

LEO XIII ON HUMAN LIBERTY & RELIGION

When Jesus Christ had blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us... [t]hen man... beheld... the light of the truth, for long ages desired, yet sought in vain... [H]e realised that he was born to much higher and more glorious things than the frail and inconstant objects of sense which had hitherto formed the end of his thoughts and cares. He learnt that the meaning of human life, the supreme law, the end of all things was this—that we come from God and must return to Him.

Leo XIII, *Tam Futura Prospicientibus* (1.11.1900), n. 5

Leo XIII (1878-1903) analysed the nature of human liberty in a number of encyclicals and expounded on its various applications, including its application to religion. We set out below extracts from three of these encyclicals whose full texts the reader may study at his leisure¹. What Pope Leo XIII had to say at the close of the 19th century does not cease to be valid at the opening of the 21st. It should be weighed carefully with the teaching in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

Michael Baker

October 15th 2005 — *St Teresa of Jesus (Teresa of Avila), Doctor of the Church*

IMMORTALE DEI

On The Christian Constitution Of States

Encyclical, 1st November 1885

...

21. *There was once a time when States were governed by the philosophy of the Gospel. Then it was that the power and divine virtue of Christian wisdom had diffused itself throughout the laws, institutions, and morals of the people, permeating all ranks and relations of civil society. Then, too, the religion instituted by Jesus Christ, established firmly in befitting dignity, flourished everywhere, by the favour of princes and the legitimate protection of magistrates; and Church and State were happily united in concord and friendly interchange of good offices. The State, constituted in this wise, bore fruits important beyond all expectation, whose remembrance is still, and always will be, in renown, witnessed to as they are by countless proofs which can never be blotted out or ever obscured by any craft of any enemies.*

¹ Follow the link on www.superflumina.org/compatible_sites.html

Christian Europe has subdued barbarous nations and changed them from a savage, to a civilized, condition, from superstition to true worship. It victoriously rolled back the tide of Mohammedan conquest; retained the headship of civilization; stood forth in the front rank as the leader and teacher of all, in every branch of national culture; bestowed on the world the gift of true and many-sided liberty; and most wisely founded very numerous institutions for the solace of human suffering. And if we inquire how it was able to bring about so altered a condition of things, the answer is—beyond all question—in large measure, through religion, under whose auspices so many great undertakings were set on foot, through whose aid they were brought to completion.

22. *A similar state of things would certainly have continued had the agreement of the two powers been lasting. Even more important results might justly have been looked for, had obedience waited upon the authority, teaching, and counsels of the Church, and had this submission been specially marked by greater and more unswerving loyalty. For that should be regarded in the light of an ever-changeless law which Ivo of Chartres wrote to Pope Paschal II: "When kingdom and priesthood are at one, in complete accord, the world is well ruled, and the Church flourishes, and brings forth abundant fruit. But when they are at variance, not only do the smaller interests fail to prosper, but things of the greatest moment fall into deplorable decay."²*

23. *But that harmful and deplorable passion for innovation which was aroused in the sixteenth century threw into confusion, first of all, the Christian religion and next, by natural sequence, invaded the precincts of philosophy, whence it spread amongst all classes of society. From this source, as from a fountain-head, burst forth all those later tenets of unbridled license which, in the midst of the terrible upheavals of the last century, were wildly conceived and boldly proclaimed as the principles and foundation of that new conception of law which was not merely previously unknown, but which was at variance on many points not only with the Christian, but even the natural law.*

24. *Amongst these principles the chief lays down that as all men are alike by race and nature, so in like manner all are equal in the control of their life; that each one is so far his own master as to be in no sense under the rule of any other individual; that each is free to think on every subject just as he may choose, and to do whatever he may like to do; that no man has any right to rule over other men. In a society grounded upon such maxims all government is nothing more nor less than the will of the people, and the people, being under the power of itself alone, is alone its own ruler. It does choose, nevertheless, some to whose charge it may commit itself, but in such wise that it makes over to them not the right, so much as the business of governing, which is to be exercised, however, in its name.*

25. *The authority of God is passed over in silence, just as if there were no God; or as if He cared nothing for human society; or as if men, whether in their individual capacity or bound*

² Epistle 238, to Pope Paschal II [*Patrologia Latina* 162, 246B].

together in social relations, owed nothing to God; or as if there could be a government of which the whole origin and power and authority did not reside in God Himself. Thus, as is evident, a State becomes nothing but a multitude which is its own master and ruler. And since the people is declared to contain within itself the fountain-head of all rights and of all power, it follows that the State does not consider itself bound by any kind of duty towards God. Moreover, it believes that it is not obliged to make public profession of any religion; or to inquire which of the very many religions is the only one which is true; or to prefer one religion to all the rest; or to show to any form of religion special favour; but, on the contrary, is bound to grant equal rights to every creed, so that public order may not be disturbed by any particular form of religious belief.

26. And it is a part of this theory that all questions that concern religion are to be referred to private judgment; that is, that every one is to be free to follow whatever religion he prefers, or none at all if he disapprove of all. From this the following consequences logically flow—that the judgment of each one's conscience is independent of all law; that the most unrestrained opinions may be openly expressed as to the practice or omission of divine worship; and that every one has unbounded license to think whatever he chooses and to publish abroad whatever he thinks.

27. Now when the State rests on foundations like those just named—and at the present moment they are greatly in favour—it readily appears into what position the Church is driven and how unrightful is that position. For, when the management of public business is in harmony with doctrines of such a kind, the Catholic religion is allowed a standing in civil society equal only, or inferior, to societies alien from it; no regard is paid to the laws of the Church, and she who, by the order and commission of Jesus Christ, has the duty of teaching all nations, finds herself forbidden to take any part in the instruction of the people.

With reference to matters that are of twofold jurisdiction, they who administer the civil power lay down the law at their own will, and in matters that pertain to religion defiantly put aside the most sacred decrees of the Church. They claim jurisdiction over the marriages of Catholics, even over the bond as well as the unity and the indissolubility of matrimony. They lay hands on the goods of the clergy, contending that the Church cannot possess property. Lastly, they treat the Church with such arrogance that, rejecting entirely her title to the nature and rights of a perfect society, they hold that she differs in no respect from other societies in the State, and for this reason possesses no right nor any legal power of action, save that which she holds by the concession and favour of government. If in any State the Church retains her own agreement publicly entered into by the two powers, men forthwith begin to cry out that matters affecting the Church must be separated from those of the State.

28. Their object in uttering this cry is to be able to violate unpunished their plighted faith, and in all things to have unchecked control. And as the Church, unable to abandon her chief and most sacred duties, cannot patiently endure this, and asks that the pledge given to her be fully and scrupulously adhered to, contentions frequently arise between the ecclesiastical and

the civil power, of which the issue commonly is that the weaker power in human resources yields to the one which is stronger.

29. Accordingly, it has become the practice and determination under this condition of public polity (now so much admired by many) either to forbid the action of the Church altogether, or to keep her in check and bondage to the State. Public enactments are in great measure framed with this design. The drawing up of laws, the administration of State affairs, the godless education of youth, the spoliation and suppression of religious orders, the overthrow of the temporal power of the Roman Pontiff, all alike aim to this one end—to paralyse the action of Christian institutions, to cramp to the utmost the freedom of the Catholic Church, and to curtail her ever single prerogative.

30. Now, natural reason itself proves convincingly that such concepts of the government of a State are wholly at variance with the truth. Nature itself bears witness that all power, of every kind, has its origin from God, who is its chief and most august source.

31. The sovereignty of the people, however, and this without any reference to God, is held to reside in the multitude; which is doubtless a doctrine exceedingly well calculated to flatter and to inflame many passions, but which lacks all reasonable proof, and all power of ensuring public safety and preserving order. Indeed, from the prevalence of this teaching, things have come to such a pass that many hold as an axiom of civil jurisprudence that seditions may rightfully be fostered. For the opinion prevails that princes are nothing more than delegates chosen to carry out the will of the people; whence it necessarily follows that all things are as changeable as the will of the people, so that risk of public disturbance is ever hanging over our heads.

To hold, therefore, that there is no difference in matters of religion between forms that are unlike each other, and even contrary to each other, most clearly leads in the end to the rejection of all religion in both theory and practice. And, however it may differ from it in name, this is the same thing as atheism. Men who really believe in the existence of God must, in order to be consistent with themselves and to avoid absurd conclusions, understand that differing modes of divine worship involving dissimilarity and conflict even on most important points cannot all be equally probable, equally good, and equally acceptable to God.

LIBERTAS

On The Nature Of Human Liberty

Encyclical, 20th June 1888

19... [L]et us 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.

20. *But, assuredly, of all the duties which man has to fulfil, that, without doubt, is the chief and 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,"³ 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 consequence of error would be the most terrible loss. 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 towards 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, as 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,

³ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 81, a. 6, Resp.

if they would provide for the good of the community—as they should—with prudence and usefulness. 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...

TAMETSI FUTURA PROSPICIENTIBUS

On Jesus Christ Our Redeemer

Encyclical, 1st November, 1900

...

3. The greatest of all misfortunes is never to have known Jesus Christ... For Christ is the fountainhead of all good. Mankind can no more be saved without His power, than it could be redeemed without His mercy. “Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved” (Acts iv, 12). What kind of life that is from which Jesus Christ, “the power of God and the wisdom of God”, is excluded; what kind of morality and what manner of death are its consequences, can be clearly learnt from the example of nations deprived of the light of Christianity...

The human race, exiled and disinherited, had for ages been daily hurrying into ruin, involved in the terrible and numberless ills brought about by the sin of our first parents, nor was there any human hope of salvation, when Christ Our Lord came down as the Saviour from Heaven... And so, when the fullness of time came, in God’s Divine Providence the only-begotten Son of God became man and on behalf of mankind made most abundant satisfaction in His Blood to the outraged majesty of His Father and by this infinite price He

redeemed man for His own. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver... but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb, unspotted and undefiled" (1 Peter i, 18-19). Thus all men, though already subject to His Kingly power, inasmuch as He is the Creator and Preserver of all, were over and above made His property by a true and real purchase. "You are not your own: for you are bought with a great price" (2 Corinthians vi, 19-20)...

When Jesus Christ had blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, fastening it to the cross, at once God's wrath was appeased, the primeval fetters of slavery were struck off from unhappy and erring man, God's favour was won back, grace restored, the gates of Heaven opened, the right to enter them revived, and the means afforded of doing so. Then man, as though awakening from a long-continued and deadly lethargy, beheld at length the light of the truth, for long ages desired, yet sought in vain.

First of all, he realised that he was born to much higher and more glorious things than the frail and inconstant objects of sense which had hitherto formed the end of his thoughts and cares. He learnt that the meaning of human life, the supreme law, the end of all things was this: that we come from God and must return to Him. From this first principle the consciousness of human dignity was revived: men's hearts realised the universal brotherhood: as a consequence, human rights and duties were either perfected or even newly created, whilst on all sides were evoked virtues undreamt of in pagan philosophy. Thus men's aims, life, habits and customs received a new direction. As the knowledge of the Redeemer spread far and wide and His power, which destroys ignorance and former vices, penetrated into the very life-blood of the nations, such a change came about that the face of the world was entirely altered by the creation of a Christian civilisation...

6. It is surely unnecessary to prove, what experience constantly shows and what each individual feels in himself, even in the very midst of all temporal prosperity—that in God alone can the human will find absolute and perfect peace. God is the only end of man. All our life on earth is the truthful and exact image of a pilgrimage. Now Christ is the "Way", for we can never reach God, the supreme and ultimate good, by this toilsome and doubtful road of mortal life, except with Christ as our leader and guide. How so? Firstly and chiefly by His grace; but this would remain "void" in man if the precepts of His law were neglected. For, as was necessarily the case after Jesus Christ had won our salvation, He left behind Him His Law for the protection and welfare of the human race, under the guidance of which men, converted from evil life, might safely tend towards God. "Going, teach ye all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew xxviii., 19-20). "Keep my commandments" (John xiv, 15).

Hence it will be understood that in the Christian religion the first and most necessary condition is docility to the precepts of Jesus Christ, absolute loyalty of will towards Him as Lord and King. A serious duty, and one which oftentimes calls for strenuous labour, earnest endeavour, and perseverance! For although by Our Redeemer's grace human nature has

been regenerated, still there remains in each individual a certain debility and tendency to evil. Various natural appetites attract man on one side and the other; the allurements of the material world impel his soul to follow after what is pleasant rather than the law of Christ. Still we must strive our best and resist our natural inclinations with all our strength "unto the obedience of Christ". For unless they obey reason they become our masters, and carrying the whole man away from Christ, make him their slave. "Men of corrupt mind, who have made shipwreck of the faith, cannot help being slaves... They are slaves to a threefold concupiscence: of will, of pride, or of outward show"⁴.

In this contest every man must be prepared to undergo hardships and troubles for Christ's sake. It is difficult to reject what so powerfully entices and delights. It is hard and painful to despise the supposed goods of the senses and of fortune for the will and precepts of Christ our Lord. But the Christian is absolutely obliged to be firm, and patient in suffering, if he wish to lead a Christian life. Have we forgotten of what Body and of what Head we are the members? "Having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross," and He bade us deny ourselves. The very dignity of human nature depends upon this disposition of mind. For, as even the ancient Pagan philosophy perceived, to be master of oneself and to make the lower part of the soul obey the superior, so far from being a weakness of will, is a mark of its nobility, in consonance with right reason and most worthy of a man. Moreover, to bear and to suffer is the ordinary condition of man. Man can no more create for himself a life free from suffering and filled with all happiness than he can abrogate the decrees of his Divine Maker, who has willed that the consequences of original sin should be perpetual.

It is reasonable, therefore, not to expect an end to troubles in this world, but rather to steel one's soul to bear them, by which we are taught to look forward with certainty to supreme happiness. Christ has not promised eternal bliss in heaven to riches, nor to a life of ease, to honours or to power, but to longsuffering and to tears, to the love of justice and to cleanness of heart.

7. From this it may clearly be seen what consequences are to be expected from that false pride which, rejecting our Saviour's Kingship, places man at the summit of all things and declares that human nature must rule supreme.

And yet, this supreme rule can neither be attained nor even defined. The rule of Jesus Christ derives its form and its power from Divine Love: a holy and orderly charity is both its foundation and its crown. Its necessary consequences are the strict fulfilment of duty, respect of mutual rights, the estimation of the things of heaven above those of earth, the preference of the love of God to all things. But this supremacy of man, which openly rejects Christ, or at least ignores Him, is entirely founded upon selfishness, knowing neither charity nor selfless devotion. Man may indeed be king—through Jesus Christ—but only on condition that he first of all obey God, and diligently seek his rule of life in God's law.

⁴ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, 37

By the law of Christ we mean not only the natural precepts of morality and the Ancient Law, all of which Jesus Christ has perfected and crowned by His declaration, explanation and sanction; but also the rest of His doctrine and His own particular institutions. Of these the chief is His Church. Indeed whatsoever things Christ has instituted are most fully contained in His Church. Moreover, He willed to perpetuate the office assigned to Him by His Father by means of the ministry of the Church so gloriously founded by Himself. On the one hand He confided to her all the means of men's salvation, on the other He most solemnly commanded men to be subject to her and to obey her diligently, and to follow her even as Himself: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (Luke x, 16). Wherefore the law of Christ must be sought in the Church. Christ is man's "Way"; the Church also is his "Way"—Christ, of Himself and by His very nature; the Church, by His commission and the communication of His power. Hence all who would find salvation apart from the Church, are led astray and strive in vain.

8. *As with individuals, so with nations. These, too, must necessarily tend to ruin if they go astray from "The Way". The Son of God, the Creator and Redeemer of mankind, is King and Lord of the earth, and holds supreme dominion over men, both individually and collectively. "And He gave Him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve Him" (Daniel vii, 14). "I am appointed King by Him... I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psalm ii., 6, 8).*

Therefore the law of Christ ought to prevail in human society and be the guide and teacher of public as well as of private life. Since this is so by divine decree, and no man may with impunity contravene it, it is an evil thing for the common weal wherever Christianity does not hold the place that belongs to it. When Jesus Christ is absent, human reason fails, being bereft of its chief protection and light, and the very end is lost sight of, for which, under God's providence, human society has been constituted. This end is the obtaining by the members of society of natural good through the aid of civil unity, though always in harmony with the perfect and eternal good which is above nature. But when men's minds are clouded, both rulers and ruled go astray, for they have no safe line to follow nor end to aim at...