et Spes*. But not all dimensions of the *pensiero debole* can be overcome, even for the believer. It belongs especially to central tenets of the Thomistic tradition, which is claimed here by Weigel, that grace and faith do not destroy all the weaknesses of nature and reason, but preserve many of them and draw them into higher service.³² This programmatic idea, although at times neglected both by a handbook Thomism and its communitarian critics, was clarified in a paradigmatic way by Thomas's position in the controversies of his own day around the inability of unbelievers and believers alike to find conclusive, rational, or empirical evidence for the beginning of the visible world.³³

³⁰ Ibid.: "Altera ex parte methodus docendi, quam dicimus 'heuristicam', postulat, ut mens eorum quibus adloquimur ducatur vi argumentorum."

³¹ One point, however, that calls for some additional elucidation is the essay's association of postmodernity with autonomy, which is more often associated with a characteristically modern confidence in subjectivity. The moment of fragmentation, which seems to be a common thread running through all the varied notions of postmodernity, calls into question the sense of the autonomous subject touted by the Enlightenment. It is more than a question of definitions. Postmodern society in America seems ever more inclined to restrict the autonomy of the religiously-minded, in order to command a show of respect even towards those who by their own account are more driven than free. That suggests a trend too Nietzschean to worry much about the value of autonomy, one's own or that of others. On the other hand, this critique of autonomy leads Weigel to omit here any easy identification of genuine liberty with the U.S. American practice of autonomy or freedom, a frequent theme of many of his "neo-conservative" colleagues and arguably a motivating factor behind the bitter polemics of his communitarian critics.

³² On the origins of this central Thomistic axiom, cf. R. Schenk, "From Providence to Grace: Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-Thirteenth Century," *Nova et Vetera* 3 (2005): 307–20; with reference to the thought of Pope John Paul II, cf. Schenk, "Option für den Thomismus in der Enzyklika?" in *Die Vernunft des Glaubens und der Glaube der Vernunft: Die Enzyklika Fides et Ratio in der Debatte zwischen Philosophie und Theologie*, ed. P. Koslowski and A. M. Hauk (Munich: W. Fink, 2007), 59–81.

³³ Cf. Richard C. Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); Richard C. Dales and Omar Argerami, ed., *Medieval Latin Texts on the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

This sense of the limits of even the strongest human reason available to us leads to Thomas's appropriation of a Pauline maxim, "Cum enim infirmor, tunc potens sum" (2 Cor 12:10). The heightened sensitivity of our own age to the often overlooked limits of human achievement, though it too often assumes exaggerated forms and unnecessarily self-destructive dimensions, need not force us to view our age as the "miserrimus mundi status." Self-doubt can, but need not, deepen into despair; though dangerous, it is also the necessary condition of faith in Another and the basis of human society as well.³⁴ Without the lasting contribution of the minority voices to the Pastoral Constitution, this attention to the *homo in seipso divisus* would be missing from our engagement of the contemporary world.³⁵ By pointing in faith to a grace that is not yet evident in our experienced nature and to a hope that is not of this world, there is a heightened Christian response, critical but not dismissive to what is proper to our age, something that shares as contemporaries in its joys and hopes as well as in its sorrows and fears, something that can deepen the solidarity to which *Gaudium et Spes* is calling us after fifty years: "Benedicite persequentibus; benedicite et nolite maledicere! Gaudere cum gaudentibus, flere cum flentibus" (Rom 12:14–15). N-V

³⁴ Cf. for example Thomas Aquinas, *De regno*, lib. 1, cap. 1.

³⁵ The section on sin, *Gaudium et Spes*, §13, beginning "Ideo in seipso divisus est homo," and continuing with the dual human experience of the "sublimis vocatio et profunda miseria," was the fruit of the minority critique of what had sounded like an all too careless optimism. These late additions to the draft, which despite the sense of critique arguably brought the text into a closer proximity to the world, eventually gained support inter alia from Cardinal Bea and the commission as a whole; cf. Sander, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution," 632–35; and J. Ratzinger, *Erster Hauptteil: Kommentar zum I. Kapitel*, 316–18.

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