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The Catholic Roots of the Doctrine of Religious Toleration

By John P. Hittinger

Introduction

Toleration is a watchword in western democracies today. The default position is that any religion, belief, or practice must be accepted and tolerated. Why? Because there is no true religion, no standard for true belief (orthodoxy), or moral norm binding on all. In other words, toleration is based upon relativism. The deeper ideology supporting toleration advocates the creative or expressive character of conscience and the moral powers, dispensing with the requirement of truth or the warning of illusory freedom.¹ One is free to create oneself; authenticity becomes the standard for belief and action. This latter ideology of self-expression pushes the demand for toleration to a further demand for approval or affirmation of the creative or authentic self. As part of this new demand for toleration based upon relativism and self-expression is the celebration of the diversity of creative and authentic choices and life-styles. The final, more sinister and paradoxical step, is the ridicule and suppression (non-toleration) of any one who holds that there is a truth and a moral norm limiting self-expression and conscience. Those categorized as traditional are bound by heteronomy and they are inauthentic. They are dangerous to the society. They can not be tolerated. How are things so upside down? How can toleration become a source of intolerance?

The history of tolerance in the modern world takes definitive shape in Holland during the late 17th century as refugees from France, Poland, and England found there way to that shelter of religious freedom; under their influence, John Locke published his influential Letter on Toleration in 1688.² And it reached a crescendo in Paris during the following century with the works of Bayle and Voltaire, in whom we find a passionate defense of toleration and a bitter de-

¹ See my article "David A. Richards and the Liberalism of the Autonomous Person," in: *Liberalism at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Contemporary Liberal Theory and Its Critics*, edited by John P. Hittinger and Christopher Wolfe (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994).

² See Klibansky's Preface to John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia/A Letter on Toleration*, edited by Raymond Klibansky, translated by J. W. Gough (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. vii-xx.

nunciation of the Catholic Church.³ With the French revolution in 1789 the first signs of the intolerance of liberalism tolerance showed themselves and the long bloody history of modern totalitarianism began to unfold, coming to an end exactly 200 years later in 1989 with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall. Pope John Paul II read in that event the signs of the times pointing to religious freedom, toleration properly understood, as the foundation of the just political order. There is still much to be learned and discussed from the classics written prior to the explosion of liberal intolerance, especially Locke and Voltaire. In the twentieth century the Church has developed a profound argument for tolerance based upon freedom of conscience and the search for God.

In 1921 the Catholic author of *Antimoderne* claimed that Voltaire, despite his vitriolic criticism of the Church, actually served the Church in his bid for toleration.⁴ Voltaire opposed that unjust and implicitly totalitarian principle, *cuis regio eius religio*. Maritain referred the reader to the recently promulgated canon 1351.⁵ Stating a principle he would later develop in his philosophy of history, Maritain argues that history is ambivalent and shows a two-fold contrasting progress of good and evil. We need to acknowledge that good and evil are mixed together in a given historical era. The Catholic thinker should "expose the principle and avow the loss." Or he says, the expansion of history shows that conjoined to evil there are gains and achievements of mankind. Such gains he says are "almost sacred" because of providential order. Toleration is one of those gains he acknowledges even if it comes from the pen of the hated Voltaire. The task of the Catholic thinker, Maritain urged repeatedly, was to extract the truth or the gain of the modern philosophy, while correcting its errors and distortions. He made repeated attempts to do this on the subject of human rights, for example, in *Man and the State*, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*.⁶ Perhaps it is one of the greatest achievements of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II to have placed human rights, properly understood, at the center of the Church's social teaching which serves as an admonition to the modern state. Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*, which opens with a meditation on the events of 1989, claims that toleration is indeed the foundation of a just political order: "... total recognition must be given to *the rights of the human conscience*,

³ Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: "It is scandalous that so much prodding from the de-Christianized world was needed to make the Church realize and recall what belongs to its own nature." *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 145.

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism; Freedom in the Modern World; and a Letter on Independence*, edited by Otto A. Bird. The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain, vol. 11. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), p. 42.

⁵ Can 1351: *Ad amplectendam fidem catholicam nemo invitus cogatur.*

⁶ See John P. Hittinger, *Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Democratic Political Theory* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002).

which is bound only to the truth, both natural and revealed. The recognition of these rights represents the primary foundation of every authentically free political order."⁷ In the span of two hundred years, the Church has come to terms with the movement for toleration. Now it promotes the recognition and the proper understanding of religious freedom. This is for the benefit of the Church and mankind for three reasons: "a) because the old forms of totalitarianism and authoritarianism are not yet completely vanquished; b) because in the developed countries there is sometimes an excessive promotion of purely utilitarian values ... making it difficult to recognize and respect the hierarchy of the true values of human existence; c) because in some countries new forms of religious fundamentalism are emerging which covertly, or even openly, deny to citizens of faiths other than that of the majority the full exercise of their civil and religious rights." (*Centesimus annus*, § 29) Hence, it is axiomatic for Catholic political philosophy to defend this conviction: "No authentic progress is possible without respect for the natural and fundamental right to know the truth and live according to that truth."

In my paper I wish to explore the development of this argument. There will be three parts to the paper. In part I, I wish to explore the Catholic and medieval roots of a doctrine of true tolerance. There are many complex social and historical reasons for the development of this doctrine and the change in Catholic practice which I will leave to political and Church historians. But we can look at the statements on religious freedom by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to see their deep theological and philosophical roots. I find three fundamental ideas: (1) the restlessness of the heart in its search for God deriving from St. Augustine; (2) the binding character of erroneous conscience as taught by Thomas Aquinas et al.; (3) the need for consent in the response of faith, also from Aquinas. In part II, I wish to consider the question of proper terminology especially the distinction between "toleration" of belief and practice, "respect" for conscience, and "endorsement" of achievement. In part III, I wish to critique those faulty accounts of toleration and attempt to articulate the disagreement concerning principles and presuppositions about anthropology and the political order.

⁷ Section 29; see also section 9; see also John Paul II, *Letter to Heads of State* (September 1, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), pp. 1252-1260; *Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace* (January 1, 1988): AAS 80 (1988), pp. 278-286.

Part I: The Roots of Religious Freedom

1. Religious Freedom and the Augustinian Restlessness

John Paul's first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, defined his pontificate. In a major section he discussed human rights and asserted that "Actuation of this right [right to religious freedom] is one of the fundamental tests of man's authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu." (§ 17) Indeed he speaks from historic and personal experience when he says: "... the curtailment of the religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed or of the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have."

John Paul II emphasizes that aspect of conscience characterized by "seeking." The human person must be free to seek the truth and to appropriate it. Without freedom of conscience, one is not able to exercise this deeper part of oneself. One is locked into the formation of childhood or the on-going propaganda of the state. One is pressured by the means of social communication and the advertizing of commercial interests. It is good to recognize the freedom of conscience so that the initiative and spontaneity of the mind, will and heart may press forward to seek the truth.

For in the modern world, the person is denied any such fulfillment according to its ideologies and its dominant practices. Totalitarian ideologies and pressures of conformity in liberal society both lead to an openness to search. Tocqueville said: "It is safe to foresee that trust in common opinion will become a sort of religion, with the majority as its prophet ... and democracy might extinguish that freedom of the mind which a democratic social condition favors. Thus it might happen that, having broken down all of the bonds which classes or men formerly imposed on it, the human spirit might bind itself in tight fetters to the general will of the greatest number." The Church must push back against this closing of the mind. Ironically, the very denials can have the opposite effect - that of stirring up the hunger and longing. Pope John Paul II says in *Redeemer of Man*, the spirit is the answer to the "materialisms" of our age. (§ 18) For it is these "materialisms that give birth to so many forms of insatiability in the human heart." We belong to a "spiritual fatherland" and we are thrown down among the mud and weeds. The "Spirit is the answer to the materialisms of our age."

John Paul finds the Augustinian core of his message here, and he cites him in this section 18: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." And thus John Paul II can turn to the human person and see a "creative restlessness" that "beats and pulsates" with what is most deeply human: "... the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful,

and the voice of conscience." The Church will stimulate and encourage active seeking of the truth and see in the restlessness various signs of the times for which the gospel will be proposed as an answer.

In a way this argument for religious freedom appeals to what is subjective (the native powers of the soul) and to what is inherently skeptical (zetetic). These are the very things which a dogmatic and institutional religion could well find a threat or antithetical to its existence, and the very things championed by Locke and Voltaire. But the danger with such an appeal to the subjective powers and skeptical search arises only if there were no hope in truth or no intuition of the good. It depends upon the presuppositions of a philosophy of man. Intellect and will are fulfilled by knowing the truth and willing the good in love. Contemplation and communion anchor the restless mind and will; thus truth and good exercise their attractive influence on the open search. As Maritain explained the dignity of the person: "A person possesses absolute dignity because he is in direct relationship with the realm of being, truth, goodness, and beauty, and with God, and it is only with these that he can arrive at his complete fulfillment. His spiritual fatherland consists of the entire order of things which have absolute value, and which reflect, in some manner, a divine Absolute superior to the world and which have a power of attraction toward this Absolute."⁸ The depth of subjectivity and the ardor of the search are fulfilled by the wisdom of God and the splendor of truth. In addition, the Church is confident in its message of redemption and the attractiveness of Christ. In other words, the Church has nothing to fear from subjectivity as such, or the skeptical mind, understood as the seeking mind.

The conditions of the modern world actually encourage the cessation of intellectual search and draw the person to life on the surface of life. A rediscovery of the subject and arousal of intellectual curiosity is a good for humanity under these conditions. Scientism, technology, and tyranny may all strip dignity from the human person and shatter the coherence of the world. These modern forms of knowing and ruling deny the subject of knowing and willing and severely limit or restrict the searching. But the restlessness of the mind and heart surges against these structures. Many may exhaust themselves in futile pursuits, and others may despair of ever finding, still Pope John Paul II holds out the promise of redemption through drawing close to Christ. The Church will benefit from freedom of conscience and toleration.

The doctrine of true toleration, based upon respect for the person in his or her free search for truth and understanding of the good in conscience is rooted back in an Augustinian account of the person who seeks the true sanctuary of

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, 1943).

conscience in the vast resources of memory. "But in which part of my memory are present, O Lord? ... What sanctuary have you build there for yourself?" (X. 25)⁹ Augustine's own life and search stand as a model for this explanation of religious freedom. As we discover in his *Confessions*, the intellectual search of Augustine led him through Manichaeism, skepticism, Platonism and eventually to embrace Christianity. The active search for truth led to his embrace of Christ. Hannah Arendt said: "Augustine, the first Christian philosopher and, one is tempted to add, the only philosopher the Romans ever had, was also the first man of thought who turned to religion because of philosophical perplexities." (*Life of the Mind/Willing*, chap. 10) His moral quest led him to discover the distinction between love and lust and the emptiness of worldly ambition. The experience of moral weakness and the phenomenon of "two wills" opened up for him the horizon of grace. The lived experience of this great saint and doctor of grace thrived on keen searching and a penetrating self-reflection. The exploration of memory in Book X culminates in the discovery of the inner sanctuary, the place of encounter with God. The affirmation of the human subject and the protection of the search have become a necessary condition for the discovery of God. Augustine provides the model: "He teaches the person who searches for truth not to despair of finding it. He teaches this by example and by means of his literary activity."¹⁰

2. Rights of Conscience and Aquinas on the Erroneous Conscience

In light of the historic abuses of the power of the modern state, Pope John Paul II defends religious freedom most often on the ground of the rights of conscience.¹¹ The massive scope of the violations of religious freedom by totalitarian regimes have made it critical for the Church to defend itself against these attacks. John Paul says: "In the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, the principle that force predominates over reason was carried to the extreme. Man was compelled to submit to a conception of reality imposed on him by coercion, and not reached by virtue of his own reason and the exercise of his own freedom. This principle must be overturned and total recognition must be given to the rights of the human conscience, which is bound only to the truth, both natural and revealed. The recognition of these rights represents the primary foundation of every authentically free political order." (*Centesimus annus*, § 29) The rights

⁹ "Quale sanctuarium aedificasti tibi?" And in X. 26, "Veritas, ubique praesides omnibus consulentibus te simulque respondens omnibus diversa consulentibus."

¹⁰ See *Augustinum Hipponensem* (Augustine Of Hippo), Apostolic Letter of John Paul II (August 28, 1986), § 4.

¹¹ See James V. Schall, *The Church, the State and Society in the Thought of John Paul II* (Chicago, Ill.: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), chap. 3.

of conscience are essential to human dignity. In freedom a person must act in accord with conscience. Freedom of religion is said to pertain to "the intimate sphere of the spirit" and serve as a "point of reference" and a "measure" for all other fundamental rights.¹² The reason is fundamental and a measure is that religion reflects a decision in conscience. The state can claim authority over conscience, for that is reserved to Truth, to God. So it is freedom of conscience that must be "legally recognized effectively respected in all citizens."

The argument that protection of conscience is protection of religion derives ultimately from the tradition that conscience is the herald of God. In other words, conscience is a means of transcendence. In 1983 Pope John Paul II said: "Moral conscience does not close man within an insurmountable and impenetrable solitude, but opens him to the call, to the voice of God. In this, and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man." (General Audience, 17 August 1983) He repeats this statement in section 58 of *Veritatis splendor*. Conscience is not so much a "process of moral reasoning" or a moral syllogism or self-reflection but primarily a "dialogue of man with God." He reminds us that Saint Bonaventure teaches that "conscience is like God's herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God's authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force." Conscience binds one to act in a way that nothing else can. No person no human law can morally bind one to act. Conscience binds because it refers to a source beyond self.

Newman suggests, for example, that "conscience does not repose on itself, but vaguely reaches forward to something beyond self, and dimly discerns a sanction higher than self for its decisions ... we are accustomed to speak of conscience as a voice ... or the echo of a voice ... like no other dictate in the whole of experience." (*Grammar of Assent*, 107-108) In *Difficulties of Anglicans*, vol. II, he speaks of conscience in more traditional scholastic terms as the "participation of the eternal law by rational creatures." But this notion he says is "founded on the doctrine that conscience is the voice of God." (It is in the Letter to the Duke of Norfolk, see Diff 2:246-249.) This is a different view, he acknowledges, from the modern one, taken from literature or science wherein conscience is "another creation of man." The rule or measure of the modern age is utility (expedience or greatest good for the greatest number) or state convenience or fitness or *pulchrum*. Newman argues that these standards are too abstract or impersonal to account for that "reaching forward" or that sense of apprehension or satisfaction that comes from the "voice of conscience." Indeed,

¹² *World Day of Peace Message*, 1988, § 1.

anticipating John Paul, Newman says conscience is "the aboriginal Vicar of Christ." In 1990 John Paul wrote a letter on Newman. He pointed out the importance of conscience in Newman as a way to acquire truth and to make "contact with the reality of a personal God." This teaching on conscience is lived out his Newman's life: "By following the light of his conscience, Newman made a journey of faith which he has described with force and clarity in his writings." Again, the appeal to right of conscience, rather than collapse under subjectivism or relativism, can lead to the discovery of God and an openness to faith.

The root of this conception of conscience derives from Aquinas' account of the structure of conscience and how it binds. It is seen most strikingly in Aquinas' teaching on the binding of erroneous conscience. To briefly review Aquinas' teaching we turn to *De veritate* q. 17.¹³ Conscience as such is an act that goes with knowledge of something (con-scire). Such a cognitive act either discovers what ought to be done/avoided or judges what has been done as right or wrong. For this act must presuppose a knowledge of good and evil called *synderesis*, and it may also involve wisdom and science. The concrete particular act of the agent as either already performed or proposed for action is thereby judged good or evil. Aquinas says that this judgement is binding on the agent – he "must" act according to conscience. The type of necessity here is of course not like physical necessity but the necessity on the supposition of the end, the end being the desire to be good and avoid evil. Perhaps this feature of conscience has been neglected by the commentators – the supposition of the end implies a fundamental will to do the good. It excludes sloth and other disorders of will which make conscience ineffectual. It is binding because it is known as a precept, i.e., a norm or law higher than oneself, from God. To obey conscience is to obey God. Even an erring conscience must be obeyed, as it appears to be the precept of God. Conscience can err in two ways: it can be wrong about the principle which it applies or it could be wrong about the application to particulars. He gives as an example a heretic who thinks that God prohibits the taking of oaths maintains a "falsehood in the higher part of reason." How is such an act binding? Aquinas says that "binding" is used metaphorically – it is not like the force used to bind a physical agent, as with a rope, but it is a necessity based on supposition of the end of attaining good or avoiding evil. The command of a king is binding through the supposition of an end, in this case the common good of the realm. "Since the knowledge binds only through the power of the precept, and the precept only through the knowledge. Consequently, since con-

¹³ Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Disputatae et Quaestiones Duodecim Quodlibetales*, 5 vols. Editio VII Taurinensis. ed. Taurini (Romae: Marietti, 1942), vol. IV, pp. 57–69; Thomas Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, translated by Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn, and Robert Williams Schmidt, 3 vols. (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1952).

science is nothing else but the application of knowledge to an act, it is obvious that conscience is said to bind by *the power of a divine precept*." Aquinas attributes the binding quality of conscience to the discovery of a divine precept. For one objection states that no one is bound by something except by what is superior: "Although man is not higher than himself, the one whose precept he knows is higher than man. This is how he is bound by his conscience." And also objection one he states: "Man does not make the law for himself, but through the act of his knowledge, by which he knows a law made by someone else, he is bound to fulfill the law." It follows that for one to act contrary to conscience "he has by this very fact decided not to observe the law of God. Consequently, he sins mortally." He adheres to the erroneous conscience "on account of the rectitude he thinks it to have."

Such a conscience binds but it does not excuse; for Aquinas says: "For there was sin in the error itself, since it happened because of ignorance of that which one should have known." And furthermore, the agent is not in a strict dilemma (i.e., must sin either way) because conscience can be changed. Finally, Aquinas teaches that conscience must take precedence over the command of a superior: "... conscience binds only in virtue of a divine command, or in the law inherent in our nature. Therefore, to compare the bond of conscience with the bond resulting from the command of a superior is nothing else than to compare the bond of a divine command with the bond of a superior's command. Consequently, since the bond of a divine command binds against a command of a superior, and is more binding than the command of a superior, the bond of conscience is also greater than that of the command of a superior. And conscience will bind even when there exists a command of a superior to the contrary." Conscience has a sacredness that cannot be subjected to temporal or spiritual power in binding, although both powers can temper the action, the temporal power through force limiting actions that would harm the common good and the spiritual power through persuasion, changing and forming the erring conscience. In the last objections Aquinas replies: "For each is bound to examine his actions according to the knowledge he has from God, whether natural, acquired, or infused." The sources of moral knowledge forming conscience include *synderesis*, philosophical (acquired), and theological (infused).

Pope Benedict also takes up the theme of conscience. He turns to Aquinas and the problem of erring conscience. He understands that conscience is binding precisely because it is the voice of God calling to man. He also points out that the binding quality of erroneous conscience is balanced by the culpability of erroneous conscience.

In 1980 Pope John Paul II sent a personal letter to the heads of state who signed the Helsinki Final Act guaranteeing freedom of religion and conscience. He offers his affirmation and rationale for such an act. He summarizes the main

thrust: "... these international documents reflect an ever growing worldwide conviction resulting from a progressive evolution of the question of human rights in the legal doctrine and public opinion of various countries. Thus today most state constitutions recognize the principle of respect for freedom of conscience and religion in its fundamental formulation as well as the principle of equality among citizens."¹⁴ The starting point for this recognition, he claims, is the dignity of the human person who is free "according to the imperatives of his own conscience." His fuller account runs as follows: "On the basis of his personal convictions, man is led to recognize and follow a religious or metaphysical concept involving his whole life with regard to fundamental choices and attitudes. This inner reflection, even if it does not result in an explicit and positive assertion of faith in God, cannot but be respected in the name of the dignity of each one's conscience, whose hidden searching may not be judged by others." These personal convictions and this inner reflection has a social dimension in so far as one thinks, acts and communicates in relationship with others. The state must therefore respect the conscience and the special formation of religious groups based upon conscience.

Pope John Paul II explains that this position is that of the Catholic Church given most recent expression in Vatican II, but also by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. He provides two summaries with reference to *Dignitatis humanae*:

"In accordance with their dignity, all human beings, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and, therefore, bearing a personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and to direct their whole lives in accordance with its demands." (§ 2)

"The practice of religion by its very nature consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a human being directly sets his course towards God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind. But man's social nature itself requires that he give external expression to his internal acts of religion, that he communicate with others in religious matters and that he profess his religion in community." (§ 3)

On the basis of this understanding of the human person, as seeking truth and the good, and ultimately God, John Paul II elaborates on the manifold and specific juridical protections that must be afforded to religion and religious communities. These include freedom to join a religious association, freedom to pray and worship, freedom for families to educate their children in religious convictions and to build schools, freedom from coercion to perform acts contrary to one's faith; it also includes corporate rights for associations to govern them-

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, *The Freedom of Conscience and of Religion*, September 1, 1980 (Personal letter to heads of state of the nations who signed the Helsinki Final Act [1975] on the eve of the Madrid Conference on European Security and Cooperation), § 2.

selves, to exercise ministry, to educate ministers, to publish books, use means of social communication, and to carry out educational, charitable and social activities (see § 4).

The right to religious freedom, grounded in the right of conscience, is the most fundamental argument for human rights. Not only does it establish the foundation for them, it provides the proper orientation for all of them, insofar as conscience carries with it the orientation towards a higher law and the discover of God. In the letter to heads of state John Paul said: "Freedom of conscience and of religion is a primary and inalienable right of the human person; what is more, insofar as it touches the innermost sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it upholds the justification, deeply rooted in each individual, of all other liberties." (§ 5) And in *Centesimus annus* he said: "The apex of development is the exercise of the right and duty to seek God, to know him and to live in accordance with that knowledge." Moreover: "The recognition of these rights represents the primary foundation of every authentically free political order." (§ 29) The teaching of Thomas Aquinas on conscience has served a rich source for a persuasive teaching on religious freedom and true tolerance.

3. Institutional Self-limitation and the Consent of Faith

The third line of argument for religious freedom put forward by Pope John Paul II relies upon the role of consent in the acceptance of faith. This serves a reminder to both Church and state as to the limits of its own power, as well as the distinction between temporal and spiritual authority. This is also the main line of defense of religious freedom and toleration put forward by Locke in his *Treatise on Toleration*.

The core of Locke's argument is that the state exists to preserve civil goods, i.e. life, liberty, health and property. The magistrate has no concern with the care of souls for three reasons: it was not committed to him by God; force cannot convince men's minds; and different countries profess different religions.¹⁵ The third reason is problematic, but the first two are quite germane. The distinction between Church and state based upon two different authorities granted by God is a long standing account of Church and state, but by no means the only one. And there are various ways to relate the two institutions and authorities such that temporal means could be used for spiritual ends. But it is the first reason that stands most firmly in favor of religious freedom. And it is a reason affirmed in the Catholic tradition: Faith must be an assent to revealed truth based on a freely formed will.

¹⁵ John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia/A Letter on Toleration*.

The recognition that consent is essential to faith leads to institutional self-limitation in Aquinas. The forced baptism of children of Jewish families is a disorder and not right; Thomas argued that it was never permissible to do so (S. Th. 2a2ae, 10.12; cf. 3a 68.10).¹⁶ Unbelievers should not be forced to accept the faith. This is because faith must be a free act; in fact, without an interior response to revelation there is no true act of faith. Forced conversion is understood to be a contradiction in terms. Therefore, it would be wrong to force the faith upon pagans or Jews (S. Th. 2a2ae 10.8; cf. 3a 68.10). This principle of consent in faith leads to these clear cases of self-limitation. Yet Thomas does argue for the use of force against heretics and schismatics. Faith is a matter requiring free response, even for a heretic to return. Why did it not also lead to the rejection of force for heretics and schismatics is a topic I shall leave to others.¹⁷ Clearly there were certain presuppositions about the unity of the temporal order deriving from unity of faith and the danger of heretical dissent or schism in a culture of public faith and uniform creed. But in a different condition of pluralism of belief, a rational or historic basis for political unity, and a dedication to liberty – such a procedure of reclamation or protection is irrational.

A similar issue remains for Aquinas on the issue of the toleration of the rites of unbelievers. He clearly recognizes strong prudential reasons for toleration. If it leads to some greater good or prevents some greater evil then toleration is recommended. Civil unrest is an obvious reason to tolerate; but so is the idea that intolerance leaves people embittered and scandalized, so toleration leaves them better disposed to receive the true faith.

But the main line of argument concerning the lack of competence of the state to regulate matters of religion, qua religious, sustains the argument in favor of toleration. Combined with the argument from conscience, and the sociality of religious impulse, would also establish toleration as the just mode of action. Thus in his world day of peace message, 1988, Pope John Paul II uses the argument from the lack of competence on the part of the state: "The State cannot claim authority, direct or indirect, over a person's religious convictions. It cannot arrogate to itself the right to impose or to impede the profession or public practice of religion by a person or a community. In this matter, it is the duty of

¹⁶ A helpful summary of the texts and their application to religious freedom, see Eric D'Arcy, "Freedom of Religion," in: Catholic University of America, *New Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Teachings, History, Organization, and Activities of the Catholic Church and on All Institutions, Religions, Philosophies, and Scientific and Cultural Developments Affecting the Catholic Church from Its Beginning to the Present*, 18 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. VI, pp. 109–114.

¹⁷ Jacques Maritain, *On the Church of Christ* (Notre Dame Press, 1974) contains a very discussion of the inquisition; see also his *Man and the State*, chapter on Church and State.

civil authorities to ensure that the rights of individuals and communities are equally respected, and at the same time it is their duty to safeguard proper public order." But the most basic issue is conscience – the state may not substitute for the conscience of the citizens, nor remove the right of religious associations (§ 1).

Three major arguments for toleration find their roots in Catholic tradition. For various reasons of history and culture, Catholics in the 17th and 18th centuries did not see clearly the lines of development for a strong affirmation of toleration and religious freedom. That task was left to men who were at odds with the Catholic Church such as John Locke and Voltaire. And they couched their arguments in many elaborate fictions and falsehoods; and their principles could be extrapolated to the forms of subjectivism and relativism that tarnish the landscape of rights today.¹⁸ But the three arguments expounded above using the philosophy of the Catholic tradition provide a clear defense for freedom and set a balance and limit to that freedom. The Augustinian argument of Pope John Paul II clearly responds to the argument from skepticism put forward by Voltaire. The Thomistic argument from conscience fills in the original argument made by the free and dissenting churches in England and Holland. And the self-limitation of the Church based upon the respect for freedom of the faith response provides a basis for the Lockean argument concerning the separation of Church and state.

Part II: An Analysis of Terms

In order to use these arguments for religious freedom, we need to define the vocabulary and phrases we use to describe our position and to clarify the problems with the extreme arguments used to defend toleration. What follows is an effort to make the refine terms. I would like to distinguish three terms, looking at the verb form: to tolerate, to respect, and to endorse. I shall use the Oxford English Dictionary and elaborate upon each one.

[1] *To tolerate*: to allow to exist or to be done or practiced without authoritative interference or molestation; the term derives from the latin "to endure, or to bear"; to bear without repugnance; to allow intellectually, or in taste, sentiment, or principle; to put up with. OED

Toleration: The action or practice of tolerating or allowing what is not actually approved; forbearance, sufferance. Or Allowance (with or without limitations), by the ruling power, of the exercise of religion otherwise than in the form officially established or recognized.

¹⁸ See John P. Hittinger, "Three Philosophies of Human Rights," in: *Liberty, Wisdom and Grace*.

To tolerate is to "allow or permit" an action or a belief as expressed. It entails non-interference with the action of another. Although such allowance is said to be "without repugnance" it does suggest disagreement or disapproval. G. J. Dalcourt rightly points out that tolerance means "allowing, without intending either to approve or encourage, what one holds to be an evil or a questionable good."¹⁹ For what is tolerated is an error or a bad practice or habit. That is, one tolerates an evil, or a deficiency on the part of another human being. As we will see below, we respect the person, but tolerate the deficiency. Tolerance is different from Indifference or suspension of judgment. But the source of tolerance is the conviction that human beings as fallen and unformed have a radical instability. We are born in ignorance and in weakness. So a human being can be sinking downward towards inveterate error and or vicious behavior or moving upwards towards the true and good. Respect requires that we see some measure or at least remaining capacity for regeneration and education. But in addition to personal weaknesses, there are powerful cultural and political forces that prevent the ascent. So toleration has its limits when it comes to the depth of personal self-destruction and social disorder.

[2] *To respect*: To give consideration to, take into account; to show discrimination or favor in regard to. Chiefly in negative contexts *to respect no person*. In favorable sense: to treat or regard with deference, esteem, or honor; to feel or show respect for.

To uphold, maintain, refrain from violating (a right, privilege, law, decision, etc.). Also: to refrain from harassing or obstructing (a person); to treat with consideration in regard to a particular course of action, function, etc.

To respect is to go beyond mere toleration to regard something in a positive way, at the same including the non-interference of tolerance. One would take into consideration or take into account someone or something because its has a positive value or status. Toleration has a more shifting border it seems to me, insofar as the degree of tolerance may change depending upon how much the deficiency or evil has a social impact, whereas "respect" has a greater firmness or solidity in its regard for the habit, action or opinion of another as something positive. There is also the curious use of the negative context, to respect no person, which in fact means that one gives no special regard to one, but rather respect all alike. It is an indirect way of stating a positive regard for all, for example in fair treatment or counting one in the solution.

Because to respect is not the same as to endorse or to approve there is a tension in the notion of respect. One can say that one respects a person's right but not agree that the achievement is good, or the opinion true. Respect is primarily aimed at the person, and the person as possessing a certain power or capacity

¹⁹ "Tolerance," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, p. 192.

which is being used in freedom and spontaneity. Conscience is an action, not a capacity, but it draws upon the deeper personal powers of intellect and will. It is the spiritual capacity of the human person that affords our fundamental respect.

[3] *To endorse*: To write on the back of (a document); to inscribe (words) *on* (the back of) a document. In general sense: e.g. to inscribe (a document) on the back *with* words indicating the nature of its contents, one's opinion of its value, some extension or limitation of its provisions, etc; *fig.* To confirm, sanction, countenance, or vouch for (statements, opinions, acts, etc.; occasionally, persons), as by an endorsement; To declare one's approval of, (a person or thing).

To endorse goes further than respect because it ends in outright approval. That is, respect does not necessarily entail agreement with the habit, opinion or action; but to endorse an opinion or action is to register one's agreement or to judge that there is something right, true or good about it. It means that one is ready to promote or at least encourage the development of the habit, opinion or action. One who endorses something is offering an implicit praise of the person and his or her achievement. The basis for this attitude of endorsement is the richness or plentitude of the true and the good. There is a true or authentic pluralism in the embodiment or expression of the transcendental values of being. One would be willing to cooperate with the person and project insofar as its harmonious with one's own, which it very likely is in some respect. A special issue in the relationship of endorsement would be how can one assist the other in refinement of their insight, strengthen their habit, or develop their gift. There is the dilemma of the erring conscience.

I would like to summarize the ideas about each with the following chart:

Term	Meaning	Basis	P/B	Action	Special issue
Tolerate	Allow	Deficiency: Sin, weakness, error, failure	Blame	Limit by external impact	Educable or Non-educable Closed in, ideological, blind, failure
Respect	Equal Regard	Positive capacity	Affirmative of the person	Dialogue, challenge	Dilemma of erring conscience
Endorse	Promote	Richness or plentitude	Praise	Cooperation	Refine, strengthen, develop

I would like to examine some comments made by Cardinal Manning concerning toleration and suggest that we need to refashion of our terms along a

more nuanced line. This passage is cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as an example of the use of the term "toleration."

Edward Henry Manning in *The internal mission of the Holy Ghost* wrote:

Everyone who has in him the gift of piety has also an instinctive hatred of heresy. The instinct which detests and recoils from heresy is part of the gift of piety, because piety loves the revealed truth of Jesus Christ. We are thought to be intolerant and bigoted, because we will keep no peace with heresy. But how can any man love Jesus Christ, and not love every jot and tittle of His truth? And if we love his truth, that which contradicts it must be hateful, for it contradicts himself. And therefore, though we are to be tolerant towards the person of the heretics, we are intolerant of the heresies themselves. There is no degree of aversion with which we may lawfully look upon conscious contradiction of divine truth. There is this distinction between the heretic and the heresy. The heresy we may deal with at once, with all preemptory severity; the heretic we leave to the judgment of God and the Church. We are not the judges of his guilt, because we cannot read the heart. (page 183)

I would suggest that the more felicitous expression would be that we respect the person of the heretic, especially in his capacity for reflective conscience and pursuit of the truth, and because we respect the person of the heretic we tolerate their opinions and actions though they be in error or wrong. We hate the heresy – that Manning has right. But toleration is consistent, I think, with rejecting or even hating the opinion or having strong disapproval of the action or habit.

We must also understand what is the political context for his statement, and for our statements today. If Cardinal Manning was talking about the Catholic polity not tolerating the protestant religion then we have a different assumption about the manner of the distinction between Church and state. As Maritain argues, new conditions call for an analogous application of the abiding principles.

But Cardinal Manning may also be talking about the attitude of the Catholic community towards those members of divided religious communities, and by extension to non-religious communities.

But we can also acknowledge that within the heresy, as developed over time, in a community and within the individual, elements of truth and holiness emerge because the heresy does not necessarily extinguish all truth and impulse towards the good. (See *Lumen gentium*) Nature continues to operate as does the fragmentary tradition that survives over time in the community. So in addition to respecting the person, in conscience, one could further endorse those elements of the rival tradition that cohere with the truth and goodness of things.

Our tentative summary on terms is this:

As a political community, that is, as a modern democratic political society, our fundamental principles is respect for freedom of conscience, properly understood as the striving of the intellectual creature to know, love and honor God the almighty. Because of human weakness, historic divisions and disagree-

ments, and because of the complexity of the issues, there will be a large variety of opinion and practice in this area. The political society respects the freedom of individuals in communities to pursue this good. Indeed, it facilitates its development. But it must also judge the impact upon the temporal and political common good and judge that some opinions and practices may be harmful to individuals or even the community at large, and it can tolerate them to the greatest degree possible without grievous injury to the common welfare. Further, the historic people will often work out terms of compromise and agreement about fundamental principles of its constitutional order and this may include affirmation of transcendent principle, especially as confirmed by reason in rational theology and natural law. But even here it can tolerate wide dissent from these principles.

A religious community, on the other hand, as existing in a political community can take the attitude of toleration for a large amount of error and bad habit and practice; it will work with political system to limit the damage, and seek to use the means of persuasion and witness above all. Asking for freedom above all, it will recognize the equal freedom to others. It will show its respect for the person of others through this toleration and also through efforts at dialogue and clarification. But it will not tolerate the error in a passive way of indifference. Dialogue requires a stand for truth and zeal for the good of truth.²⁰ It will also seek to cooperate with all men and women of good will and from diverse religious backgrounds for common affirmation and action concerning the dignity of the human person, the justice of society, and proper honor to the divine being.

Our central focus or emphasis should be upon respect for conscience and freedom of religion. Such respect for conscience will inevitably be surrounded by tolerance and endorsement. Tolerance when the pursuit of conscience fails or comes to a halt, issuing in a predominance of error or immoral behavior and bad habits. There is a limit to such tolerance based upon impact upon the common good. Catholics can advocate tolerance but also seek to protect the common good. Or the free pursuit of conscience can be led upwards to achievements in truth, culture, and religion in which case Catholics can endorse such achievements and seek to assist in further developments or refinements.

²⁰ See John Henry Newman, "Tolerance of Religious Error," and "Christian Zeal," in: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 2.

Part III: Faulty Approaches and their Philosophical Presuppositions²¹

The Catholic position on religious freedom and respect for conscience is a balanced teaching. It is easy to select one aspect and develop a distorted view of the matter. Here are some of the faulty views.

1. Relativism as a Defense of Religious Freedom

After having lived through and witnessed totalitarian oppression and the fall of the Soviet Union, Pope John Paul II strongly affirms the value of political democracy. Democracy “ensures the participation of citizens” and holds the governed accountable, and formalizes peaceful means of transition (*Centesimus annus*, § 46). He is following the account of political life provided by *Gaudium et spes*, and argued by various Catholic political philosophers like Jacques Maritain and Yves R. Simon.²² Precisely because human freedom and dignity are protected in the democratic form of government, he points out the fatal mistake that is being made to defend democracy on spurious grounds – “Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life” (*Centesimus annus*, § 46). People convinced of the truth are deemed unreliable, or worse, fanatical. But John Paul cautions that without a true standard, ideas can be easily manipulated and yield back to totalitarian rule. He agrees that fanaticism is unbecoming for a democratic citizen, but this danger stems from an ideological cast of mind, in fact an unwillingness to face the truth, not from a conviction concerning the truth of human dignity.

In writing the *Gospel of Life*, John Paul II calls this attempt to use relativism a “sinister” approach that opens up justification for the killing of the weak. Behind the attacks on life and the changing of a crime to a right, lies a cultural crisis “which generates skepticism in relation to the very foundation of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, and the meaning of his rights and duties” (*Evangelium vitae*, § 11). And indeed we often hear as a justification of liberal abortion law the notion that no one can know when life begins, or that there are so many different opinions about it, none can be correct, or some more correct than others.

²¹ See my chapter on Maritain on Church and State in *Liberty, Wisdom and Grace*.

²² I have learned much from my brother, Russell Hittinger, “The Problem of the State in *Centesimus Annus*,” *Fordham International Law Review* 15, no. 4 (1991), pp. 952–996; “Making Sense of the Civilization of Love: John Paul II’s Contribution to Catholic Social Thought,” in: *The Legacy of Pope John Paul II*, edited by Geoffrey Gneuchs (New York: Herder and Herder, 2000), pp. 29–42.

All opinion is private opinion and cannot stand forth as true. We have despaired of reason itself. The inner coherence of Catholic witness will match the “parrhesia of faith” [candid or forthright speech] with the boldness of reason (*Fides et ratio*, § 48).

Relativism is seen to be a way to bolster tolerance, peace, and civility. Readily admitting that crimes are committed in the name of truth, John Paul II says that “equally grave crimes and radical denials of freedom have also been committed and are still being committed in the name of ‘ethical relativism’” (*Evangelium vitae*, § 70). So relativism is no guarantee of tolerance.²³ The true basis for tolerance is precisely the dignity of the person, a truth that we must embrace. Jacques Maritain points out that the mistaken appeal to relativism as a defense of toleration fails to distinguish the subject or person who deserves our respect and the opinion they hold, which may be in error. Democracy “stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes.” It is a true crisis of democracy if it cannot give an account of or defend the values we seek to live and promote.

The appeal to relativism ultimately neglects the very sign of human dignity, the presence of moral conscience. St. Thomas More is a witness to the “inalienable dignity of conscience.” Pope John Paul II points to the great passage of *Gaudium et spes* on conscience: The intimate center and sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God (§ 16). But conscience thrives on truth, only makes sense on the basis of the power to seek truth and to live by truth. In fact, we say of Thomas More that he bore witness to the “primacy of truth over power.” Relativism would subvert the very basis for human dignity and the rationale for democracy.

2. Toleration as the Separation of Politics from Morality

The second type of distortion seeks to privatize religion so that it has no impact upon social or public matters. Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “For Catholic moral doctrine, the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church – but not from that of morality – is a value that has been attained and recognized by the Catholic Church and belongs to inheritance of contemporary civilization.”²⁴ Note that he says in summary fashion that “the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere” is a value attained and recog-

²³ See Jacques Maritain, “Truth and Human Fellowship,” in: *On the Use of Philosophy* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), pp. 16–43.

²⁴ “Doctrinal Note On Some Questions Regarding The Participation Of Catholics In Political Life” – Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 24, 2002, Feast Day of Christ the King, § 6.

nized by the Catholic Church. Prior to Vatican II it had not been decisively attained nor fully recognized. But the achievement is the fruition of centuries of development in Catholic doctrine and papal social teaching and the outcome of the important work of the prior fifty years in Catholic political thought by such thinkers as Maritain, Simon, Rommen, Sturzo, Murray and many others.²⁵ Thus, it consolidates these gains and makes them available to Catholics as they face new conditions and circumstances in the modern world. While the "Doctrinal Note" was issued to confront explicitly the widespread error of a liberal denial of morality in the political realm, its broad purpose is to encourage meaningful participation in the political sphere.

What called forth the Ratzinger intervention and how are we to understand it? The obvious reason is that Catholics have failed to understand or to implement the role of conscience in political life. Catholic citizens and politicians have become assimilated to and absorbed by the dominant liberal ideology. The confusion stems from the false understanding of autonomy already identified in *Gaudium et spes* (§ 36). Religious freedom, in the form of a separation of Church and state does not entail the separation of morality and state. Indeed, the very foundation of the modern state and its legitimacy to protect the rights of the person rest upon morality. The document points out the hostile and "disingenuous" use of the rhetoric of toleration which seeks to ban Christian conviction or even moral conviction from having an impact on public reason and public action. But conscience is the deep structure of the human person that touches on what pertains to God and divine law. The appeal to conscience is not an act of sectarian or confessional politics because conscience has a source in rational moral law and deliberation.

Catholics for their part must understand the realm for autonomy and legitimate freedom of opinion concerns for the most part the question of means and technical solutions to the end of human flourishing. Ratzinger acknowledges that there can exist a plurality of parties and opinions based on the development of different strategies for achieving our goals, even from a range of interpretation of the fundamental principles, and of course a pluralism deriving from different technical solutions to a given set of problems. But he says that one cannot compromise the fundamental dignity of the person. This not only threatens the foundation of free government and democratic regimes, but it also jeopardizes the integrity and unity of Catholic life. It is the failure to understand the fundamental challenge of Vatican II and the unity of life. To compromise on such ba-

²⁵ See John P. Hittinger, "Jacques Maritain and Yves R. Simon's Use of Thomas Aquinas in Their Justification of Democracy," in: *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, edited by David Gallagher (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), pp. 149-172; John P. Hittinger, *Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Modern Democratic Theory* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002).

sic principles would threaten the witness of faith and the "unity and interior coherence" of faith. In other words, Catholics are living a lie when they profess the faith on Sunday and act in direct opposition to it in the political arena.

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called "secular" life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility – as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture – are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity" (*Christifideles Laici*, § 59).

The deepest appeal made in this doctrinal note is that of understanding political action as form of Christian witness and a way of living that is coherent. So in a way, we must say that political success is not the primary issue here at all; the failure of Catholic political action is a failure of personal integrity and a failure to show forth the faith. Invoking Thomas More at the outset of the document, Ratzinger clearly means to convey the notion that unity of life and witness to faith are the primary values at stake in political action.

3. The Separation of Man from God

"Homo a Deo seiungi non potest nec res politica a re morali." "Man cannot be separated from God, nor should politics be separated from morality." Pope John Paul II refers to the "Promethean attitude" that emerges in such arguments, an attitude which leads people "to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands" (*Evangelium vitae*, § 15). The quest for mastery of nature and autonomy of life are baffled by the presence of suffering. The mystery of suffering defies a rationalistic understanding, and there is an attempt to "resolve it" by eliminating at the root. To resolve it at the root is not only the practice of "mercy killing", euthanasia, but also the justification of man's ultimate authority and control of the mystery of life and death. Religion is a rival to the humanistic ideology which justifies these acts of killing. Thus, hostility towards religion, secularism, is the deepest source for the culture of death:

In seeking the deepest roots of the struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death", we cannot restrict ourselves to the perverse idea of freedom mentioned above. We have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, typical of a social and cultural climate

dominated by secularism, which, with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test. Those who allow themselves to be influenced by this climate easily fall into a sad vicious circle: when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity and his life; in turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity, produces a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence. (*Evangelium vitae*, § 21)

In another document Pope John Paul II defines secularism as follows: "... a movement of ideas and behavior which advocates a humanism totally without God, completely centered upon the cult of action and production and caught up in the heady enthusiasm of consumerism and pleasure seeking, unconcerned with the danger of 'losing one's soul.'"²⁶ The development of a Christian humanism for the modern world, as an alternative to the secular humanism of the intellectuals and the totalitarian movements characterized the work of many great Catholic thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, Henri de Lubac, Christopher Dawson, Aurel Kolnai, Romano Guardini and others prior to Second Vatican Council. Maritain's work has influenced the writings of both Pope Paul VI and John Paul II. *Gaudium et spes* shows their mark. Pope Paul VI cites both Maritain and de Lubac in *Populorum progressio*. Maritain insisted that we must face the difference between two philosophies of rights which must be traced back to fundamental differences in philosophy of God. He distinguishes the underlying philosophies as anthropocentric humanism and theocentric humanism: "The first kind of humanism recognizes that God is the center of man; it implies the Christian conception of man, sinner and redeemed, and the Christian conception of grace and freedom. The second kind of humanism believes that man himself is the center of man and implies a naturalistic conception of man and of freedom."²⁷ According to the philosophy of theocentric humanism, human rights rest upon a natural and divine order, according to which human beings possess a dignity in virtue of their nature and destiny as creatures before God. The rights are limited in scope and are designed to assist the person in attaining their full stature as human beings. According to anthropocentric humanism, rights are based upon "the claim that man is subject to no law other than that of his will and freedom" and as a result have become "infinite, escaping every objective measure, denying every limitation imposed upon the claims of the ego." The one notion of rights derives more from Hobbes; the other, from Thomas Aquinas. "Anthropocentric humanism," or what we now call "secular humanism." This is a humanism which defines man by excluding all reference to the transcendent and divine. Human happiness is to

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*), December 2, 1984, § 18.

²⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 27-30; *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Press, 1952) chapters 7, 8, 14.

be found in this world alone. Anthropocentric humanism grounds the modern project to master nature; its aim is "to be lord of exterior nature and to reign over it by means of technological procedures [and] ... to create ... a material world where man will find, following Descartes' promises, a perfect felicity." Bourgeois life is a "cult of earthly enrichment"; economic life absorbs every other field of activity. By excluding the eternal and spiritual values, the citizens have only material goods for private consumption and no basis for a common good. By excluding a transcendent measure for human action, libertarianism and mere mutually-agreed-to restrictions on liberty obtain. And the cult of earthly enrichment, the lust for profit, leads to exploitation of the worker. Ecularism becomes a new religion tolerating no other rival to its understanding of life.

The challenge of secularism is central to the understanding of the Church in the Modern World. The Catholic today must understand the benefits of modern society, the dignity and "autonomy" of various fields of action and production. Our critique must be properly placed, against secularism, not secularity, against the closure to transcendence and not the affirmation of the value of temporal affairs. Alberto Ferre explained the challenge very well. He said that the attitude of Vatican II means that the Church "fully accepts the rightful demands of the Enlightenment."²⁸ The two positive values of the Enlightenment are based upon two protests: "The secular, lay protest at being absorbed into the religious sphere ... since religion denied the secular sphere its own independence and logic." Secondly, it was "a protest against an 'other-worldly' type of spirituality" which would undervalue the things of the earth. The extreme form of the protest led to secularism, "the removal of everything religious from earthly life." It was a separation of heaven from, of man from God, in the name of man and the earth. But Ferre explains that the council put forward a theological basis for human development which does not deny the autonomy of the secular sphere. The very passage cited by John Paul II concerning the loss of the creature distinguishes a proper and improper meaning of autonomy:

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. (*Gaudium et spes*, § 36; cf. § 43 and *Lumen gentium*, § 33)

²⁸ Alberto Methol Ferre, "Puebla: The Evangelization of Culture," *The Laity Today*, number 28, 1982, pp. 60-77.

It is a false autonomy which seeks to cut off the intrinsic reference to God as the very origin of life and being and which denies the intrinsic orientation of creation to the creator.

Conclusion

I have attempted to sketch out the main arguments for religious freedom and toleration, clarify the terminology we use to express this, and to respond to some of the faulty conceptions of toleration which lead to a subversion of religion and the public good. These fundamental concepts provide the true account of tolerance and religious freedom: the human person possesses dignity because of the spiritual powers of intellect and will; conscience is the sanctuary of man's encounter with God, and as such is binding even on an erroneous judgment; the concept of faith excludes the use of coercion or force for authentic response of faith to revelation. With these basic concepts we can refine our terms concerning toleration, freedom, and rights. It is important that the modern accounts of freedom and conscience be criticized for sundering conscience from truth, encouraging a debilitating skepticism, and imposing a deadening uniformity and lack of toleration for religion.

Summary

I sketch out the main arguments for religious freedom and toleration, clarify the terminology we use to express this, and to respond to some of the faulty conceptions of toleration which lead to a subversion of religion and the public good. These fundamental concepts provide the true account of tolerance and religious freedom: the human person possesses dignity because of the spiritual powers of intellect and will; conscience is the sanctuary of man's encounter with God, and as such is binding even on an erroneous judgment; the concept of faith excludes the use of coercion or force for authentic response of faith to revelation. With these basic concepts we can refine our terms concerning toleration, freedom, and rights. It is important that the modern accounts of freedom and conscience be criticized for sundering conscience from truth, encouraging a debilitating skepticism, and imposing a deadening uniformity and lack of toleration for religion.

Zusammenfassung

Ich befasse mich mit den Kernargumenten für die Religionsfreiheit und die Toleranz, mit der Klärung der Terminologie, die uns zur Verfügung steht, und mit einigen falschen Vorstellungen über die Toleranz, die die Religion und das Gemeinwohl untergraben. Grundlegend für die Erkenntnis der Toleranz und der Religionsfreiheit sind: Die menschliche Person besitzt Würde, weil sie mit Verstand und freiem Willen ausgestattet ist; das Gewissen ist das Heiligum, in dem der Mensch Gott begegnet, weshalb es den

Menschen bindet, selbst dann wenn ein Fehlurteil vorliegt; der Glaube ist unvereinbar mit Zwang und Gewalt, um eine authentische Antwort auf die Offenbarung zu geben. Dies sind die Grunderkenntnisse, die uns befähigen, die Toleranz, die Freiheit und die Grundrechte richtig zu verstehen. Es ist notwendig, die modernen Vorstellungen über Freiheit und Gewissen der Kritik zu unterziehen, wenn sie das Gewissen von der Wahrheit trennen und dadurch einen Skeptizismus fördern und eine tödliche Uniformität sowie einen Mangel an Toleranz gegenüber der Religion heraufbeschwören.

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Toleranz und Menschenwürde

Tolerance and Human Dignity

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