

David L. Schindler, Nicholas J. Healy Jr.
*Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity:
The Second Vatican Council's Declaration
on Religious Freedom*, 491 pp.
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This important new book by two professors on the faculty of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America, is inspired by these words of Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*: “For this reason the Church in our time attaches great importance to all that is stated by the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration on Religious Freedom, both the first and the second part of the document. We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation” (§12). In his insistence on carefully reading together the first and second part of the controversial document, John Paul II took a stand against the one sided individualistic and voluntaristic notion of rights championed by most political philosophies in the west. To each right there corresponds a duty and a background notion of the common good and a standard for human flourishing. The obligation imposed by God entails a respect for the right of others because the proclamation of the Gospel embodies “a deep esteem for man, for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom.” But more importantly, the right to religious freedom presupposes an obligation on the part of its possessor to search for the truth and to live by the truth when found. That of course is the main idea of part two of *Dignitatis Humanae*. Guided by Wojtyła’s more balanced and dialectical account of freedom and truth, the authors draw out the fundamental differences between a more juridical account of religious freedom,

as represented by John Courtney Murray, and the ontological account as taught by Wojtyla, DeLubac and others.

The book has five parts. In the first part, a new English translation of the Declaration on Religious Freedom is set along side the Latin text. It is important to understand the English translation precisely because Fr. Murray and the American experience of religious freedom have held such significance for the Church and the world. The new translation better captures the nuances and interconnections between freedom and truth and the dependence of the juridical aspects of the teaching upon the ontological teaching about human being and its intrinsic ordering to the truth about God through reason and revelation.

The second part contains the core of the book in the form of a one hundred and seventy page essay by David L. Schindler entitled "Freedom, Truth and Human Dignity: An Interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right to Religious Freedom." He offers a fresh comprehensive interpretation of the right to religious freedom. Schindler compares and contrasts the account provided by John C. Murray and that of Karol Wojtyla and Henri DeLubac. The emphasis of the latter view points to the intrinsic connection and inseparability of freedom and truth. Truth must be received and embraced in and through the freedom of the human person, and freedom itself must be established in truth and finds its fulfillment in the truth of human nature and ultimately in the truth about God. Drawing upon the work of Servais Pinckaers, O.P.—the distinction between "freedom of indifference" and "freedom of excellence"—Schindler argues that Murray's juridical account of religious freedom overemphasizes the freedom of indifference. The right to religious freedom for Murray has primarily a negative or abstract content, providing an "immunity from coercion" and a neutral public square. His account, despite his protests to contrary, inevitably falls prey to relativism and an oppressive treatment of true religious pluralism spawned by a monistic secularism. His articles of peace in fact have failed to establish a true or just peace among citizens when it comes to religious freedom. On the other hand, as Wojtyla well understood, religious freedom has primarily a positive content. The right to religious freedom takes its meaning from the human person's natural desire to seek the truth, especially religious truth. Thus by finding the essential interconnection between freedom and truth, Schindler explains how this teaching represents a genuine development in the Catholic Church's teaching on religious freedom insofar as it brings together both the importance of truth and the concomitant importance of freedom. The two should not be set in opposition to one another as is done by the liberals on one side and the integralists on the other. Christendom is a thing of the past, for sure, but the new secular order must be transformed from within by the appeal to the spirit and truth. The Church influences the temporal order through the formation of the laity by way of conscience and liturgical life. The proper secularity of the laity must be always combined with the newness of life brought about by baptism

and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Schindler wisely concludes with these words: “The Church’s embrace of rights, in a word, can be properly understood only when tied to, and situated within, her comprehensive Christological and anthropological mission to the contemporary world: within the call to form a civilization of love open finally to the God revealed in Jesus Christ” (p. 161).

Part three consists of an essay by Nicholas J. Healy on the process of the drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae* and in part four all five conciliar schemas are presented with new English translation set side by side with the Latin text. The fifth part lies out the final text with schema three in order to emphasize the decisive and key modifications to the text. In these parts of the book the reader may discover the evidence for the developmental influence of the position argued by Schindler on the final draft. Healy establishes a redaction history, “The Drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae*,” and thereby provides “a brief overview of each successive draft, and to call attention to the some of the important changes introduced into the final text” (p. 213). Through his study of conciliar histories, journals, and documents, Healy shows how the developments of the document on issues like the relation of Church and state or the limits of religious liberty arose out of a discussion, led in part by Wojtyla and supported by Pope Paul VI, for a more adequate anthropological grounding of religious freedom. In this way, a true development of doctrine was able to unfold and true dynamic balance was found for the subjective and objective aspects of the right of religious freedom.

In the two appendices are contained conciliar interventions, in Latin and English, of Karol Wojtyla and Alfred Ancel, Titular Bishop of Myrina, Auxiliary Bishop of Lyon. Ancel’s brief intervention was decisive in bringing the principle for a true balance in the teaching; he said “the obligation to seek the truth is itself the ontological foundation of religious freedom.” His terse statement provided the key to the problem: “Not only is there no opposition between religious freedom and the obligation to seek the truth, therefore, but in fact religious freedom has its foundation in the obligation itself, and the obligation to seek the truth in turn requires religious freedom” (p. 463). The five interventions by Wojtyla are crucial texts for an appreciation of his rare combination of philosophical understanding and pastoral experience; the seeds of his future pontificate may be seen in these concerns about the human person, freedom and truth, and the role of the Church in human society as brought before the council. The testimony of a soul under barbed wire offered an important corrective to the easy freedom of the west. The current ideology of secular or anthropocentric humanism is unable to provide the resources for an adequate account of the importance of religion and the dignity of the person who claims a right to religious freedom. Like Solzhenitsyn, Wojtyla sought a full account of human existence, one which turns toward God and faces the opportunities for good, and evil, of the present age. But especially in the degradation of oppression they discovered the possibility of renewal through the discovery of the

transcendent truth that provides the spark for conscience. The purely juridical account of religious freedom, and the freedom of indifference that underwrites it, fails to account for the urgency and priority that a true account of religious freedom holds for the modern world. As Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła, brought this hopeful teaching on religious freedom to countless persons across the globe and he established the authentic interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. This new book, *Freedom, Truth and Human Dignity*, should become essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the principles and ground of religious freedom and how this teaching emerged out of the debates of the Second Vatican Council.

John Hittinger