

## Only Connect: Romano Guardini, *Gaudium et Spes* and the Unity of Christian Existence

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### Abstract

Romano Guardini's theory of oppositions (*Gegensatzlehre*), which helped him forge a unity within multifaceted realities such as Church and liturgy, also inspired him to achieve a unity between the secular and sacred aspects of the Christian life, as the Second Vatican Council was later to do, particularly in *Gaudium et Spes*. While *Gaudium et Spes* concentrated on a Christian view of the autonomy of created realities, Guardini diagnosed the gulf between faith and life in a neglect of the interplay of creation and redemption: 'to save redemption by the Son, [man] has been forced to abandon creation by the Father'. In a way which was prophetic of later criticisms of *Gaudium et Spes* and also of fruitful applications and developments of its doctrine, Guardini called for a reflection on the light which the work of redemption sheds on the created world and on man's life within it, that the believer may stand with his faith amid the concrete, actual world, and rediscover that world in his faith.

### Keywords

Guardini, *Gaudium et Spes*, creation, unity of life, autonomy

Romano Guardini was one of the central Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, a forerunner of the Second Vatican Council, and participant in various movements of thought which were prophetic of the workings of the Council, in particular in the ecclesial and liturgical movements. He also inspired thought on the unity of a Christian life, forged between the sacred and the secular, which was famously taken up by the Council in *Gaudium et Spes*, its dialogue with the world of today. In all of these areas he brought to light a fresh unity and integration among realities which at first sight

seemed opposed: charism and institution, objectivity and personal involvement, faith and everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

Faith and everyday life: Guardini believed that Christians had lost their conscious unity of existence; a unity rooted in faith, but present in every aspect of life. This essay deals with:

- Guardini's *Gegensatzlehre* or theory of unity-in-opposition, which he found useful in drawing out the creative tension which characterized living realities;
- his description of how that tension had been lost in the Christian life, degenerating into a split between faith and everyday living;
- *Gaudium et Spes*'s analysis of this problem, centred on an analysis of the *autonomy* of creation, compared to Guardini's suspicion of autonomy, however construed;
- Guardini's solution to the fragmentation: a deeper link between the theology of creation and that of redemption, an enterprise to which the Council was only able to gesture, but which has slowly begun to take shape in the intervening years.

## GUARDINI'S GEGENSATZLEHRE

Guardini's method – or perhaps better, attitude – in all of this was his '*Gegensatzlehre*', or theory of oppositions. It was Guardini's way of understanding and explaining concrete living realities, which, he believed, are invariably complex, made up of contrasting elements in vital tension with one another. He himself states that his central early works, such as *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, *Sacred Signs* and *The Church and the Christian* have the *Gegensatzlehre* as 'their ruling direction and measure'.<sup>2</sup> These works (and many more of Guardini's writings in these areas) show how body and soul, individual and corporate body, freedom and commitment, are opposing realities which actually need one another and enrich us by entering into dialogue with one another.<sup>3</sup> The *Gegensatzlehre* is also exemplified in the topic of this essay: Guardini's call for the integration of *faith and life*, where he also seeks a living tension which can nourish both poles. For

<sup>1</sup> Robert Krieg in *Romano Guardini. A Precursor of Vatican II* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) p. 180, has spoken of *Gaudium et Spes* as containing the polarities which Guardini had identified, including that between human autonomy and our relationship to Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1925), pp. 210-11, quoted in H.B.Gerl-Falkowitz, *Romano Guardini* (Kevalaar: Topos, 2010, p. 177).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Giuseppe D'Acunto in 'Concretezza e opposizione in Guardini', *Información Filosófica* 8 (2011), pp. 107-20, for further examples of Guardini's application of 'opposition' to various areas, such as the process of knowledge: intuition of the singular and universal knowledge are not contradictory realities, but inhabit one another.

instance, in the preface to *Freedom Grace and Destiny*, given as a lecture in 1943, Guardini worried that ‘the conscious unity of existence has been to a large extent lost even by believing Christians. The believer no longer stands with his faith amid the concrete, actual world, and he no longer rediscovers that world in his faith.’<sup>4</sup> The ordinary rule of life, as Guardini points out, that to which most members of the Church are called, is that in which ‘natural and supernatural values and demands are brought into an harmonious balance’.<sup>5</sup> This conscious unity had been lost, and with it the ability to reflect one’s faith in the secular world. Michael Novak offers a telling quotation from Guardini’s writings, to the effect that anybody should be able to tell that you are a Catholic even by the way you climb a tree!<sup>6</sup>

### FAITH AND LIFE – ONLY CONNECT

‘Only Connect’ was the epigraph of *Howards End* by E.M. Forster, a novel published in 1910, the year of Guardini’s ordination: it is a matter of linking the prose and the passion, the beast and the monk: living, as individuals and society, in fragments no longer, but reconciling poetry and perspiration in a synthesis which enriches both. Forster’s ‘sermon’ as he called it, was delivered in the era of rampant capitalism and urban squalor, and a growing middle class. Guardini appealed for a similar reconciliation: he called on Christians to forge a *unity* in their existence, bringing the inspiration of faith to bear on a world which seemed to be fleeing from God, but nevertheless thirsted for his Word and healing. Guardini had a pivotal role in many areas of Catholic thought in the twentieth century, and his vision of unity, *both – and*: life *and* reason, ethos *and* logos, inwardness *and* action, etc, was a powerful witness to the ability of faith to integrate aspects of human life which modernity had split into false dilemmas.

These ideas are echoed closely by the Second Vatican Council, in particular by *Gaudium et Spes*, 43: ‘One of the gravest errors of our times is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives.’ Unlike many other councils in the history of the Church from her beginning, Vatican II had no major theological matter to clarify, no rampant heresy with which to deal, but the practical error or difficulty which is summed up in those

<sup>4</sup> *Freedom, Grace and Destiny* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), translated by John Murray, pp. 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> *The Church and the Catholic* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), translated by Ada Lane, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Michael Novak, ‘A Letter to Roberto’ in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 3 (2000), pp. 70-84 (72-73).

words, rather similar to Guardini's, was at the heart of its mission and is reflected in Paul VI's well known remark that the rupture between the Gospel and culture is 'without a doubt the drama of our time'.<sup>7</sup>

## FAITH AND WORLD IN THE COUNCIL

One of the most famous passages of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 36, in its analysis of the autonomy of earthly affairs, offers an analysis of the problem and a possible solution.<sup>8</sup> It addresses the fear that bringing faith to bear on earthly realities will lead to a theocracy or at least to a loss of an equilibrium between the things that are Caesar's and those that are God's, and points out that this fear is misplaced. The passage is key, for it seeks to achieve a balanced unity between what it sees as the rightful God-given *autonomy* of creation (culture, science, humanity) *and* its dependence on God:

[M]any of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God...

But if the expression, the independence [*autonomia*] of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear his revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 8 December, 1975, 20.

<sup>8</sup> The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965, represents the Council's attempt to dialogue with the world of today, sharing its 'joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties' (no. 1). It deals with man's dignity, calling and activity, in the light of Christ, and applies these ideas to family, culture and public life.

<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

## GUARDINI AND AUTONOMY

This paragraph has given rise to many interpretations. Tracy Rowland, in *Culture and the Thomist Tradition*, on the treatment of culture in *Gaudium et Spes*, points out that while it is perfectly clear that all things have their own *autonomy*, that is, their proper laws and order, stability, truth and goodness, it is not so clear that the process of secularisation will respect these laws and values. She also quotes David Schindler's view that paragraph 36 probably needs to be interpreted from the perspective of Christ who reveals man to himself (*Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 22) and that this would suggest that Christ's message and followers are called to inform, from within, everything in the cosmos, 'every act, every relationship, every cultural or social or economic order'. But she also mentions Bernard Lambert OP, a writer close to the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes*, who saw it as a baptism on the Church's part of autonomy ('society now is constituted as an autonomous society and finds in its own consistency, methods, structures and laws for its own organisation') and of secularisation, the process whereby society frees itself from religious notions, beliefs or institutions which used to order its existence, which he defines as part of the logical development of creation.<sup>10</sup>

How does this compare to Guardini's approach? At first sight, it falls foul of his repeated criticisms of modernity's drive towards autonomy, particularly in the ethical sphere. He often claimed that 'the whole modern view of the autonomy of the world and of man . . . seem to rest ultimately on the notion which made of God the "other" '.<sup>11</sup> He applies this view to Kant, for example, in *Conscience* (1932):

[Kant] says: 'As soon as I treat the Good like God, as soon as I apprehend the moral law as a demand of God, it is "another" who is commanding me, and I become heteronomous . . .' But anyone who is really religious is bound to reply in amazement: 'But God after all is not "Another"! How is it possible to confuse things and concepts in such a way? A man next to me is "another", state authority is "another". But God after all is not "another" in this sense! Of course He is not I. Between Him and me there lies an infinite gulf. But God is the Creator, in whom I have the foundation of my being; in Whom I am more myself, than in myself alone'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 29

<sup>11</sup> Romano Guardini, *The World and the Person* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), translated by Stella Lange, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Romano Guardini, *Conscience* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), translated by Ada Lane, p. 64.

He believes that when it comes to God, heteronomy is just as wrong as autonomy, for God is not ‘the other’, but he is God. As Roland Millare has pointed out, the ‘autonomy alluded to by the Council was precisely the problem that Guardini was trying to overcome with his prophetic insight’.<sup>13</sup>

Guardini diagnosed the gulf between faith and life in a neglect of the theology of creation: ‘to save redemption by the Son, [man] has been forced to abandon creation by the Father’.<sup>14</sup> Religion had taken refuge in inwardness and left the world to its own devices. Faith had lost contact with the world and grown increasingly incapable of grasping and fashioning it, of saving it from the perils which continually threaten its objects and values. ‘The riches of revelation are inexhaustible, but we have to put our questions to them, and these questions come from the reality of the world.’<sup>15</sup>

### GUARDINI’S THEOLOGY OF CREATION

The theology of creation allows the believer to understand St Paul’s words: ‘All is yours, but you are Christ’s’ (1 Cor 3:23). *Gaudium et Spes* 22 declares that Christ reveals man to himself; Guardini claimed that Christian revelation also offered modern man a new relationship to *creation*, an ability to exercise his stewardship in a free and powerful way:

[T]he teaching and work of Christ first provided the believer with a status that was not one of imprisonment in the world and yet was operative within it, and in consequence with a liberty that otherwise would not have evolved. This was, in the first place, religious but it penetrated into the whole mental and spiritual life. It gave man his inner independence of Nature, his capacity for adventure and enterprise which has been the source of the scientific, artistic and technical civilisation of modern times.<sup>16</sup>

Creating means that God places man in a relation to Himself in which reason first says ‘God is not I’ and then adds ‘but He is not another’ either, by this seeming contradiction pointing

<sup>13</sup> Roland Millare, ‘The Primacy of *Logos* over *Ethos*: The Influence of Romano Guardini on Post-Conciliar Theology’ (*The Heythrop Journal*, 2013), pp. 974-983, at pp. 980-81. Millare quotes Guardini “‘Existence as a whole, things, man and action, come from God’s grace... Only because the creating God really placed the created world in man’s hand can the latter come upon the idea that he must create an autonomous culture.’” (Romano Guardini, *The World and the Person*, pp. 21, 24) and concludes: ‘Autonomy is not the natural order, which God has created in and through grace’ (at pp. 980-981).

<sup>14</sup> *Freedom, Grace and Destiny*, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

to something inexpressible which is beyond conceptual thought. But this inexpressible something can be immediately apprehended by the religious consciousness. 'Indeed it is likely that religious consciousness consists in this very apprehension.'<sup>17</sup>

For Guardini, the 'supreme quality of creation' is the fact that God *releases* that which he has conceived that it may stand and act freely.<sup>18</sup> As Herbert McCabe has remarked, creation is simply 'leaving the world to be itself'.<sup>19</sup> In this way, creation possesses the complete seriousness of validity, an inevitability of fact and law which, for example, determines the experience and character of modern science. The idea of *autonomy*, for Guardini, is a misunderstanding and misuse of this status, it takes creation *too* seriously and thus turns it into an idol. As Guardini put it, 'the world does not wish to become an idol. It desires that charming lightness of touch which finds its final expression in the "freedom of the children of God", who take neither the world, themselves nor nature seriously, and thus share in that divine 'letting be'.<sup>20</sup> Our task is to recognise the will of God which 'does not hang above the world, but lies within it, lies in its being what it is'.<sup>21</sup>

In a commemorative essay on the anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*, written in 1996, Walter Kasper also draws attention to the need of a deepening in the theology of creation and its emergence from that of redemption if the Church is to be able to articulate her relation to the world: '[t]he background of *Gaudium et Spes* is a theological conception which assumes the unity of the orders of creation and redemption'<sup>22</sup> But this, for Kasper, showed up a weak point of the document: there is a 'certain lack of clarity . . . with respect to the relationship between man's character as God's image according to Genesis 1:26 and that of Jesus Christ according to Colossians 1:15', that is, between the orders of creation and redemption. Both are involved in *Gaudium et Spes*: 'without the creator, the creature would disappear' (*Gaudium et Spes* 36) and 'Christ reveals man to himself' (*Gaudium et Spes* 22), but are not successfully integrated. Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger were both intimately involved in the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* and came to remarkably similar assessments, believing that creation and redemption, nature and grace had not been successfully interrelated.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *The World and the Person*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Herbert McCabe, OP, *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> *The World and the Person*, p. 204, note 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Kasper, 'The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*' in *Communio* 23 (1996), pp. 129-140 at p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Brandon Peterson, 'Critical Voices: the reactions of Rahner and Ratzinger to "Schema XIII" (*Gaudium et Spes*)', *Modern Theology* 31 (2015) pp. 1-26 at pp. 2-3 and pp. 25-26.



Kasper suggests that this is a task for theology rather than for councils: '[U]ltimately, we cannot expect a council to define systematically the relationship between these terms; this is a task for subsequent theology'<sup>24</sup>. Time would be needed for Guardini's linking of creation and redemption, the world and faith, nature and grace to mature in the life of the Church, in her theology and in her living experience.

## SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

And indeed in the years after the Council a development of its doctrine has emerged, echoing Guardini's prophetic phrase: 'the unity of Christian existence'. This feature emerges in official documents and other reflections and has been most commonly expressed as 'unity of life'. Here is one of the clearest examples: '[T]he unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ.'<sup>25</sup> In recent years, since the Synod, this has become a commonly repeated phrase in magisterial and unofficial spiritual exhortation.<sup>26</sup>

While this development, still in an embryonic stage, reflects Guardini's desires and work, it goes deeper than that, calling on Christians to welcome the values of the world, seen as good in its creation – and seen as better still in its re-creation in the Word made flesh, who 'has broken down the dividing wall' (Eph 2:14). St Thomas, echoing the Patristic tradition, had after all remarked that the second creation was fittingly also brought about through the Word, in

<sup>24</sup> Kasper, *art. cit.*, pp. 138-40. Brandon Peterson, in the article mentioned above, points to subsequent pontiffs interpreting *Gaudium et Spes* through the lens of paragraph 22, thus privileging the point of view of redemption.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988), 17.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase 'unity of life' is associated with the preaching of St Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei. He began to use the term in 1931 and it became a core description of his aim, in particular as addressed to lay people: 'Christians must not resign ourselves to leading a double life: our lives must be a strong and simple unity into which all our actions converge' - *Christ is Passing by* (Dublin: Veritas, 1974), 126.

In recent years, *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II's 1996 Apostolic Exhortation on the renewal of Religious life (67) encouraged religious too to exercise themselves in the '*difficili arte vitae unitatis*' (67). In the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* (1994), *Priests for the Third Millennium* (1999) and *The priest, pastor and leader of the parish community* (2002) the Congregation for Clergy has recommended the practice to priests. Cardinal Martini S.J. spoke of 'unity of life in a fragmented world', and many recently formed associations, blogs and initiatives – some consciously taking up the suggestions offered in *Christifideles Laici* – also refer to this ideal.



order that restoration should correspond to creation: “For God indeed was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19).<sup>27</sup>

I mentioned at the outset that Guardini’s liturgical writings contributed to liturgical renewal; he believed that the liturgy had a special ability to express faith and particularly stressed the power of the ancient collects of the Roman Church in this regard: they rest on a bedrock of truth, possess an unrivalled concision and polish as inheritors of the Roman rhetorical style and also harmonise with the disposition of the person who is offering them.<sup>28</sup> So the last word goes to one of those venerable prayers, taken from the Easter Vigil meditation on the book of Genesis, which reflects Guardini’s desire to blend the theology of creation with that of redemption, the new creation:

Almighty ever-living God,  
 who are wonderful in the ordering of all your works,  
 may those you have redeemed understand  
 that there exists nothing more marvelous  
 than the world’s creation in the beginning  
 except that, at the end of the ages,  
 Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 3 a. 8 ad 2.

<sup>28</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), translated by Ada Lane, p. 22.