

Reconciling Literary Naturalism and *Gaudium et Spes*

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ABSTRACT

Tension exists between literary naturalism and *Gaudium et Spes* if human freedom is tilted more towards the physical realities. To achieve balance to a person's dual nature implies a recognition of the role of spirituality as defined in *Gaudium et Spes* to meet "the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer," the same message that naturalism wants humanity to reflect on for them to nurture and deepen their spirituality to still their troubled hearts. Spirituality within the tradition of *Gaudium et Spes* highlights the good of the human person with the acknowledgment of divine will, the same aspiration (with emphasis on social awareness) that naturalism, as portrayed in the naturalistic novels under study, conveys for humanity, with its lens however on individual will. The study concludes that naturalism's focus on the physical social realities actually point to the same aspiration that *Gaudium et Spes* projects – the betterment of the human condition and humanity as a whole.

KEY WORDS: Literary Criticism, Naturalism, Naturalistic Novels, Heroines, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Document)

Introduction

This paper explores the context of *Gaudium et Spes* in order to relate it to my examination of naturalism in literature in regard to issues on marriage, family, human dignity, human will and freedom, suicide and self-preservation, atheism and anti-clericalism as represented in the four novels, namely, *Maggie: A Girl of the Street* by Stephen Crane, *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. It attempts to examine the tension that exists between naturalism's focus on the physical, social realities and *Gaudium et Spes*' call for a consideration of the spiritual dimension of man for the good of humanity. Despite these individualistic tendencies and non-conformism to social roles and tradition as exemplified in the naturalistic novels, this paper suggests that the human person has spiritual yearnings for a meaningful life.

Naturalism is a mode of literary expression that highlights social realities with a focus on characters challenged by external forces of nature. It hints of the presence of tension with Christian spirituality as reflected in *Gaudium et Spes*. The two traditions seem to clash because one focuses on the physical realities, while the other one focuses on the spiritual dimension of man¹. However, naturalism, as represented in the novels, has an implied message about the possible betterment of the human experience. They show that the attainment of perfection through instincts and individual will is futile without a consideration of man's spiritual dimension that paves the way for permanence or stability in life. On the other hand, *Gaudium et Spes* shows that to recognize the spiritual within man is to search for the good, for his continuity, and not for his destruction. So although the naturalistic novels limit access to spirituality through its tendency to undervalue self-preservation and the portrayal of life as a useless passion with its focus on death as humanity's fate, they nevertheless recognize a person's spiritual need for enlightenment from life's harsh realities and awareness of the dual nature of man - the physical

1 The Vatican document uses "man" as a general term to mean either male or female. It is used in this paper to be consistent with its usage and meaning in *Gaudium et Spes*.

and spiritual dimensions. Also, because naturalism promotes social awareness for the betterment of the human condition through its examination of social realities, its end goal echoes the spiritual creed of love and furtherance of humanity proclaimed in *Gaudium et Spes* and demonstrated in the novels through the protagonists' inherent need for love, social acceptance, and individual integrity.

Gaudium et Spes is a useful source for a commentary on spirituality because it is an official summary of the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church on these matters. It underscores the aforesaid issues in guiding humanity for spiritual living in the modern world among believers in the faith, along with non-believers. The document's full title is *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*. It is a result of the efforts of the Second Vatican Council, assembled in 1962-1965 by the Church leadership. More than three thousand religious dignitaries, authorities, "observers" and "auditors" were involved in the writing of *Gaudium et Spes* according to Carroll:

Vatican II met in the great nave of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome in four sessions in the autumns of the years 1962-1965, with committees doing extensive work between sessions. Made up of about 2,400 bishops, with about 500 periti or experts, and something between 50 – 200 "observers" and "auditors" in attendance... (25)

Gaudium et Spes is distinctive as a document and in terms of its orientation because it represents Christian spiritual values resulting from the collaborative efforts of an Ecumenical Council that meets once in a century or even once in several centuries when necessary and convened by the Pope. Previous councils were Vatican I (1869-1870) and the Council of Trent (1545-1563) (Carroll 25). It is also the outcome of the Church response to the times that ensued from the Pope's observations:

Pope John intuited that there was something profoundly out of sync in the inner life of the Church: intellectually sterile, liturgically lifeless, moral instruction depending

more on imperatives than on invitations, fear emphasized over hope, a clergy cut off from the laity, the razor wire of the Reformation still dividing Christendom, the living Word of Scripture all but forgotten, Jesus himself on the margin of piety. (Carroll 27)

The purpose of the council's assembly is also to monitor the papacy, especially in relation to his "infallibility" (declared by the First Vatican Council) as well as strengthen his authority (Carroll 25). Moreover, the council serves to evaluate the Church in regard to the implementation and relevance of its spiritual tradition and teachings in the contemporary world. The document is one of the results of the council's aim for reformation within the Church, and an answer to the threat of nuclear destruction and human extinction felt by the "council fathers in the context of Hiroshima and Auschwitz" (27).

Spirituality within the frame of *Gaudium et Spes* therefore suggests a quest for the "true, good and beautiful" (85). Pope Paul VI promulgated *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965. Some theologians raised questions about the document, for instance on its use of modern language, and on what they saw as its excessive optimism, which tied the idea of Christian hope to the "modern idea of progress" (Ratzinger qtd. in Dulles 1). However, the document is significant for the faithful as it represents the continuation of the Catholic tradition that focuses on Jesus Christ's spirituality, and on the broader social mission of the church, rather than more narrowly theological matters. Thus, *Gaudium et Spes* is useful here because it links spirituality directly to the questions about family, marriage, society, male and female roles, and the other social issues raised in the four naturalistic novels.

One of the key concepts in *Gaudium et Spes* is that it considers an individual person a "social being" (13). This suggests that man – male or female - belongs to a social structure that requires free interchange of ideas and feelings with others. The doctrine cautions that "unless he relates himself to others, he can neither live nor develop his potential (13). This statement suggests that a woman who ceases to function as a "social being" and becomes a recluse or an outcast will have difficulty living on her own. She will not be able to

develop her full potential in the world. Similarly, the portrayal of the protagonists, *Maggie and Lily*, in Crane and Wharton's novels, puts them in situations where they cease to function as "social beings" due to societal ostracism. As a result, their potential for change and advancement as women with aspirations are crushed because they are socially alienated and are eventually unable to live in society. The document's important message for humanity is that we need others for our survival or continuity, and the role of societal support for a woman's development ensures her continued existence in society.

The church through *Gaudium et Spes* echoes its concern regarding isolation because it is not part of God's design for humanity: He "did not create man for a life of isolation, but for the formation of social unity" (30). Hence, the church maintains that "from the beginning of salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community" (30). It is through social interaction that "man" is able to cultivate his talents and realize his purpose:

Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life. (3) Since this social life is not something added on to man, through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny. (24)

Man's "social ties" which include his "family and political community, relate with greater immediacy to his innermost nature; others originate rather from his free decision" (24). Naturalism as demonstrated in the novels of Flaubert and Chopin shows married women who enjoy the shared activities available in society i.e. Emma attending the royal ball, and Edna vacationing with family and friends in the Grand Isle. However, these women are portrayed as more determined in their quest for happiness and individual freedom by challenging expected roles as wives and mothers, highlighting

naturalism's message, shared with *Gaudium et Spes*, that "the deepest longings of the heart... is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer" (39). And while *Gaudium et Spes* notes the importance of socialization to the human person, it also cautions about its possible threats: "socialization, while certainly not without its dangers, brings with it many advantages with respect to consolidating and increasing the qualities of the human person, and safeguarding his rights" (25). It acknowledges that the "disturbances which so frequently occur in the social order result in part from the natural tensions of economic, political, and social forms" (25). However, it singles out the influence of man's self-centeredness that causes the disturbances: "But at a deeper level they flow from man's pride and selfishness, which contaminate even the social sphere" (25). The statement echoes the portrayal of individualism and self-regard of the female protagonists in the novels, particularly the married heroines. Thus, the Church recommends a relentless watch for the "social order" in relation to human freedom, love, and justice:

This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more human balance. An improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained. (26)

There is tension in the idea of free will and individuality in the naturalistic novel and *Gaudium et Spes*. For instance, *Gaudium et Spes* discourages "individualistic morality" because it expects the individual person to contribute to improving life's conditions and maintain that "the obligations of justice and love are fulfilled only if each person, contributing to the common good, according to his own abilities and the needs of others, also promotes and assists the public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life" (29). The focus on "individualistic morality" and independence as exemplified by the female protagonists in the novels highlights human freedom and individual will to show their resistance to human conventions within patriarchal structures.

Gaudium et Spes focuses on the importance of social interaction as human beings for a sense of community and *esprit de corps*. Naturalism, as suggested in the novels, shows a twofold polarizations within social structures through the representation of Chopin's characters like Edna and Adele, for example, who represent the individualistic and social, physical and spiritual, traditional and non-traditional. Other examples are Crane and Wharton's unmarried female protagonists who seek societal and familial acceptance while Flaubert and Chopin's married female protagonists resist oppressive behaviors in favor of individual freedom, detachment, and fairness in gender relations in their struggle for equal opportunities with men in a male-centered society.

Man and the Spiritual

Gaudium et Spes suggests the need for humanity to extend awareness to the non-physical, spiritual human dimension to minimize the lagging "spiritual advancement" amidst the increasingly "intellectual formation" (6). It reminds humanity of the importance of the life of a human being among all creations in the world where his existence can only achieve perfection through increased spirituality, the recognition of his Creator's love for his continuity. This love preserves man as "he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator" (17). The document explains more about the concern of the Church for humanity:

Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance... True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement. (5)

As to the value of man in this world, naturalism suggests a need to refocus on the importance of self-preservation. The novels depict the female protagonists with a passion and love for the ideal despite the harsh realities around them. However, while they are represented as dedicated to the physical-visible world, naturalism, as demonstrated in the novels, recognizes the value of spirituality to a person's life. The pursuit for material fulfilment is connected to their quest for the ideal because of man's dual nature. In other words, the longing for something more among the female protagonists indicates that despite material fulfilment, a person's spirituality is important as well and must not be neglected. For instance, Crane's Maggie is successful in a material sense as a prostitute. Wharton's Lily comes from the elite class. Flaubert's Emma lives with her middle-class doctor-husband, and Chopin's Edna's businessman-spouse provides for her comfort adequately. These women (with the exception of Maggie) read literature suggesting "intellectual formation", and they are more educated than the other women who are simply content with domestic education. Through these protagonists, naturalism shows that they are a different breed of women with imagination that challenge social traditions. The female protagonists lack inner peace, an offshoot of their relentless quest for impartial social structure that is more accepting, for instance, of female interests and sentiments, as shown in their preferred readings and alternative activities in society. On the other hand, *Gaudium et Spes* reminds society about a balanced life because the tendency of the individual person is to search painstakingly "for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement" (6). The document suggests that this kind of spirituality is animated by a consideration of the "true, good, and beautiful" for both men and women.

Human dignity

Another key concept *Gaudium et Spes* highlights is human dignity which is related to a person's self-respect or self-esteem. The document asserts that man is "not wrong" when he considers himself "superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or

a nameless constituent of the city of man” (14). It underscores man’s importance in this world because of his twofold nature: “body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will” (4), and he is expected to acknowledge within him “a spiritual or immortal soul” (4):

Thus, when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the proper truth of the matter. (14)

In relation to the novels, the orientation of the female protagonists is on material security, but towards the end, before their tragic move, they discard this kind of security with their acknowledgment of an inner reality they seem unable to satisfy amidst the material advantage. They experience a sense of inner vacuum to suggest a search for more despite the physical-material orientation of naturalism. Thus, the novels portray women with an inner center and spirituality anchored on a frail base as mentioned earlier, and their experience resonates with Copernican moments that show they are not the center of the universe, most notably in their tragic fates.

The novels’ projection of physical-material realities signifies unfriendly “forces” that seem beyond the protagonists although dependent on their will. In Lehan’s terminology, “the naturalistic force was hostile... or at least more indifferent to human needs” (230). This idea of unfriendly “forces” in naturalism is juxtaposed with the spiritual reality as representing a positive “force” higher than the female protagonists although within their reach, awareness, and readiness to acknowledge it. So “without a corresponding spiritual advancement” *Gaudium et Spes* points out that (6), a physical-material triumph alone is meaningless as suggested by the experiences of the female protagonists. This “spiritual advancement” (6), along with the physical-material progress, paves the way for humanity to recognize a higher, powerful force that is “in no way hostile to man’s dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God” (20) with man as an “intelligent and a free member” of God’s society called to “share in His happiness” (20).

Suicide and self-preservation

The novels show the harsh reality of suicide in a society where female agency, human bodies, and the physical circumstances of women in prejudicial positions pose as potent forces encouraging self-destruction. The novels present suicide as the likely outcome for a person that focuses on material reality and harmful emotions. *Gaudium et Spes*, however, opposes “wilful self-destruction” because it suggests a desecration of the “integrity of the human person” as I will explain further. Thus, the document’s message for humanity is a reminder concerning what man is, what comprises an individual as a person, and what he must acknowledge about one’s self as a person with dignity. A human being must acknowledge “in himself a spiritual and immortal soul” (14). On the other hand, naturalism, as demonstrated in the novels, conveys the message that there is more to the physical-material human dimension, a perception similar to that in *Gaudium et Spes*. For instance, in Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Edna’s spirituality deepened after her show of freedom from the material excess provided by her husband. She feels that after “having descended in the social scale”, there exists a “corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual” (Chopin 104). *Gaudium et Spes* suggests that a human being is on a higher level than the human body and physical circumstance because he or she has a soul. A refocus therefore on the spirituality of man or woman uplifts his or her consciousness from the challenges of material knowledge.

Gaudium et Spes is clear in its position on the subject of suicide because it opposes the importance of life that the church upholds, and is toxic to general welfare and society:

...whatever is opposed to life itself such as any type of murder ... or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as ... torments inflicted on the body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, ... prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful conditions, where men are treated as tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and the likes are

infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator. (27)

Self-destruction is ruled out by the writers of *Gaudium et Spes* because of its message of hopelessness and futility of life for future generations: “We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping” (30). Thus, the church calls for the preservation of the human person (4). Naturalism, through the novels, suggests that the self-destruction of the female protagonists provides instant solution to a human problem without mental fortitude or staying power and regard for the continuity of future generations. *Gaudium et Spes* acknowledges the concept of self-preservation for the future of humanity through acceptance of life’s challenges. Human beings are encouraged to shoulder their cross, face responsibility through pro-life affirmation and uphold the “values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom” (37). However, “man extends his power in every direction” (5). The naturalistic novels’ portrayal of the female protagonists’ response to societal values suggest a resistance to experiences that disadvantage women and a sign of aversion to face further the challenge of human pain. This is perhaps due to a culture that focuses on instant gratification. This means for *Gaudium et Spes* that power is misdirected because man “does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare” (5). Humanity is urged to acknowledge human suffering as one of the social realities that beset mankind. Despite its negative connotation for non-believers, human suffering as suggested in the document entails quiet acceptance of the challenges by facing them, and the focus on human agency through a life-affirming stance for a vision of hope among mankind. The good news for humanity, however, is that a deepening of one’s spirituality may answer the innermost longings of the heart:

Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, Who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself. The

Church truly knows that only God, Whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer. (39)

In relation to the novels, the portrayal of women experiencing frustration in fulfilling the longings of the heart suggests naturalism's acknowledgment of a person's spiritual aspect that needs attention. The "breakdown of conventional frameworks such as the family and community structures" (Souza 270) in the individual situation of the female protagonists contributes to their sense of disconnection. However, *Gaudium et Spes* implies that the longings of the human heart can only be satisfied through a recognition of a higher force that is positive, referring to a divine authority that is not hostile. It reveals that this divine authority represents the ideal as the "true, good, and beautiful" which is perhaps what the female protagonists in the novels actually desire.

Human will and freedom

The idea of freedom as represented in naturalistic novels suggests the absence of physical constraints with the protagonists who perceive agency and free will as what *Gaudium et Spes* calls "a license for doing whatever pleases them" (16), with the emphasis on physical realities. The Vatican document opposes this to the true nature of freedom, which is focused toward goodness: "Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness" (16) with the dignity of the human person requiring freedom from confinement to passion and depravity.

Hence man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor mere external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skillful action, apt helps to that end. (16)

Each of the four novels presents a woman whose courage, spirituality, and values are challenged because they seem to clash with the nineteenth century values of the family and society. She is represented to have a “split personality” because she has an “inner life that questions” and an outer life that is expected to conform. As a result, her personal and social relationships have been undermined because she feels structured by her circumstances. The woman’s situation in naturalistic literature echoes the image of man in *Gaudium et Spes* who feels confined by his experiences and yet, he feels limitless in his aspirations: “Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life” (10). This suggests therefore that a person “expresses and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions” (12) because he is “split within himself” (14). He “often exalts himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair” which often ends in “doubt and anxiety” (12-13). This manifestation of tension within man indicates vulnerabilities that may cause him to succumb to infractions:

Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society. No doubt many whose lives are infected with a practical materialism are blinded against any sharp insights into this kind of dramatic situation; or else, weighed down by unhappiness they are prevented from giving the matter any thought. (10-11)

As shown in the novels, naturalism suggests that transgressions are committed without regard of the outcome. The protagonists do what they are not supposed to do and don’t do what they should. As a result, happiness is compromised as it becomes elusive or gets blocked by a conflict between their individualism (shown through their resistance) and a repressive society. Reliance on human efforts alone is not enough. *Gaudium et Spes* shows that man consider his faith and spirituality in order to throw a “new light on everything”

and direct his mind to solutions to problems that are “fully human”. The document expounds: “The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be, for wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and a love for what is true and good” (15). Society undergoes inevitable transformations whereby “this very circumstance, the traditional local communities such as families, class, tribes, villages, various groups and associations stemming from social contacts, experiences more thorough changes every day” (3). With all sorts of transformations that humanity faces in society, the relevance of tradition and its values is challenged:

A change in attitudes and in human structures frequently calls accepted values into question, especially among young people, who have grown impatient on more than one occasion, and indeed become rebels in their distress. (8)

The novels link freedom and human dignity through the material circumstances and social status of the female protagonists. And *Gaudium et Spes* cautions humanity about what can happen to freedom and human dignity in extreme poverty or affluence and warns about isolation through individualism:

Now a man can scarcely arrive at the needed sense of responsibility, unless his living conditions allow him to become conscious of his dignity, and to rise to his destiny by spending himself for God and for others. But human freedom is often crippled when a man encounters extreme poverty just as it withers when he indulges in too many of life’s comforts and imprisons himself in a kind of splendid isolation. (30)

Atheism and anti-clericalism

Naturalism’s representation of the protagonists points to young women with free will who refuse to conform to the demands of their societies in their unhappiness. The novels reveal that their

spirituality hungers for attention and nourishment. Their Christian education and faith are portrayed as deficient in their experience with dysfunctional families although the female protagonists such as Flaubert's Emma, for instance, seeks Christ in her final moments for spiritual redemption or Chopin's Adèle, as Edna's foil, suggests the importance and practice of Christian spirituality through family values like marital fidelity, domestic devotion, and personal care for the young to strengthen the tradition in her Creole society that is predominantly Catholic. Flaubert shows a woman's discontentment and presents the corruption of church values through her representatives who are unable to help Emma in her distress. Her convent education has not exactly strengthened her faith in the good because Flaubert depicts religious instruction in the Catholic convent needs strengthening. The heroine's spirituality needs a refocus too because it is motivated by romantic ideals.

On the other hand, Crane's novel projects the importance of physical supremacy among men and makes a travesty of Christian spirituality because it symbolizes weakness in its preference for individual submission and self-sacrifice for the "common good". The novel also showcases the hypocrisy of believers at the wake of the lifeless protagonist. Crane attacks the flaws of Christianity with the corruption of Church representatives and less effective spiritual formation. *Gaudium et Spes* shows that man can only "live fully according to the truth" if he "freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator" (17). The novels portray manifestations of the protagonists' orientation of the Christian spirituality (i.e. seeking enlightenment of their problems by approaching a priest and kissing the crucifix for redemption as in the case of Emma in Flaubert's novel). Desiring love and acceptance from society, the protagonists extend importance to social activities (i.e. melodramas, royal balls, long vacations or holidays, and dinners in mansions), the material or physical circumstances from the naturalist perspective, because of the focus on love and romance they consider the female ideals in society. However, the negative experiences of the female protagonists have become pathways for the recognition of an innermost need that cannot be fulfilled alone by the physical-material realities that this world offers.

Naturalism offers a radical concept of freedom with its representation of individualistic women who use it with less restraint and thought of its effect on the self and others. By contrast, *Gaudium et Spes* explains that “authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man” (16) and must be directed towards the wellbeing of the individual and others. For instance, the tension within the protagonists’ marriage and family in Flaubert’s and Chopin’s novels illustrates female agency and freedom without deep reflection on the consequences. *Gaudium et Spes* clashes with such idea of freedom since it connotes unrestrained “desires for human independence to such a point that it poses difficulties against any kind of dependence” on Divine Love (19) the Creator wants to share with humanity in the modern times. *Gaudium et Spes* suggests that this kind of “human independence” or individualism extends to “modern atheism” because it illustrates man’s freedom “to be an end unto himself, the sole artisan and creator of his own history” (19) and reinforces the idea that “this freedom cannot be reconciled with the affirmation” of the existence of a divine creator as the “author and purpose of all things, or at least that this freedom makes such an affirmation altogether superfluous” (19). The protagonists’ search for love and freedom has links to the fulfilment of the spiritual aspect of their humanity. *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes man’s dual nature: material and spiritual, and unless he recognizes that other part of him and participates in some form of spirituality, such as his “own training in the faith” (18) motivated by the ideal, “true, good, and beautiful” (85), he remains split within himself. The Vatican document suggests that a person’s “call to communion with God” (17) strengthens human spirituality. A compromised happiness results from the neglect of a person’s spiritual dimension so that “when divine instruction and the hope of life eternal are wanting, man’s dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attests; riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved with the frequent result that men succumb to despair” (20) that is experienced, too, by the female protagonists. The novels show that the protagonists are shown to be denied fulfilment through loving relationships as a result of a spirituality anchored on a fragile foundation and lack of awareness of a person’s dual nature as suggested in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Although the church rejects atheism, the Vatican document calls for both “believers and non-believers” in the faith for active involvement in the “betterment of this world” (21). It notes further: “The church calls for the active liberty of believers to build up in this world God’s temple too. She courteously invites atheists to examine the Gospel of Christ with an open mind” (21). *Gaudium et Spes* warns that one clue for atheism is “a critical reaction against religious belief” or “against the Christian religion” (18). Anti-Christianity in Crane’s novel is reflected in the representation of Maggie’s brother (“he despised obvious Christians” (11) as opposed to the culture of violence and physical strength in the slums. The spirituality motivated by Christian principles promotes selflessness and non-violent actions in consideration of the wellbeing of others that the document suggests. Crane’s naturalistic fiction shows that spirituality and the focus on inner life weigh less among the slum dwellers because of their efforts on concerns for economic survival. It is through the character of Maggie that spirituality is demonstrated even though physical power is more of a reality in the underclass. This aversion to Christian ideology is also found in Flaubert’s novel when he presents the insensibility of the clergy in society and the imperfections of Emma’s convent education.

This aversion is also found in Chopin’s novel when she portrays the irony of the high society elite who attend the mass religiously, but are corrupt and materialistic, and who subject Lily to oppression for her social transgressions such as missing the mandatory church mass and for still being single at age 29. The novels, however, acknowledge the importance of spirituality because the protagonists are portrayed with their inherent goodness as human beings and desire to transform a repressive social structure through their acts of resistance, perhaps to signify the need to change the status quo to accommodate female wellbeing and equality with men.

Marriage and family

As to the institution of marriage and family, naturalism presents it as flourishing with imperfections to portray social realities. These are personal, economic, cultural, and social concerns: communication barriers between husband and wife, intellectual and

emotional incompatibilities, money problems, cultural differences, marital infidelities, and contradictory views about gender roles in society. The church through *Gaudium et Spes* though encourages humanity to understand more about marital love and the problems it faces:

In addition, married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation. Moreover, serious disturbances are caused in families by modern economic conditions, by influences at once social and psychological, and by the demands of civil society. Finally, in certain parts of the world problems resulting from population growth are generating concern. (48-49)

The Vatican document suggests that it can “offer guidance and support” to those who work to preserve marital sanctity “to foster the natural dignity of the married state and its superlative value” (49):

For the good of the spouses and their off-springs as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. (1) All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole. (49)

The two married women in Flaubert and Chopin’s novels choose to act independently in their unhappiness with their spouses resulting in their experimentation with human love. Their marital discontent and resistance to their roles as wives suggest their need of emotional fulfilment. Although they go beyond the marital borders of commitment, their independence may be interpreted as among other things a message for their husbands not to treat them as possessions or

commodities. *Gaudium et Spes* presents a staunchly traditional view of marriage, so that there exists tension with naturalism in its thrusts for innovation and radical solutions. For instance, as portrayed in the novels, the female married protagonists are represented as imbued with independent minds who want their husbands to be sensitive to their individual needs, to communicate with them honestly and not take their feelings for granted. Communication barriers within marriage and conjugal love seem taken for granted as a result of unresolved deep-seated concerns. The church's message through *Gaudium et Spes* reminds man and woman about conjugal love as "firmly established by the Lord" (52) suggesting that the couple work to come up with a marriage that "radiates from the equal personal dignity of wife and husband, a dignity acknowledged by mutual and total love" (52). Although this view is a reversal of the marital experience of the female protagonists, Chopin's and Flaubert's novels show marriages and families of other characters in the novels that embody the Christian ideals on marriage and family. For instance, the marriage and family of Edna are juxtaposed to the marriage and family of Adèle while the marriage and family of Emma are juxtaposed to the marriage and family of Homais' wife that project images of stability and marital contentment.

The writers of *Gaudium et Spes* say that to preserve the sanctity of marriage and family in society, both husband and wife are required to "promote mutual self-giving" so that they can "enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will" (52). Chopin's Emma and Flaubert's Edna long for love, but it is a different form of love because it is based more on emotions instead of a decision that promotes the self-giving of mature married love. The kind of love they have is more physical than unconditional perhaps because they have not exactly experienced the stage of romantic love where young girls are carefree and responsibility-free. In other words, they marry at a young age when they are not yet mature enough to face the responsibilities of married life. They have not received the kind of romantic love in marriage perhaps because their husbands' love is focused more on a decision to have a family and embrace the traditional role of breadwinners, making them seem to neglect their wives' emotional needs. As a

result, the married women succumb to romantic love with other men, an act that may be interpreted as a desperate move for the completion of their romantic desires and live in the moment or perhaps feel the excitement of being natural in their self-expressions. The novels' representation of marriage suggests that both husband and wife, such as Edna and Léonce in *The Awakening* or Emma and Charles in *Madame Bovary*, for instance, consider the physical and emotional needs of each other so that they can establish genuine sharing of feelings and thoughts for the total commitment of their persons to each other.

Gaudium et Spes reminds couples about marital commitment: "As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them" (50). Both husband and wife must remember that the "author of matrimony" is God and contemplate the divine will in marriage by extending "mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions" (49-50). Both can then "cultivate and pray for steadiness of love, large heartedness and the spirit of sacrifice" (52). In *The Awakening*, for example, Edna's husband reconsiders his night outs with his male friends and be with his wife and children. When they are on family vacation, he is presumed to give first priority to them so that they can exercise "true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it" (53). This is shown in the marriage of Adèle to her husband whose example of a cohesive family is demonstrated by their adherence to spiritual values such as love and respect for each other and commitment to the family and children.

As shown in Flaubert and Chopin's novels, the married women's need for gender equality and expression of creativity is laudable, however, *Gaudium et Spes* puts the alternative view that both husband and wife should consider the "dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of the human society as a whole" (49). The novelists do not imply that the protagonists are at fault in seeking equality and creative outlets, but for the success of the marital and familial structures, *Gaudium et Spes* suggests a consideration of

values for the preservation of the family and strength of the human society. It also suggests a balance of personal or individual interests and the “common good” such as the interests of married couples and the family, as a whole. Both husband and wife are encouraged to “nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection” (51).

The novels, *Madame Bovary* and *The Awakening*, present married women with natural longings and love. Their spirituality may need to refocus on the ideal i.e. “true, good, and beautiful”. *Gaudium et Spes*, however, calls for the preservation of marital love, that it must “never be profaned by adultery or divorce” (52) through “fulfilment of duties” as a “Christian vocation”. To safeguard marriage and family, the Vatican document encourages “steadiness of love, large heartedness and the spirit of sacrifice” (52). The married couple’s behavior is expected to protect the meaning of marital love so that they experience a “truly human fulfilment” with their children who can contribute to the wellbeing of their parents (53). Parents are also reminded of their important role in the education of their children who bring about the “needed cultural, psychological and social renewal on behalf of marriage and the family” (52). Flaubert’s and Chopin’s novels, for instance, show the importance of parental role in the education of their children. Emma is sent by her father to the convent for her education while Edna reads stories to her sons before bedtime to suggest her interest in the intellectual formation of her children.

Human and social culture

Gaudium et Spes highlights the importance of a person’s right “to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination of race, sex, nation, religion or social condition”. It acknowledges the importance of the development of culture for humanity and comments on culture as follows:

The word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He

renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family. (57-58)

For the development of culture in society, the document recognizes the value of literature and arts because of its “great importance to the life of the church” (67).

The naturalistic novels show that although the prevailing culture in society is inherited through the male dominant tradition where female protagonists make adjustments, innovations are possible, for instance, in the inclusion of a more creative or productive life for women in society. For example, Chopin introduces Reisz as an independent artist accepted in society to juxtapose her role with the traditional woman like Adèle. The protagonists value creative works i.e. painting, playing the piano, reading, watching creative productions, because they believe that through them they can make a positive contribution to society and culture. This suggests that the development of culture is made possible through the roles of men and women who value their own contributions to society. Here and elsewhere the naturalistic writers acknowledge that tradition is enriched through a more tolerant society where women enjoy productive roles with men.

The view of *Gaudium et Spes* is that freeing humanity from ignorance occurs through the provision of cultural benefits so that people will not “be prevented from cooperating in the promotion of the common good in a truly human manner because of illiteracy and a lack of responsibility” (64). Men and women therefore have a special duty to develop themselves culturally so that they can help themselves as well as others in society (65). The protagonists in the novels are shown to have internalized the value of participating in creative activities for self-development while contributing positively as well to the culture in their society.

The novels do not portray women as content with their domestic roles because they are focused on their creative efforts for

an independent existence. *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that since women are now working in “all spheres”, they are encouraged “to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature” because their participation in “cultural life” is important in society (65). The church, therefore, acknowledges the role of women in the modern world particularly their participation in the workplace. They are expected to develop themselves in society for their wellbeing and that of others. In this sense, *Gaudium et Spes* is in sympathy with the implied endorsement in the novels of the need for the emancipation of women. However, such developments relate to the tradition of the church that highlights the values of Christian spirituality. These values necessitate alignment to constructive actions or affirmative solutions that promote the common good. The church acknowledges, however, that “it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching” (66); the integration of the values of Christian spirituality to society is not without challenges as shown in the images of marriage and family in the novels. This suggests further that the structures of marriage and family as traditional institutions in society undergo transformations in the face of social change. And to keep the balance of a person’s dual nature and inner contentment, all forms of physical-material developments in the world must keep pace with the non-physical spiritual advancements for humanity’s positive vision for continuity and a meaningful existence. The novels recognize a person’s spiritual need for enlightenment from life’s harsh realities, and they suggest that the attainment of aspirations for humanity’s permanence and stability through instincts and individual power alone is less certain unless there is a consideration as well of the spiritual dimension.

Conclusion

Spirituality as portrayed in the novels has allusions to the spirituality as defined in the Catholic *Gaudium et Spes* which links to the quest for the “true, good and beautiful” in humanity (85). The novels have an implied message about the common good of humanity that is why they present a commentary on the flaws of Christian spirituality with the portrayal of characters fraught with imperfections. This suggests that the spiritual ideals of the Vatican document are executed with imperfections

not just by ordinary citizens but also by the custodians of the church as represented in the novels. For instance, the Catholic priest in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* fails to give advice to Emma when she approaches him for spiritual enlightenment on her problems. Emma's orientation of Catholic spirituality as a young woman is on the reading of serious Catholic materials (i.e. Catechism) she does not find very exciting as it requires learning by rote. This idea is perhaps a commentary on the approach of Catholic instruction for the young women in the nunnery. At her deathbed, however, Emma implores the compassion of Jesus Christ – demonstrating her orientation of the Christian spirituality. In Crane's *Maggie*, Christian spirituality is attacked because the female protagonist's brother considers the Catholic spiritual ideal of submission or obedience contrary to the physical power he advocates. Maggie approaches a priest for guidance or help, but she is dismissed by the priest as if she has a contagious disease. Like Flaubert's Emma, the act of approaching a priest for direction shows that her spiritual orientation is Christian. Her inherent goodness as a person remains intact despite her struggle for love from her family and freedom from poverty. Her patriarchal society is an example of a world that tolerates oppression and dehumanization. On the other hand, Lily's high society in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* presents people who hear the Catholic Mass on a Sunday as a holiday of obligation. However, when Lily misses the Mass once, she is criticized and gossiped at by the same people in her society. Lily's implicit attendance at Mass is a manifestation of her Catholic Christian spirituality. Her integrity as a person remains intact despite the malicious gossip about her. Edna, in Chopin's *The Awakening*, is also surrounded by Catholic people, the Creole, who uphold the values of the church in regard to family and gender relations. However, Edna seems to value her freedom more than the mores of her patriarchal society she finds limiting to her creativity. She values independence for herself and for her children. *Gaudium et Spes* believes in the contribution of women to society, and this is shown in the novels. It serves as a guide on Christian spirituality with a focus on man's search for the "true, good and beautiful". It links spirituality directly to the questions about family, marriage, society in relation to male and female roles and social positions raised in the novels. They portray social realities where the strong and dominant represented by the men in society make women question the

roles that limit them as well as challenge them to assert their rights as persons with dignity, freedom and integrity. The novels suggest that in reality, people, despite their church orientation, do commit suicide, an idea that connotes that their Christian spirituality is anchored on a weak foundation. This implies that despite a Christian spiritual orientation, some people do not choose continuity and self-preservation. This idea of reality is shown in the novels.

The naturalist writer may be less fully aware than the church-based writers of the Catholic document such as *Gaudium et Spes* of connections to the spiritual element because of the focus on the physical-social dimensions perhaps for narrative-objective effect. However, the novels suggest that tension exists between the physical and spiritual human dimensions if freedom is tilted more towards the physical. To achieve balance to a person's dual nature suggests a recognition of the role of spirituality to meet "the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer" (39), the same message naturalistic novels want humanity to reflect on in order to nurture and deepen their spirituality to still their troubled hearts. *Gaudium et Spes* highlights the good of the human person with the acknowledgment of divine will, the same aspiration literary naturalism conveys for humanity, with its focus, however, on individual will. The criticism on literary naturalism's reductionist treatment of the spiritual dimension and intense focus on the physical-social realities therefore point to the same aspiration that *Gaudium et Spes* projects – the betterment of the human condition and humanity as a whole.

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