

THE TROUBLE WITH *DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ*—ERROR MASQUERADING AS RIGHT

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came and sowed darnel all among the wheat and made off...

Matt. 13: 24 et seq.¹

In the Declaration, *Dignitatis humanae*, (7 December 1965) the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, by a majority of 2,308 to 70, made the following claim—

“This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious liberty.”²

They then detailed the ways in which this right manifested itself, including the following.

- In matters religious a man may not be compelled to act otherwise than in accordance with his beliefs. [n. 2]³
- The exercise of religion consists in the acts whereby a man directs his course to God. [n. 3]
- Religious bodies have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith... [n. 4]

The claim presented an immediate problem.

A Problem of Interpretation

In the first place, “liberty” names two realities, 1) natural liberty, and 2) moral liberty. The first is the fountainhead from which all other liberties flow. The second is the liberty proper to man as a creature ruled by reason and confers on him the dignity that “he is in the hand of his counsel”⁴ and has power over his actions. “[T]he manner in which such dignity is exercised,” as Pope Leo XIII says, “is of the greatest moment inasmuch as on the use that is made of [it] the highest good and the greatest evil alike depend.” The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council did not specify to which of these two they were referring. In some places they seem to refer to the first; in others to the second. And at times they run the two together, as in n. 11—

“God calls men to serve Him in spirit and in truth, hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion.”

This sentence is on its face self-contradictory. If men are bound in conscience, they certainly *do* stand under compulsion. The assertions can be reconciled, of course, but only if the distinction is made. In the *conclusio* they are referring to moral freedom; in the *exceptio*, to natural freedom. Why do they refrain from making the distinction?

¹ Cf. footnote 17 to the original Latin text of the Declaration. The reader should note that there are a number of different sets of footnotes in the English editions which include interpolations and excisions from the authorised text.

² *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2: *Haec Vaticana Synodus declarat personam humanam ius habere ad libertatem religiosam.*

³ This right is expressed twice, once positively, once negatively, but the two are reduced to the same.

⁴ Ecclesiasticus 15: 14

Next, they did not specify what they meant by the noun “religion” (*religio*) or its cognate adjective “religious” (*religiosus*).⁵ That this left the scope of the asserted right obscure may be seen from an analysis of each of the three subsidiary claims instanced above.

In matters religious a man may not be compelled to act otherwise than in accordance with his beliefs.

By “matters religious” here they must refer to the beliefs these encompass. Did they mean, to take six possible instances, —

- belief in the one true God Who has revealed Himself to men?
- belief in the Muslims’ ‘Allah’?
- belief in the achievement of the Buddhists’ contrived oblivion?
- belief in one or other of the Mormons’ multiple divinities?
- belief in the Freemason’s ‘Great Architect’?
- belief in an amorphous ‘deity’?

Or did they mean any and all of these; and, in addition, any other ‘God’ in which men may have professed belief? In n. 4, for example, they indicate their support for religious communities that “honour the supreme being in public worship” (*numen supremum cultu publico honorent*).

*The exercise of religion consists in the acts whereby a man directs his course to God.*⁶

“The exercise of religion” (*exercitium religionis*) here must refer to the attitude of the believing individual. The same questions recur. Did the Council Fathers mean belief in the One True God, or in one or other of the various alternatives suggested? Save for belief in God according to the revelation He has made to mankind, each of these alternatives resolves into what the respective believer conceives to be God. In the absence of a clear explanation, the Fathers’ subsequent claim that “no merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind” does not logically follow. It may be true; but it may equally be false. For if the ‘God’ to which they refer is only a product of the believer’s conception, a “merely human power” might be entirely justified “in commanding or prohibiting acts of this kind.”

Religious bodies have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith...⁷

What did they mean by “religious bodies”? Any society whose members claim to follow some religion or other? Experience demonstrates that the term “religious” can be claimed for activities that range from the honest to the fraudulent; from the benevolent to the plainly murderous. In the absence of essential distinctions, it does not follow necessarily that a “religious body” should not be hindered in its public teaching or witness to its faith.

⁵ As they comment on the exercise of this right they introduce qualifications but this seems to the reader to have been done *ad hoc*, as if to deal with objections that might arise, rather than to modify its force.

⁶ *Exercitium namque religionis ex ipsa eius indole, consistit imprimis in actibus internis voluntariis et liberis, quibus homo sese ad Deum directe ordinat.*

⁷ *Communitates religiosae ius etiam habent, ne impediuntur in sua fide ore et scripto publice docenda atque testanda.*

How, then, is one to interpret *Dignitatis Humanae*? It is all very well to make claims of principle, but they must be consistent with reason. “Why,” the reader might ask, “did the Council Fathers not commence their considerations with a study of the nature of the religious belief of their own, the members of the Catholic Church?” They were, after all, *Catholic* bishops not experts in other forms of belief. Moreover, their experience as bishops, if not their knowledge of theology, ought to have told them that Catholic belief is radically different from every other.⁸ Yet here they were speaking as if Catholic faith and every other form of faith were but species of a common genus. Two evils follow on this failure of precision: 1) they reduce the Catholic faith to the level of a merely human thing; and (worse) 2) they elevate merely human categories of faith to the level of the Catholic.

This confusion of the two is manifest in two statements. In n. 12 of the Declaration we find this—

“In faithfulness... to the truth of the Gospel, the Church is following the way of Christ and the apostles when she recognises and gives support to the principle of religious freedom as befitting the dignity of man and as being in accord with divine revelation.”

Yet Christ expressly told the Jews (and Samaritans) that they were *not* free; that Almighty God had specified precisely how He wanted them to worship Him:

“[T]he hour is coming—in fact it is already here—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants...”⁹

“It is my Father’s will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life...”¹⁰

True religion comes, and comes only, through Jesus Christ, as St Paul attests:

“In many and various ways in times past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets. But now, in our day, He has spoken to us through His Son.”¹¹

Then, in n. 13 of the Declaration the Council Fathers say—

“[A] harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and [this] religious freedom...”

This is false: no such harmony exists. Indeed, as St Paul teaches, it is impossible.

“Do not harness yourself together with unbelievers. Virtue is no companion for crime. Light and darkness have nothing in common. Christ is not the ally of Belial, nor has a believer anything to share with the unbeliever. The temple of God has nothing in common with idols, and that is what we are, the temple of the living God”¹²

⁸ It may be argued against the thesis advanced here that it was not so much the bishops, but their *periti*, who were responsible for the document. But this cannot seriously be advanced. The relevant distinction is that between principal and instrument. The *peritus* may advise; but it is the principal, the bishop, who is responsible when he adopts his advice.

⁹ *John* 4: 23

¹⁰ *John* 6: 40

¹¹ *Hebrews* 1: 1

¹² *2 Corinthians* 6: 14-16

A Problem of Expression

The thoughtful reader soon discovers a further problem with the document, one of expression: the Declaration does not read like a Catholic document. Any number of instances serve to illustrate this. Take this quote from n. 3:

“Truth... is to be sought in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The enquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.”

The clumsiness in expression here is only matched by the lack of intellectual rigour. There is no analysis of *truth*, no insistence that truth is measured by reality (and only by reality). Indeed, the paragraph seems ambivalent about it. The Fathers make not the slightest reference to the riches of the Church on the subject.

Then there is the content of n. 9. The first sentence advises us that “the exigencies of the dignity of the person have come to be fully known through centuries of experience.” This is a curious claim by leaders of that Institution which maintains that human dignity derives from human nature, God’s creation. Moreover, the Catholic Church has ever insisted that the dignity of the Christian exceeds that of his fellow man *precisely in his Catholic belief*. “Christian, remember your dignity! It is God’s own nature that you share...” is the memorable cry of the great St Leo in his first sermon on the Nativity of Christ. Yet the Council Fathers lump the Christian together with the pagan on the score of dignity. The impression given is that human dignity is of greater importance than the dignity accorded the Christian.

In the second sentence of n. 9 the Fathers say,

“What is more, the doctrine [i.e. ‘of religious liberty’] has roots in divine revelation”¹³.

Their use here of the Latin conjunction *immo* conveys the impression that this religious freedom is somehow prior to God’s revelation. This is reinforced with the claim that Christ Himself shows respect for it (*observantiam Christi erga hominis libertatem in exsequendo officio credendi verbo Dei demonstrat*); and, accordingly, that His disciples (that is, the Catholic faithful) must also subordinate themselves to its demands (*atque de spiritu nos edocent quem discipuli talis Magistri debent in omnibus agnoscere et sequi*). The impression is reinforced via the adverb *praesertim* in another passage:

“Especially is religious freedom in society consonant with the freedom of the act of Christian faith.”¹⁴

A cynic might render the meaning of the whole like this: “The rights of man, including the right to religious liberty, come first in the order of reality: how fortunate that Christianity manages to conform with their demands!”

There are similar passages of concern in n. 12.

¹³ Immo haec doctrina de libertate radices habet in divina revelatione, quapropter eo magis a Christianis sancte servanda est.

¹⁴ Praesertim libertas religiosa in societate plene est cum libertate actus fidei christianae congrua.

“[T]he Church is being faithful... when she recognises and supports (*agnoscit eamque fovet*) the principle of religious freedom (*rationem libertatis religiosae*) as consonant with the dignity of man and the revelation of God (*tamquam dignitati hominis et Dei revelationi*).”

Note that “the dignity of man” appears before “the revelation of God”. Then, in the passage that follows, the conjunction *etsi* is used to qualify the Fathers’ acknowledgement of the faithful transmission down the centuries of the Church’s doctrine—

“and yet... there has at times appeared a way of acting hardly in accord (*minus conformis*) with the spirit of the Gospel and even opposed (*immo contrarius*) to it.”

In other words, the Church has not measured up in the past to the rightful demands of this principle of religious freedom; and now that the Council Fathers have exposed it, both the Church and her members must conform.

We are not saying that these passages cannot be read in a Catholic sense but that their character postulates another reading. Those who reject this criticism will no doubt point to the fact that the Council Fathers specifically reserve the full Catholic teaching at the outset of the document (in n. 1)—

“Religious freedom... has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies towards the true religion and towards the one Church of Christ.”

But this assertion is misleading. The very claim of a right of “religious freedom” touches Catholic doctrine fundamentally, as we will show, and it was objectively dishonest for the Council Fathers to contend that the contrary was the case. Moreover, there is no necessary contradiction between traditional Catholic doctrine and immunity from coercion in civil society.

There is more. The Declaration refers, as the criterion for determining the limits of this religious freedom, to the preservation of public order¹⁵ rather than to the standard the Catholic Church has insisted upon for at least eight centuries, the safeguarding of the common good.¹⁶ Public order has to do with part (and only a part) of social justice, that which addresses pathology in society. The common good, on the other hand, is all encompassing; it addresses the health of society, respecting not only justice but charity, which as St Thomas says, is the mother of all virtues.¹⁷

“[S]ocial charity and social justice ... both serve the common good... Social justice demands that each individual in the social organism give to others their due in the interest of the common good; and social charity lays obligations of brotherly love on

¹⁵ In nn. 2, 4 & 8.

¹⁶ “He that seeks the good of the many, seeks in consequence his own good for two reasons. First, because the individual good is impossible without the common good of the family, state or kingdom. Hence Valerius Maximus says of the ancient Romans *they would rather be poor in a rich empire than rich in a poor empire*. Secondly, because, since man is a part of the home and state, he must needs consider what is good for him by being prudent about the good of the many. For the good disposition of parts depends on their relation to the whole; thus Augustine says (*Confessions*, iii) *that part is unseemly that does not harmonise with the whole*.” St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 1, 47, a. 10, ad. 2

¹⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 8, r. 3

all in society with a view to promoting the common good by mutual service and cooperation.¹⁸

And again, in dramatic contrast to the Church's perennial claim to precedence in any civil society because she alone of all the religions on earth is of God, the Council Fathers (in n. 13) restrict the rights of the Church simply to the freedom to proclaim her doctrine which they now assert to be "the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations" between Church and State.

Quite apart from these departures from traditional Catholic teaching, there is a great deal missing. There is no mention, for instance—

- that human nature is perfected by grace; and, accordingly
- that, before one can pronounce on what is due to humanity, it is essential to understand the nature of sanctifying grace and the ambit of its influence;
- that it is the eternal law of God which is the sole standard and rule of human liberty; and therefore,
- that, before one can pronounce on man's "religious" liberty, one must first know the nature of the eternal law.

Moreover, the Council Fathers seem unaware that they have put the cart before the horse. Far from human liberty being, as it were, the ground of religion, it is the virtue of religion which is the ground of human liberty.

The impression that the Declaration is not so much a Catholic document as a secular one with Catholic interpolations is reinforced in n. 15:

"Indeed [this] religious freedom has already been declared to be a civil right in most constitutions, and it is solemnly recognised in international documents."

Why should this be a desideratum? Does not the Church look to another and higher standard than any posited in the secular world? With its use of verbs in the indicative rather than the subjunctive mood, the Declaration reads in places like a statute promulgated by an institution of world government.¹⁹ The interlarding of Catholic principle seems largely irrelevant.

The Problem of Contradiction

In footnote 2 to the Latin authorised edition of the Declaration, the Fathers cite Leo XIII in *Libertas praestantissimum* (20th June 1888) as authority for the proposition—

the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.

¹⁸ Bishop Aloisius J Muench, *Social Charity*; in *Summa Theologica, First Complete American Edition*, Benziger Brothers, Inc., Vol. III, 3326 at 3327.

¹⁹ For instance, in n. 6: "Therefore government *is* to assume the safeguard of religious freedom..." "Government *is* also to help create conditions...". In n. 7: "In the use of all freedoms the moral principle of personal and social responsibility *is* to be observed..."; Men *are* to deal with their fellows in justice and civility." "[G]overnment *is not* to act in an arbitrary fashion..." "Its action *is* to be controlled by juridical norms..."

But the great reforming Pope said no such thing, whether in that encyclical or anywhere else in his writings.²⁰ And this brings us to the most significant problem with the Declaration.

In that encyclical, *Libertas praestantissimum*, Leo XIII fulfilled the duty which the Council Fathers omitted. Preparatory to explaining how the faculty of human liberty relates to the worship of God, he exposed and elaborated its nature. He then said this (at nn. 19 and 20)—

“Let us [now] examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion, namely, the liberty of worship, as it is called. This is based on the principle that every man is free to profess as he may choose any religion, or none.

“But assuredly, of all the duties which man has to fulfil, that without doubt is the chief and the holiest which commands him to worship God with devotion and piety. This follows of necessity from the truth that we are ever in the power of God, are ever guided by His will and providence, and having come forth from Him, must return to Him. Added to which, no true virtue can exist without religion for moral virtue is concerned with those things which lead to God as man’s supreme and ultimate good; and therefore religion, which (as St Thomas says) “performs those actions which are directly and immediately ordered to the divine honour,” (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 81, a. 6; resp.) rules and tempers all virtues.

“And if it be asked which of the many conflicting religions it is necessary to adopt, reason and the natural law unhesitatingly tell us to practise that one which God enjoins upon us and which men can easily recognize by certain exterior notes through which Divine Providence has willed that it should be distinguished, because in a matter of such moment the most terrible loss would be the consequence of error. Wherefore, when a liberty such as We have described is offered to man the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil. Which, as We have said, is no liberty at all but its degradation and the abject submission of the soul to sin.”²¹

Leo here expounds²² the truth proclaimed by his predecessor, Pius IX, in the *Syllabus of Errors* attached to the encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, on 8th December, 1864, in condemning (in n. 15) the following proposition:

“Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he thinks to be the true religion.”

Pius IX formally endorsed the teaching of his predecessor, Gregory XVI (1831-1846), in the encyclical *Mirari vos* (August 15th, 1832) condemning certain propositions of the French priest, Félicité de Lamennais²³.

²⁰ The dishonesty implicit in the misuse of footnotes occurs all too frequently in modern Church documents. English layman Michael Davies notes that not one of the authorities cited by the Council Fathers in support of this proposition in the footnote in fact does so: cf. his *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, The Neumann Press, Long Prairie, Minnesota, 1992, pp. 211-2. [Note that Davies refers to Leo’s encyclical *Libertas praestantissimum* throughout as *Libertas humana*.]

²¹ All relevant sections of *Libertas praestantissimum* are set forth the Appendix to this paper.

²² But not for the first time. He had earlier, in *Immortale Dei* (1.11.1885), endorsed Pius IX’s condemnation.

The terms in which Pius IX pronounced his condemnations do not admit of cavil or contradiction. They were enjoined upon the bishops of the Catholic Church strictly:

“We, truly mindful of Our Apostolic duty, and especially solicitous about our most holy religion, about sound doctrine and the salvation of souls divinely entrusted to Us, and about the good of human society itself, have decided to lift our voice again. And so all and each evil opinion and doctrine individually mentioned in this letter, by Our Apostolic authority We reject, proscribe and condemn; and We wish and command that they be considered as absolutely rejected, proscribed and condemned by all the sons of the Catholic Church.”²⁴

In condemning the proposition *that a man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he thinks to be the true religion*, Pius IX was addressing a matter of faith—because it concerns what a man must believe. He was also addressing a matter of morals—because morality has to do with human acts, each of which bears upon man’s last end, and the act whereby a man embraces and professes the one true religion is fundamental to the attainment of that end.

Less than six years after this condemnation, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, the Vatican Council defined as dogma—that is, as revealed by God—that the Pope speaks infallibly when, 1) speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, carrying out his duty as pastor and teacher of all Christians; 2) in accordance with his supreme apostolic authority; 3) he explains a doctrine of faith or morals; 4) to be held by the universal Church. Each of these four conditions is fulfilled in *Quanta Cura* as analysis shows:

1. [M]indful of Our Apostolic duty... solicitous about our most holy religion, about sound doctrine and the salvation of souls entrusted to us, and... the good of human society;
2. by Our Apostolic authority;
3. We reject, proscribe and condemn [all and each evil opinion and doctrine individually mentioned]; and... wish and command they be considered as absolutely rejected, proscribed and condemned;
4. by all the sons of the Catholic Church.

In 1946, Pope Pius XII reiterated these truths when he taught—

“The Catholic Church... is a perfect society and has as its foundation the truth of Faith infallibly revealed by God. For this reason, that which is opposed to this truth is, necessarily, in error, and the same rights which are objectively recognized for truth cannot be afforded to error. In this manner, liberty of thought and liberty of conscience have their essential limits in the truthfulness of God in Revelation.”²⁵

From all of the above it can be seen that it is *impossible* that the teaching of the Council Fathers in *Dignitatis Humanae* in contradiction of the condemnation in *Quanta Cura* and the constant teaching of his successors could bind the Catholic

²³ Félicité de Lamennais (1782-1854) was a French priest whose views were most influential in his day. At first those views were orthodox, but later he lapsed into heresy. He eventually abandoned his priesthood and, finally, all adherence to Christianity.

²⁴ *Quanta Cura*, n. 6

²⁵ Discourse *Ecco che gia un anno* of 6th October 1946, quoted in Michael Davies, *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

faithful. Indeed, the Catholic faithful are bound on this authority to reject the teaching in that document as false.

Liberty—St Thomas and Pope Leo XIII

Before one can speak of “religious liberty” he must first understand the nature of liberty. *Liberty* (or freedom), as we noted above, names two things: 1) natural liberty; and 2) moral liberty. *Natural liberty* is simply the name we give to the faculty and exercise of free will. Free will, as St Thomas says, is a power of man, the intellectual being, and is indifferent to good or evil as an object of choice²⁶. *Right* (in Latin *ius*) signifies the object of justice²⁷. Right is either natural or positive²⁸, but the human will cannot posit as just something contrary to natural justice²⁹—as e.g., no legislator can make it lawful for a woman to abort her child. The assertion of *liberty*, as, for instance in the slogan of the French Revolutionaries, is the assertion not of the exercise of the power of free will, but the unspoken assertion of a *right* in man to exercise it. As in all slogans there is as much of error as of truth, for it makes no distinction between *natural liberty* and *moral liberty*. The bland assertion of “liberty” without distinction, then, is not only misleading, but dangerously so.

In *Libertas praestantissimum* Leo XIII lays out the reasoning behind his predecessor’s condemnation in *Quanta Cura*. We set out his argument here with the paragraph numbers added to assist the reader’s analysis. The full text of the relevant sections of the encyclical appear in the Appendix.

- a. When the Pope speaks of “liberty” in this encyclical he is referring not to natural liberty but to moral liberty. [n. 3]
- b. The end or object both of the rational will and of its liberty is that good only which is in conformity with reason. [n. 5]
- c. The choice of something contrary to reason is an abuse of human liberty and, indeed, corrupts its very essence—which is why Our Lord says “anyone who commits sin is a slave”. The man who sins in that very act loses his liberty. [n. 6]
- d. Man’s liberty, in order that it be liberty, must be conformed to law, i.e., the ordination of reason, whether natural or positive law. “Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that, because man is free by nature, he is therefore exempt from law.” [n. 7]
- e. The natural law is nothing but the eternal law of God (commanding good and forbidding evil) implanted in man. [n. 8]
- f. Therefore, human liberty demands conformity of a man with the eternal law; and it is precisely in this conformity that man’s liberty is protected and perfected. [n. 11]
- g. If something be suggested as liberty from which conformity with law is removed, this is not freedom at all, but a most foolish licence. [n. 14]
- h. Of all the duties that man has to fulfil, the chief and the holiest is that which commands him to worship God with devotion and piety. And reason and the

²⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 88, 2

²⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 57, 1

²⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 57, 2

²⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 57, 3, ad 2. When the Council Fathers’ claimed in *Dignitatis Humanae*—“the human person has a right to religious liberty”—they were either asserting a *positive* right, or declaring a *natural* right. But if there was no such natural right, no assertion by the Council Fathers of the existence of a positive right could render it so.

natural law unhesitatingly tell us that the religion man is bound to adopt and practise (among all those available) is that religion which God enjoins upon us and which men can easily recognise by certain exterior notes whereby Divine Providence has willed it should be distinguished. [n. 20]

- i. Hence, when a so-called liberty of worship, that is “religious liberty”, [n. 19] is offered to man, the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil. This is no liberty at all but its degradation and involves the abject submission of the soul to sin. [n. 20]

From all this it can be seen that what the Council Fathers called “religious liberty” was nothing but “religious licence”.

The Influence of de Lamennais and Freemasonry

Hugues Félicité Robert de Lamennais (June 19th 1782-February 27th 1854) was a French priest (ordained 1816 by the Bishop of Rennes) whose views exercised great influence on the people of his day. He moved from a reasonable orthodoxy to heresy. Many of his views whilst he was orthodox were not only sound but incisive. He realised that Luther’s introduction into religion of private judgement had infected Descartes and Leibniz (in philosophy and science), and Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists (in politics), and that this had resulted in a practical atheism. In 1817 he produced a book which became immensely popular, *Essai sur l’indifférence en matière de religion* (An Essay on Religious Indifference). His popularity brought him a following, and he was responsible for the conversion of many intellectuals to the faith. Regrettably, it also enlarged his sense of self importance and he was carried away with his own theories on how to combat the errors of the age.

In a second volume of his *Essai*, published in 1820, he advanced a philosophical position designed to combat that of René Descartes. Here is an extract from the analysis of his thought in the on-line *Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

“The philosophic system which he expounded... was based on a new theory of certitude. [C]ertitude cannot be given by the individual reason... only to the general reason, that is to the universal consent of mankind, the *common* sense; it is derived from the unanimous testimony of the human race. Certitude, therefore, is not created by evidence, but by the authority of mankind; it is a matter of faith in the testimony of the human race, not the result of free enquiry... There exists... a true religion... one, which is absolutely necessary to salvation and to social order. Only one criterion will enable us to discern the true religion from the false... the authority of testimony. The true religion, therefore, is that which can put forth on its own behalf the greatest number of witnesses. This is the case with the Christian, or rather, the Catholic religion. It is in reality the true, the only religion which began with the world and perpetuates itself with it. The result of a primitive revelation, this unique religion has perfected itself in the course of ages without being essentially modified; Christians now believe all that the human race has believed, and the human race has always believed what Christians believe...

“The philosophic system of Lamennais, like his apologetics, called forth serious objections... [His] philosophy and apologetics favoured scepticism by denying the validity of individual reason. If the latter can furnish no certitude, how can we

expect any from the general reason, which is but a synthesis of individual reasons? It was also a confusion of the natural and the supernatural orders, of philosophy and theology, to base both alike on the authority of the human race; and, since according to him both alike are based on human testimony, religious faith was at once reduced to human faith...”

With his founding of the journal *L’Avenir* in 1830, de Lamennais’ opinions began to move even further from orthodoxy and Pope Gregory XVI was moved to condemn them in his encyclical *Mirari vos* (1832). The Pope required him to submit to the judgements set forth there but de Lamennais refused. Later he abandoned his priesthood and, finally, all adherence to Christianity, ending in atheism.

De Lamennais taught *inter alia* that—

- the individual citizen should have a freedom of conscience which is full, universal, without restriction or privilege;
- governments only exist to maintain unity and harmony among the citizens of the State;
- the only power the State should have is the power to repress crimes which would attack the liberties of its citizens;
- the only prohibited religious (or anti-religious) propaganda should be that calculated to incite violence or sedition;
- error should be accorded the unlimited power of diffusing itself;
- there should be absolute separation between Church and State;
- all concordats between the nations and the Holy See should be abolished.

Once the Church renounced the use of force, he claimed naively, the nations would, under the influence of her truth, flock to her embrace, leading to—

“the temporal sovereignty of Christ by means of the emancipation of peoples and freedom of thought and conscience...”

The reader will observe that many of these claims are reflected in the language of *Dignitatis Humanae*. He will also detect a certain resonance between de Lamennais’ teachings and the thinking of Pope John XXIII manifested in his Opening Speech to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council:

“[Certain Catholics] behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life, and for a proper religious liberty... Today... the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations... [Fallacious teaching, opinions and dangerous concepts] are so obviously in contrast with the right norm of honesty and have produced such lethal fruits that by now it would seem that men of themselves are inclined to condemn them... They are ever more deeply convinced of the paramount dignity of the human person and of his perfections, as well as of the duties which that implies...”³⁰

³⁰ Abbott at p. 712. We have remarked elsewhere on the naivety of the late Pope’s views; cf. “Failure of the Executive Power” at <http://www.superflumina.org/executivefailure.html>

In his encyclical, *Humanum Genus* (20th April, 1884)³¹, Pope Leo XIII set out the program that Freemasonry seeks to bring about in the world. Many of the heads of that program are reflected in the teachings of de Lamennais, including the following:

- all religions are alike and there is no reason why one should have precedence over another;
- each one must be left at liberty to follow whatever religion he may prefer;
- it is an act of violence to require men to obey any authority other than that which is obtained from themselves;
- the civil state should be without God;
- a regard for religion should be held as an indifferent matter;
- the teaching office and authority of the Catholic Church should be of no account in the civil state;
- Church and state ought to be altogether disunited;
- (consequently) states ought to be constituted without any regard for the laws and precepts of the Church.

Again, the reader should have little difficulty detecting in *Dignitatis Humanae* a reflection of many of these elements of the Masonic program.

The Absence of Argumentation

Since it was founded by the Author of reason, the Catholic Church is pre-eminently the religion of reason. In any document issued by the Church giving a decision or judgement on some topic of faith or morals, then, one is entitled to expect to see the reasons laid out with clarity. Moreover, if there is any argument to the contrary of a decision or judgement enjoined upon the faithful, one expects to see that argument addressed and any difficulties satisfactorily resolved. Consider *Dignitatis Humanae* in the light of these prescriptions.

The Church had spoken previously on the critical distinction between natural liberty and moral liberty. Why did the Council Fathers choose not to repeat it? There can be only one answer. It would have impeded, not assisted, their novel claim. In every report of the many preparatory debates among the Council Fathers³², it is clear that the Church's earlier teachings were in issue. They were debated *in extenso*. Why, then, is there nothing in the document stating them? or addressing them? or at least attempting to resolve them? Nowhere in any of the footnotes to the authorised Latin edition of the document will a reader find any mention of the *Syllabus of Errors* attached to Pius IX's Bull, *Quanta Cura*; or of proposition n. 15 which it condemned; or of Leo XIII's studied endorsement of that condemnation in *Libertas praestantissimum*. A cynic would be justified in opining that these matters were not mentioned because the Fathers had no answer to them, or no answer which would bear the light of critical analysis.

³¹ In sections 12 to 23.

³² As, e.g., the commentators' papers in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M Abbott SJ, General Editor; London, 1966; Ralph M Wiltgen in *The Rhine flows into the Tiber; A History of Vatican II*, New York, 1967 (my copy a reprint by TAN Books, 1985); and Michael Davies in *The Second Vatican Council and Religious Liberty*, op. cit.

But more than this, there is evidence the Council Fathers engaged in a deliberate obfuscation of the *status quo*, for when they came to enunciate their novel principle (if one omits the intervening chapter heading) this is what they said—

“[This Vatican Council] intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and the constitutional order of society. [It] declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion etc...”

First, they were aware that there existed a pre-existing statement of Pius IX expressed in the most solemn manner contradicting the claim they were now making. Secondly, by adopting the device of referring only to “recent popes” they gave the impression that they were deferring to the Church’s tradition, when in fact they were contradicting it. Thirdly, in obscuring the existing Church teaching, they were denying the need for Catholics to conform to its demands.

We mentioned above the Fathers’ departure from the Church’s perennial standard of the common good in favour of the preservation of public order as the criterion for determining the limits to their asserted right to religious freedom. There is reason latent in this theological aberration which demonstrates a degree of wilful attention.

Any reference to the common good demands that due order be observed with regard to man and society. In respect of matters religious this entails that respect be given, not to any religion at all, but only to that religion established by Almighty God because the common good cannot ultimately be secured save by the religion established by the Founder of society. Now, as St Thomas says, “the individual good is impossible without the common good of the family, state or kingdom”³³; but religious liberty *simpliciter* is against the common good of any of these. Hence it is impossible that it be for the good of the individual. For which reason any appeal to the common good would have betrayed the Council Fathers’ claim that *the human person has a right to religious liberty*.

Christ’s Faithful People, who have long suffered the effects of what, if it was not wilful disobedience of the Church’s existing teaching, was certainly recklessness towards it, are entitled to feel a righteous anger against the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council over these falsifications, and against the Pope who sanctioned them.

Perhaps it was the scope given the Devil by the errors in *Dignitatis Humanae* to which Pope Paul VI was referring when, on June 29th 1972, he told a Vatican audience—

“We believed that after the Council would come a day of sunshine in the history of the Church. But instead there has come a day of clouds and storms, and of darkness... And how did this come about? We will confide to you the thought that may be, we

³³ Summa Theologiae, II-II, 1, 47, a. 10, ad. 2. “He that seeks the good of the many, seeks in consequence his own good for two reasons. First, because the individual good is impossible without the common good of the family, state or kingdom. Hence Valerius Maximus says of the ancient Romans *they would rather be poor in a rich empire than rich in a poor empire*. Secondly, because, since man is a part of the home and state, he must needs consider what is good for him by being prudent about the good of the many. For the good disposition of parts depends on their relation to the whole; and thus Augustine says (*Confessions*, iii) *that part is unseemly that does not harmonise with the whole*.

ourselves admit in free discussion, that may be unfounded, but that is that there has been a power, an adversary power [at work]. Let us call him by his name: the Devil... It is as if from some mysterious crack, no, it is not mysterious, from some crack the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God..."

We will in a further paper discuss the evils that have befallen the Church and the world as a result of the errors in *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Michael Baker

14th February 2009—*Sts Cyril & Methodius*³⁴

APPENDIX

Selected passages from *LIBERTAS PRAESTANTISSIMUM*, Encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, 20th June 1888, *On the Nature of Human Liberty*.

3. "It is with *moral* liberty [that we are dealing].... But, first of all, it will be well to speak briefly of *natural* liberty; for, though it is distinct and separate from moral liberty, natural freedom is the fountainhead from which liberty of whatsoever kind flows, *sua vi suaque sponte*³⁵. The unanimous consent and judgment of men, which is the trusty voice of nature, recognizes this natural liberty in those only who are endowed with intelligence or reason; and it is by his use of this faculty that man is regarded rightly as responsible for his actions. For, while other animate creatures follow their senses, seeking good and avoiding evil only by instinct, man has reason to guide him in each and every act of his life. Reason sees that whatever things that are held to be good upon earth may exist or may not, and discerning that none of them are of necessity for us, it leaves the will free to choose what it pleases. But man can judge of this contingency, as We say, only because he has a soul that is simple, spiritual, and intellectual—a soul, therefore, not produced by matter, nor dependent on matter for its existence, but created immediately by God—and, far surpassing the condition of things material, which has a life and action of its own so that, knowing the unchangeable and necessary reasons of what is true and good, it sees that no particular kind of good is necessary to us. When, therefore, it is established that man's soul is immortal and endowed with reason and not bound up with things material, the foundation of natural liberty is at once most firmly laid.

...

5. "...Considered as to its nature, [liberty] is the faculty of choosing means fitted for the end proposed, for he is master of his actions who can choose one thing out of many. Now, since everything chosen as a means is viewed as good or useful, and since good, as such, is the proper object of our desire, it follows that freedom of choice is a property of the will, or, rather, is identical with the will in so far as it has in its action the faculty of choice. But the will cannot proceed to act until it is enlightened by the knowledge

³⁴ This paper was amended on 29 June 2009 to correct an error with reference to the date of Pastor Aeternus.

³⁵ "by one's own power and free will."

possessed by the intellect. In other words, the good wished by the will is necessarily good in so far as it is known by the intellect; and this the more, because in all voluntary acts choice is subsequent to a judgment upon the truth of the good presented, declaring to which good preference should be given. No sensible man can doubt that judgment is an act of reason, not of the will. The end, or object, both of the rational will and of its liberty is that good only which is in conformity with reason.

6. “Since, however, both these faculties are imperfect, it is possible, as is often seen, that the reason should propose something which is not really good, but which has the appearance of good, and that the will should choose accordingly. For, as the possibility of error, and actual error, are defects of the mind and attest its imperfection, so the pursuit of what has a false appearance of good, though a proof of our freedom, (just as a disease is a proof of our vitality,) implies defect in human liberty. The will also, simply because of its dependence on the reason, no sooner desires anything contrary to reason than it abuses its freedom of choice and corrupts its very essence. Thus it is that the infinitely perfect God, although supremely free, because of the supremacy of His intellect and of His essential goodness, nevertheless cannot choose evil; neither can the angels and saints, who enjoy the beatific vision. St. Augustine and others urged most admirably against the Pelagians that, if the possibility of deflection from good belonged to the essence or perfection of liberty, then God, Jesus Christ, and the angels and saints, who have not this power, would have no liberty at all, or would have less liberty than man has in his state of pilgrimage and imperfection. This subject is often discussed by the Angelic Doctor in his demonstration that the possibility of sinning is not freedom, but slavery. It will suffice to quote his subtle commentary on the words of our Lord: *Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.* (John 8: 34) ‘Everything,’ he says, ‘is that which belongs to it a naturally. When, therefore, it acts through a power outside itself, it does not act of itself, but through another, that is, as a slave. But man is by nature rational. When, therefore, he acts according to reason, he acts of himself and according to his free will; and this is liberty. Whereas, when he sins, he acts in opposition to reason, is moved by another, and is the victim of foreign misapprehensions. Therefore, *Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.*’ [On the Gospel of St. John, cap. viii, lect. 4, n. 3 (ed. Vives, Vol. 20 p. 95)]. Even the heathen philosophers clearly recognized this truth, especially they who held that the wise man alone is free; and by the term ‘wise man’ was meant, as is well known, the man trained to live in accordance with his nature, that is, in justice and virtue.

7. “Such, then, being the condition of human liberty, it necessarily stands in need of light and strength to direct its actions to good and to restrain them from evil. Without this, the freedom of our will would be our ruin. First of all, there must be *law*; that is, a fixed rule of teaching as to what is to be done and what is to be left undone. This rule cannot affect the lower animals in any true sense, since they act of necessity, following their natural instinct, and cannot of themselves act in any other way. On the other hand, as was said above, he who is free can either act or not act, can do this or do that, as he pleases, because his judgment precedes his choice. And his judgment not only decides what is right or wrong of its own nature, but also what is practically good and therefore to be chosen, and what is practically evil and therefore to be avoided. In other words, reason prescribes to the will what it should seek or shun for the eventual attainment of man’s last end, for the sake of which all his actions ought to be performed. This ordination of *reason* is called law. In man’s free will, therefore, or in the moral necessity that our voluntary acts comply with reason, lies the very root of the necessity of law. Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that, because man is

free by nature, he is therefore exempt from law. Were this the case, it would follow that to become free we must be deprived of reason; whereas the truth is that we are bound to submit to law precisely because we are free by our very nature. For, law is the guide of man's actions; it turns him toward good by its rewards, and deters him from evil by its punishments.

8. "Foremost in this office comes the *natural law*, which is written and engraved in the mind of every man; and this is nothing but our reason, commanding us to do right and forbidding sin. Nevertheless, all prescriptions of human reason can have the force of law only inasmuch as they are the voice and the interpreters of some higher power on which our reason and liberty necessarily depend. For, since the force of law consists in the imposing of obligations and the granting of rights, authority is the one and only foundation of all law—the power, that is, of fixing duties and defining rights, as also of assigning the necessary sanctions of reward and chastisement to each and all of its commands. But all this, clearly, cannot be found in man, if, as his own supreme legislator, he is to be the rule of his own actions. It follows, therefore, that the law of nature is the same thing as the *eternal law*, implanted in rational creatures, and inclining them *to their right action and end*; and can be nothing else but the eternal reason of God, the Creator and Ruler of all the world. To this rule of action and restraint of evil God has vouchsafed to give special and most suitable aids for strengthening and ordering the human will. The first and most excellent of these is the power of His divine *grace*, whereby the mind can be enlightened and the will wholesomely invigorated and moved to the constant pursuit of moral good, so that the use of our inborn liberty becomes at once less difficult and less dangerous. Not that the divine assistance hinders in any way the free movement of our will; just the contrary, for grace works inwardly in man and in harmony with his natural inclinations, since it flows from the very Creator of his mind and will, by whom all things are moved in conformity with their nature. As the Angelic Doctor points out, it is because divine grace comes from the Author of nature that it is so admirably adapted to be the safeguard of all natures, and to maintain the character, efficiency, and operations of each.

9. "What has been said of the liberty of individuals is no less applicable to them when considered as bound together in civil society. For what reason and the natural law do for individuals, that *human law*, promulgated for their good, does for the citizens of States. Of the laws enacted by men, some are concerned with what is by its very nature good or bad; and they command men to follow after what is right and to shun what is wrong, adding at the same time a suitable sanction. But such laws by no means derive their origin from civil society, because, just as civil society did not create human nature, so neither can it be said to be the author of the good which befits human nature, or of the evil which is contrary to it. Laws come before men live together in society, and have their origin in the natural, and consequently in the eternal, law. The precepts, therefore, of the natural law, contained bodily in the laws of men, have not merely the force of human law, but they possess that higher and more august sanction which belongs to the law of nature and the eternal law. And within the sphere of this kind of laws the duty of the civil legislator is, mainly, to keep the community in obedience by the adoption of a common discipline and by putting restraint upon refractory and viciously inclined men, so that, deterred from evil, they may turn to what is good, or at any rate may avoid causing trouble and disturbance to the State. Now, there are other enactments of the civil authority, which do not follow directly, but somewhat remotely, from the natural law, and decide many points which the law of nature treats only in a general and indefinite way. For instance, though nature commands all to contribute to the public peace and

prosperity, whatever belongs to the manner, and circumstances, and conditions under which such service is to be rendered must be determined by the wisdom of men and not by nature herself. It is in the constitution of these particular rules of life, suggested by reason and prudence, and put forth by competent authority, that human law, properly so called, consists, binding all citizens to work together for the attainment of the common end proposed to the community, and forbidding them to depart from this end, and, in so far as human law is in conformity with the dictates of nature, leading to what is good, and deterring from evil.

10. "From this it is manifest that the eternal law of God is the sole standard and rule of human liberty, not only in each individual man, but also in the community and civil society which men constitute when united. Therefore, the true liberty of human society does not consist in every man doing what he pleases, for this would simply end in turmoil and confusion, and bring on the overthrow of the State; but rather in this, that through the injunctions of the civil law all may more easily conform to the prescriptions of the eternal law. Likewise, the liberty of those who are in authority does not consist in the power to lay unreasonable and capricious commands upon their subjects, which would equally be criminal and would lead to the ruin of the commonwealth; but the binding force of human laws is in this, that they are to be regarded as applications of the eternal law, and incapable of sanctioning anything which is not contained in the eternal law, as in the principle of all law. Thus, St. Augustine most wisely says: 'I think that you can see, at the same time, that there is nothing just and lawful in that temporal law, unless what men have gathered from this eternal law.' (*De libero arbitrio*, lib. I, cap. 6, n. 15 [PL 32, 1229].) If, then, by anyone in authority, something be sanctioned out of conformity with the principles of right reason, and consequently hurtful to the commonwealth, such an enactment can have no binding force of law, as being no rule of justice, but certain to lead men away from that good which is the very end of civil society.

11. "Therefore, the nature of human liberty, however it be considered, whether in individuals or in society, whether in those who command or in those who obey, supposes the necessity of obedience to some supreme and eternal law, which is no other than the authority of God commanding good and forbidding evil. And, so far from this most just authority of God over men diminishing or even destroying their liberty, it protects and perfects it, for the real perfection of all creatures is found in the prosecution and attainment of their respective ends; but the supreme end to which human liberty must aspire is God.

...

14. "If when men discuss the question of liberty they were careful to grasp its true and legitimate meaning, such as with reason we have just explained, they would never venture to affix such a calumny on the Church as to assert that she is the foe of individual and public liberty. But many there are who follow in the footsteps of Lucifer, and adopt as their own his rebellious cry, 'I will not serve'; and consequently substitute for true liberty what is sheer and most foolish license. Such, for instance, are the men belonging to that widely spread and powerful organization, who, usurping the name of liberty, style themselves 'liberals'.

15. "What *naturalists* or *rationalists* aim at in philosophy, that the supporters of *liberalism*, carrying out the principles laid down by naturalism, are attempting in the domain of morality and politics. The fundamental doctrine of rationalism is the

supremacy of the human reason, which, refusing due submission to the divine and eternal reason, proclaims its own independence, and constitutes itself the supreme principle and source and judge of truth. Hence, these followers of liberalism deny the existence of any divine authority to which obedience is due, and proclaim that every man is a law unto himself; from which arises that ethical system which they style *independent* morality, and which, under the guise of liberty, exonerates man from any obedience to the commands of God, and substitutes for it a boundless license. The end of all this is not difficult to foresee, especially when society is in question. For, when once man is firmly persuaded that he is subject to no one, it follows that the efficient cause of the unity of civil society is not to be sought in any principle external to man, or superior to him, but simply in the free will of individuals; that the authority in the State comes from the people only; and that, just as every man's individual reason is his only rule of life, so the collective reason of the community should be the supreme guide in the management of all public affairs. Hence the doctrine of the supremacy of the greater number, and that all right and all duty reside in the majority. But, from what has been said, it is clear that all this is in contradiction to reason. To refuse any bond of union between man and civil society, on the one hand, and God the Creator and consequently the supreme Law-giver, on the other, is plainly repugnant to the nature, not only of man, but of all created things; for, of necessity, all effects must in some proper way be connected with their cause; and it belongs to the perfection of every nature to contain itself within that sphere and grade which the order of nature has assigned to it, namely, that the lower should be subject and obedient to the higher.

16. "Moreover, besides this, a doctrine of such character is most hurtful both to individuals and to the State. For, once ascribe to human reason the only authority to decide what is true and what is good, and the real distinction between good and evil is destroyed; honour and dishonour differ not in their nature, but in the opinion and judgment of each one; pleasure is the measure of what is lawful; and, a code of morality being provided which can have little or no power to restrain or quieten the unruly propensities of man, a way is naturally opened to universal corruption. With reference also to public affairs: authority is severed from the true and natural principle whence it derives all its efficacy for the common good; and the law determining what it is right to do and avoid doing is at the mercy of a majority. Now, this is simply a road leading straight to tyranny. The empire of God over man and civil society once repudiated, it follows that religion, as a public institution, can have no claim to exist, and that everything that belongs to religion will be treated with complete indifference. Furthermore, with ambitious designs on sovereignty, tumult and sedition will be common amongst the people; and when duty and conscience cease to appeal to them, there will be nothing to hold them back but force, which of itself alone is powerless to keep their covetousness in check. Of this we have almost daily evidence in the conflict with *socialists* and members of other seditious societies, who labour unceasingly to bring about revolution. It is for those, then, who are capable of forming a just estimate of things, to decide whether such doctrines promote that true liberty which alone is worthy of man, or rather, pervert and destroy it.

...

18. "There are [some]... who affirm that the morality of individuals is to be guided by the divine law, but not the morality of the State, such that in public affairs the commands of God may be passed over, and may be entirely disregarded in the framing of laws. Hence follows the fatal theory of the need of separation between Church and State. But the absurdity of such a position is manifest. Nature herself proclaims the necessity of the

State providing means and opportunities whereby the community may be enabled to live properly, that is to say, according to the laws of God. For, since God is the source of all goodness and justice, it is absolutely ridiculous that the State should pay no attention to these laws or render them abortive by contrary enactments. Besides, those who are in authority owe it to the commonwealth not only to provide for its external well-being and the conveniences of life, but still more to consult the welfare of men's souls in the wisdom of their legislation. But, for the increase of such benefits, nothing more suitable can be conceived than the laws which have God for their author; and, therefore, they who in their government of the State take no account of these laws abuse political power by causing it to deviate from its proper end and from what nature itself prescribes. And, what is still more important, and what We have more than once pointed out, although the civil authority has not the same proximate end as the spiritual, nor proceeds on the same lines, nevertheless in the exercise of their separate powers they must occasionally meet. For their subjects are the same, and not infrequently they deal with the same objects, though in different ways. Whenever this occurs, since a state of conflict is absurd and manifestly repugnant to the most wise ordinance of God, there must necessarily exist some order or mode of procedure to remove the occasions of difference and contention, and to secure harmony in all things. This harmony has been not inaptly compared to that which exists between the body and the soul for the well-being of both one and the other, the separation of which brings irremediable harm to the body, since it extinguishes its very life.

19. "To make this more evident, the growth of liberty ascribed to our age must be considered apart in its various details. And, first, let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion, namely, the liberty, as it is called, of worship,. This is based on the principle that every man is free to profess as he may choose any religion or none.

20. "But, assuredly, of all the duties which man has to fulfil, that, without doubt, is the chief and the holiest which commands him to worship God with devotion and piety. This follows of necessity from the truth that we are ever in the power of God, are ever guided by His will and providence, and, having come forth from Him, must return to Him. Added to which, no true virtue can exist without religion, for moral virtue is concerned with those things which lead to God as man's supreme and ultimate good; and therefore religion, which (as St. Thomas says) "performs those actions which are directly and immediately ordained for the divine honour," rules and tempers all virtues. And if it be asked which of the many conflicting religions it is necessary to adopt, reason and the natural law unhesitatingly tell us to practice that one which God enjoins, and which men can easily recognize by certain exterior notes, whereby Divine Providence has willed that it should be distinguished, because, in a matter of such moment, the most terrible loss would be the consequence of error. Wherefore, when a liberty such as We have described is offered to man, the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil; which, as We have said, is no liberty, but its degradation, and the abject submission of the soul to sin.

21. "This kind of liberty, if considered in relation to the State, clearly implies that there is no reason why the State should offer any homage to God, or should desire any public recognition of Him; that no one form of worship is to be preferred to another, but that all stand on an equal footing, no account being taken of the religion of the people, even if they profess the Catholic faith. But, to justify this, it must needs be taken as true that the

State has no duties toward God, or that such duties, if they exist, can be abandoned with impunity, both of which assertions are manifestly false. For it cannot be doubted but that, by the will of God, men are united in civil society; whether its component parts be considered; or its form, which implies authority; or the object of its existence; or the abundance of the vast services which it renders to man. God it is who has made man for society, and has placed him in the company of others like himself, so that what was wanting to his nature, and beyond his attainment if left to his own resources, he might obtain by association with others. Wherefore, civil society must acknowledge God as its Founder and Parent, and must obey and reverence His power and authority. Justice therefore forbids, and reason itself forbids, the State to be godless; or to adopt a line of action which would end in godlessness—namely, to treat the various religions (as they call them) alike, and to bestow upon them promiscuously equal rights and privileges. Since, then, the profession of one religion is necessary in the State, that religion must be professed which alone is true, and which can be recognized without difficulty, especially in Catholic States, because the marks of truth are, as it were, engraven upon it. This religion, therefore, the rulers of the State must preserve and protect, if they would provide—as they should do—with prudence and usefulness for the good of the community. For public authority exists for the welfare of those whom it governs; and, although its proximate end is to lead men to the prosperity found in this life, yet, in so doing, it ought not to diminish, but rather to increase, man's capability of attaining to the supreme good in which his everlasting happiness consists: which never can be attained if religion be disregarded.

22. “All this, however, We have explained more fully elsewhere. We now only wish to add the remark that liberty of so false a nature is greatly hurtful to the true liberty of both rulers and their subjects. Religion, of its essence, is wonderfully helpful to the State. For, since it derives the prime origin of all power directly from God Himself, with grave authority it charges rulers to be mindful of their duty, to govern without injustice or severity, to rule their people kindly and with almost paternal charity; it admonishes subjects to be obedient to lawful authority, as to the ministers of God; and it binds them to their rulers, not merely by obedience, but by reverence and affection, forbidding all seditions and venturesome enterprises calculated to disturb public order and tranquillity, and cause greater restrictions to be put upon the liberty of the people. We need not mention how greatly religion conduces to pure morals, and pure morals to liberty. Reason shows, and history confirms the fact, that the higher the morality of States, the greater are the liberty and wealth and power which they enjoy...”
