

CONTRA LEFEBVRISM

PART II: ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

1. Abstract

According to the Society of St. Pius X, the Second Vatican Council directly contradicted the Magisterium of the Popes from Gregory XVI to Pius XII, along with traditional church teaching, on matters of religious liberty, creating instead a policy that, together with the documents on ecumenism, promotes a freedom of choice when it comes to religion and conscience, which can only result in a rejection of Truth in favor of following one's own inner voice.

A careful and prudent reading of the Vatican II and post-conciliar documents, however, paints a different picture. Rather than encouraging a sort of individual, laissez-faire approach to the liberties of religion and conscience, the documents of the Council instead cooperate with the teachings of prior popes to remind a world becoming increasingly antagonistic to religion of a person's freedom from coercion in matters religious, of the Church's right to freedom to do its work of evangelization, and of the State's duty to create and permit the conditions necessary for that work.

2. The Position of the Society of St. Pius X:

“Liberty of thought, liberty of conscience, liberty of religions, religious liberty—these are modern errors that were refuted by the pre-conciliar popes in their condemnations of Liberalism. However, the Second Vatican Council took another stance on these questions.”

The Society's complaint centers on the Vatican II Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, which they claim embodies a thoroughly modernist understanding of freedom and human dignity. In the Society's FAQ video, presented by Fr. McDonald, the argument is distinguished between the Catholic and Modern understandings of those concepts.¹

Although the Society concedes that both Catholicism and Modernism agree that “all men possess a natural dignity, constituted primarily by the free exercise of his reason and will” and that no one should violate this liberty even to force them to do good, they propose that the two schools of thought diverge as follows:

Catholicism holds that:

- Liberty is a precious gift from God which can be embraced or abused.

¹ SSPX FAQ, #9.

- To choose what is objectively good and in accord with God’s will is the proper way exercising this freedom, and what makes a man truly free.
- The abuse of freedom, regardless of whether it offends or hurts another person, is always wrong because it opposes God, the Supreme Good. Man therefore has the duty to choose the true religion revealed by God, “who can neither deceive nor be deceived”.

Compared to Modernism, which holds that:

- Liberty is the right to act as one pleases, whether objectively good or bad, unless this exercise endangers another.
- The human conscience, rather than God, is the ultimate arbiter of good vs. evil, and can legitimately vary depending on the person.
- Man is thus free to choose his own religious beliefs. This right must be respected and permitted for the sake of temporal peace and prosperity.

And because of these two different understandings of freedom, both Catholicism and Modernism likewise understand religious liberty differently.

Catholicism:

- Man is only free to choose what is good and believe what is objectively true.
- Although men do make poor choices and embrace false religions, society can never praise, encourage, or support faulty judgments. It can, however, tolerate certain individual abuses of liberty to keep the peace while at the same time encouraging people of false religions to convert to the true faith.

Modernism:

- Every man has the freedom to choose whatever belief system suits him best, regardless of whether it is objectively false or not, so long as no one else is directly and physically harmed.

The Society goes on to accuse the Church leaders since Vatican II of promoting the Modernist take on religious liberty, in contrast to the clear and infallible declarations of previous Popes. Specifically cited is Pope Bl. Pius IX, who in his *Syllabus of Errors* condemned the following proposition:

“Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true.”²

3. The Documents at Issue:

² Pius IX, *Syllabus of Errors*, Prop. #15.

The Vatican II declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* is the most frequently cited document, specifically an excerpt from §2 which states:

“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”

4. The Position of the Second Vatican Council:

Although the entirety of *Dignitatis Humanae* expresses the bulk of the Council’s doctrine of religious liberty, other documents of the Council refer to the subject as well. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, addresses the subject on numerous occasions in its dissertation on the state of man today. Finally, the decrees *Ad Gentes* and *Christus Dominus* round out the Council’s teachings on religious liberty.³ Each of those documents’ treatments will be summarized in the order mentioned above (with *emphasis* added by the author).

4a. The Position of *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965):

A sense within human societies of the dignity inherent in every human being has been increasing in recent times, and with it the demand that governments not encroach on the rightful freedoms of its citizens.

With an eye towards sacred tradition and doctrine, the Church declares in the first place that God has revealed the proper manner of worship, in which lies our salvation. This proper manner of worship is found whole in the Catholic Church, to which Jesus committed to it and all its members to “make disciples of all nations.”⁴

All men are thus bound to seek the truth, especially concerned God and His Church, to embrace that truth, and to hold fast to it. These obligations are binding on our human conscience. At the same time, truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth. Therefore, men require religious freedom, which is defined as the freedom from coercion in civil society in order to carry out their duty to worship God; this is in addition to the moral

³ The Society’s FAQ videos also mention *Lumen Gentium* as introducing “a new notion on the liberty of worship and of conscience and on the concept of liberty; new notions previously condemned by the Popes,” (SSPX FAQ, #8). However, *Lumen Gentium* does not discuss the subject of religious liberty.

⁴ Matthew 28:19.

duty of both men and societies toward the true religion and the Catholic Church, in accordance with the traditional doctrine of the Church (§1).

All men have the right to that freedom from coercion in matters religious and, within due limits, from being forced to act contrary to his beliefs. This right is revealed by God in the foundation of one's very dignity, and is joined by the privilege of bearing personal responsibility for that freedom, and carries with it the obligation, albeit free from external and psychological coercion, to seek the truth, adhere to it once it is found, and to order their whole lives in accord with the truth. For this right to religious freedom is not based in the subjective disposition of the person (which would imply the freedom to do what one pleased based on his own preferred moral system), but rather in his very nature (which is a deeper, God-given freedom that is necessarily joined with man's natural obligation to seek the truth). Since it comes from God, one is never deprived of this right even if it is neglected or abused. Governments ought to enshrine this right into law and to promote the religious life of its community, without supplanting or suppressing the Church's role (§2-3).

The specific rights of religious freedom include the rights of religious communities to govern themselves, honor God in public worship, educate their people, manage their members, building houses of worship, and to publicly witness to their own faith (provided they don't disrupt the public order or act in a coercive manner toward others). Families likewise enjoy similar rights for themselves and their children (§4-5).

Governments have the duty to protect and promote the equality and inviolable rights of men, among them religious freedom. Moreover, governments should foster conditions favorable promotion of religious life in their communities so that society may profit from the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in God. Also, if a particular religion is given special civic recognition, the religious freedom (meaning immunity from coercion) of other religious communities ought to be respected (§6).

Religious freedom, as with other freedoms, is nonetheless subject to reasonable regulatory norms. It must be exercised properly according to moral principles, since religious freedom has as its end the proper exercise of personal and social responsibility. Indeed, there are many who use their freedoms as a pretext for refusing to submit to authority, or else make light of the duty of obedience. Society has the right to defend itself from the abuse of these freedoms, however this defense must not be arbitrary or unfair, but must conform to the objective moral order (§7-8).

This freedom is found perfectly expressed in Christ Jesus, who demonstrated a proper exercise of freedom by committing Himself fully and

freely to the will of His Father. Jesus likewise respected this freedom of others; it was not with coercion that He called His followers to Him, but with patience and His illumination of the truth through His words, His miracles, and ultimately His death and resurrection. We are likewise called to use our freedom to fulfill our duty of belief in the Word of God. Our response to this calling, consistent with the major tenants of the Catholic faith, must be freely given, since the act of faith is itself a free act of the will. Man cannot give a genuine assent to belief unless it is freely made. In this manner, religious freedom makes no small contribution to an environment where men can freely approach the faith, embrace it, and profess it with their whole being (§9-12).

The Church herself claims first and foremost the sacred freedom to carry out her work in society of caring for the salvation of souls and of spreading and preaching the Gospel to all souls; it is a fundamental principle upon which relations between the Church and State are to be based. To act against this freedom would be to act against God Himself. Therefore, both the Church's freedom and religious freedom cooperate to give the Church the independence necessary to accomplish her work, as well as guarantee their members the right to act in accordance with their consciences.

With this freedom of conscience, and in light of the God-given teaching authority given to the Church, Christians are to form their consciences upon the sure doctrine of the Church, to walk in the light of wisdom, and to spread the Gospel even at the cost of their own lives. Furthermore, Christians are bound by a grave obligation toward Christ to understand the truth more fully, faithfully proclaim it, and energetically defend it. At the same time, they are to bear with those in error or ignorance with love, prudence, and patience,⁵ taking into account everything: the duty to proclaim Christ, the rights of the human person, and the power of God's grace (§13-14).

4b. *The Position of Gaudium et Spes (December 7, 1965):*

In the depths of his conscience lies a law written by God, calling man to love what is good and hate what is evil. To obey this law is the very dignity of man, and according to this law will man be judged. Christians are joined to the rest of mankind in the search for truth, in the course of which man's conscience is formed. The more this right conscience holds sway, the more man will favor the objective norms of morality over blind choice. Conscience does not lose its dignity in the face of invincible error but becomes blind in the man who cares nothing for the truth.

⁵ cf. Ephesians 4:1-3.

Authentic freedom is a sign of the image of God, and it is in this freedom that man can direct himself towards goodness. Man's dignity finds its root and perfection in man's call to communion with God. It demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice, and he achieves that dignity through freedom from passion and sin. But since man's freedom is corrupted by sin, only through God's grace can it be restored to its full glory. Those who avoid the truth do not act according to their conscience (§16-21).

Human freedom is crippled both by poverty and by overindulgence in comforts. It finds strength when a man consents to the requirements of social life, takes on the many demands of human partnership, and commits himself to the service of the human community (§31).

The Church, in her belief in God, can anchor the dignity of man against the tides of opinions that, for example, objectify, dehumanize, or idolize the human body. No human law can safeguard the dignity and freedom man as aptly as the Gospel of Christ, which announces and proclaims the freedom of the sons of God, rebuking the bondage of sin. Therefore, the rights of men must be penetrated by the spirit of the God and shielded from any kind of false autonomy. For although man is tempted to think that freedom exists only the measure that we are free from any obligation of the divine law, this way leads not to the perfection of the dignity of man, but his annihilation. In the preaching of the Gospel, in which the dignity of man finds its true nature, the Church desires the freedom to develop and exercise her evangelical mission (§41-42).

In a religiously pluralistic state, there needs to be a correct notion of the relationship between Church and state. Although they have distinct roles, they are both devoted to the personal and social vocations of the same men. The better cooperation exists between Church and state, the more effective will their services benefit the good of all. Indeed, since man's horizons are not limited to the temporal order, the Church, with her eye toward God, protects and fosters the political freedom and responsibility of citizens by preaching the truths of the Gospel and bringing the light of the Christian doctrine to all fields of human endeavor. It is only right, then, that the Church have true freedom to preach the faith, teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men, and to pass moral judgment in matters which regard the public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it (§76).

4c. The Position of Christus Dominus (October 28, 1965):

In discharging their apostolic office, bishops enjoy full and perfect freedom and independence from civil authority. The exercise of their office

may not be interfered with, nor may their ability to freely communicate with the Holy See, other ecclesial authorities, or their subjects. In turn, Bishops are called to collaborate with public officials according to the nature of their office, advocating for obedience to just laws and obedience to lawful authorities.

The right of nominating and appointing bishops is reserved solely to the competent ecclesiastical authority; it is desired that civil authorities not participate in that process (Ch. 1, §19-20).

4d. The Position of *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965):

By manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to all the truth about their condition and their calling. Both Christ and His Church transcend all peculiarities of race and nation and cannot therefore be considered foreign to anywhere or anybody. In other words, the preaching of the Gospel, which is the true leaven of liberty and progress, opens to everyone the door to salvation. No one is freed from sin by himself under his own power; on the contrary, all stand in need of Christ, who is their model, mentor, liberator, Savior and source of life (Ch. 1, §8).

The Church forbids forcing, or using trickery to lure, anyone into embrace the Faith. At the same time, the Church insists on a person's right not to be frightened away from the Faith by unjust vexations. In accord with the Church's ancient custom, a new convert's motivations should be looked into and purified if needed (Ch. 2, §13).

5. Pre- & Post-Conciliar Teachings:

5a. Pre-Conciliar Teaching:

Certainly, a modernist conception of religious liberty is repeatedly condemned by the teachings of the 19th century Popes. Gregory XVI did the first major work on the subject in *Mirari Vos* (On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism, 15 August, 1832):

“This shameful font of indifferentism gives rise to that absurd and erroneous proposition which claims that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone. It spreads ruin in sacred and civil affairs, though some repeat over and over again with the greatest impudence that some advantage accrues to religion from it. “But the death of the soul is worse than freedom of error,” as Augustine was wont to say. [St. Augustine, Epistle 166] When all restraints are removed by which men are kept on the narrow path of

truth, their nature, which is already inclined to evil, propels them to ruin. Then truly “the bottomless pit” [Ap 9.3] is open from which John saw smoke ascending which obscured the sun, and out of which locusts flew forth to devastate the earth. Thence comes transformation of minds, corruption of youths, contempt of sacred things and holy laws — in other words, a pestilence more deadly to the state than any other. Experience shows, even from earliest times, that cities renowned for wealth, dominion, and glory perished as a result of this single evil, namely immoderate freedom of opinion, license of free speech, and desire for novelty.” (§14).

Pope Bl. Pius IX developed this teaching in great detail in *Qui Pluribus* (On Faith and Religion, 9 November, 1846) and in *Quanta Cura* (Condemning Current Errors, December 8, 1864), along with its companion *Syllabus of Errors* (9 June, 1864):

Qui Pluribus:

“Also perverse is the shocking theory that it makes no difference to which religion one belongs, a theory which is greatly at variance even with reason. By means of this theory, those crafty men remove all distinction between virtue and vice, truth and error, honorable and vile action. They pretend that men can gain eternal salvation by the practice of any religion, as if there could ever be any sharing between justice and iniquity, any collaboration between light and darkness, or any agreement between Christ and Belial.” (§15).

Quanta Cura:

“But, although we have not omitted often to proscribe and reprobate the chief errors of this kind, yet the cause of the Catholic Church, and the salvation of souls entrusted to us by God, and the welfare of human society itself, altogether demand that we again stir up your pastoral solicitude to exterminate other evil opinions, which spring forth from the said errors as from a fountain. Which false and perverse opinions are on that ground the more to be detested, because they chiefly tend to this, that that salutary influence be impeded and (even) removed, which the Catholic Church, according to the institution and command of her Divine Author, should freely exercise even to the end of the world — not only over private individuals, but over nations, peoples, and their sovereign princes; and (tend also) to take away that mutual fellowship and concord of counsels between Church and State which has ever proved itself propitious and salutary, both for religious and civil interests.⁶

⁶ Gregory XVI, encyclical epistle “*Mirari vos*,” 15 August 1832.

“For you well know, venerable brethren, that at this time men are found not a few who, applying to civil society the impious and absurd principle of “naturalism,” as they call it, dare to teach that “the best constitution of public society and (also) civil progress altogether require that human society be conducted and governed without regard being had to religion any more than if it did not exist; or, at least, without any distinction being made between the true religion and false ones.” And, against the doctrine of Scripture, of the Church, and of the Holy Fathers, they do not hesitate to assert that “that is the best condition of civil society, in which no duty is recognized, as attached to the civil power, of restraining by enacted penalties, offenders against the Catholic religion, except so far as public peace may require.” From which totally false idea of social government they do not fear to foster that erroneous opinion, most fatal in its effects on the Catholic Church and the salvation of souls, called by Our Predecessor, Gregory XVI, an “insanity,”⁷ viz., that “liberty of conscience and worship is each man’s personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society; and that a right resides in the citizens to an absolute liberty, which should be restrained by no authority whether ecclesiastical or civil, whereby they may be able openly and publicly to manifest and declare any of their ideas whatever, either by word of mouth, by the press, or in any other way.” But, while they rashly affirm this, they do not think and consider that they are preaching “liberty of perdition;”⁸ and that “if human arguments are always allowed free room for discussion, there will never be wanting men who will dare to resist truth, and to trust in the flowing speech of human wisdom; whereas we know, from the very teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, how carefully Christian faith and wisdom should avoid this most injurious babbling.”⁹ (§3)

Syllabus of Errors:

“15. Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true.¹⁰

“77. In the present day it is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship.¹¹

7 Ibid.

8 St. Augustine, epistle 105 (166).

9 St. Leo, epistle 14 (133), sect. 2, edit. Ball.

10 Allocution '*Maxima quidem*,' June 9, 1862; Damnatio '*Multiplices inter*,' June 10, 1851.

11 Allocution '*Nemo vestrum*,' July 26, 1855.

“78. Hence it has been wisely decided by law, in some Catholic countries,¹² that persons coming to reside therein shall enjoy the public exercise of their own peculiar worship.”¹³ (Condemned Propositions 15, 77 & 78).

Finally, Pope Leo XIII confirmed both Gregory XVI and Pius IX in his encyclicals *Libertas Praestantissimum* (On the Nature of Human Liberty, 20 June, 1888) and *Immortale Dei* (On the Christian Constitution of States, 1 November, 1885):

Libertas Praestantissimum:

“[...] of all the duties which man has to fulfill, that, without doubt, is the chiefest 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. Add 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 honor,’¹⁴ rules and tempers all virtues. And if it be asked which of the many conflicting religions it is necessary to adopt, reason and the natural law unhesitatingly tell us to practice that one which God enjoins, and which men can easily recognize by certain exterior notes, whereby Divine Providence has willed that it should be distinguished, because, in a matter of such moment, the most terrible loss would be the consequence of error. Wherefore, when a liberty such as We have described is offered to man, the power is given him to pervert or abandon with impunity the most sacred of duties, and to exchange the unchangeable good for evil; which, as We have said, is no liberty, but its degradation, and the abject submission of the soul to sin.

“This kind of liberty, if considered in relation to the State, clearly implies that there is no reason why the State should offer any homage to God, or should desire any public recognition of Him; that no one form of worship is to be preferred to another, but that all stand on an equal footing, no account being taken of the religion of the people, even if they profess the Catholic faith. But, to justify this, it must needs be taken as true that the State has no duties toward God, or that such duties, if they exist, can be abandoned with impunity, both of which assertions are manifestly false. For it cannot be

12 It should be noted that Pope Bl. Pius IX speaks here of Catholic countries, not secular countries.

13 Allocution '*Acerbissimum*,' Sept. 27, 1852.

14 *Summa Theologiae*, Ila-IIae, q. Ixxxii, a. 6. Answer.

doubted but that, by the will of God, men are united in civil society; whether its component parts be considered; or its form, which implies authority; or the object of its existence; or the abundance of the vast services which it renders to man. God it is who has made man for society, and has placed him in the company of others like himself, so that what was wanting to his nature, and beyond his attainment if left to his own resources, he might obtain by association with others. Wherefore, civil society must acknowledge God as its Founder and Parent, and must obey and reverence His power and authority. justice therefore forbids, and reason itself forbids, the State to be godless; or to adopt a line of action which would end in godlessness — namely, to treat the various religions (as they call them) alike, and to bestow upon them promiscuously equal rights and privileges. Since, then, the profession of one religion is necessary in the State, that religion must be professed which alone is true, and which can be recognized without difficulty, especially in Catholic States, because the marks of truth are, as it were, engraven upon it. This religion, therefore, the rulers of the State must preserve and protect, if they would provide — as they should do — with prudence and usefulness for the good of the community. For public authority exists for the welfare of those whom it governs; and, although its proximate end is to lead men to the prosperity found in this life, yet, in so doing, it ought not to diminish, but rather to increase, man's capability of attaining to the supreme good in which his everlasting happiness consists: which never can be attained if religion be disregarded." (§20-21).

Immortale Dei:

“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 insuring public safety and preserving order. Indeed, from the prevalence of this teaching, things have come to such a pass that may hold as an axiom of civil jurisprudence that seditions may be rightfully 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 this is the same thing as atheism, however it may differ from it in name. 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.

“So, too, the liberty of thinking, and of publishing, whatsoever each one likes, without any hindrance, is not in itself an advantage over which society can wisely rejoice. On the contrary, it is the fountain-head and origin of many evils. Liberty is a power perfecting man, and hence should have truth and goodness for its object. But the character of goodness and truth cannot be changed at option. These remain ever one and the same, and are no less unchangeable than nature itself. If the mind assents to false opinions, and the will chooses and follows after what is wrong, neither can attain its native fullness, but both must fall from their native dignity into an abyss of corruption. Whatever, therefore, is opposed to virtue and truth may not rightly be brought temptingly before the eye of man, much less sanctioned by the favor and protection of the law. A well-spent life is the only way to heaven, whither all are bound, and on this account the State is acting against the laws and dictates of nature whenever it permits the license of opinion and of action to lead minds astray from truth and souls away from the practice of virtue. To exclude the Church, founded by God Himself, from life, from laws, from the education of youth, from domestic society is a grave and fatal error. A State from which religion is banished can never be well regulated; and already perhaps more than is desirable is known of the nature and tendency of the so-called civil philosophy of life and morals. The Church of Christ is the true and sole teacher of virtue and guardian of morals. She it is who preserves in their purity the principles from which duties flow, and, by setting forth most urgent reasons for virtuous life, bids us not only to turn away from wicked deeds, but even to curb all movements of the mind that are opposed to reason, even though they be not carried out in action.” (§31-32).

However, *Dignitatis Humanae* does not contradict any of the above teachings, given that the declaration focuses entirely on immunity from coercion in matters religious as a more appropriate definition of religious liberty, which §2 makes abundantly clear. This is even confirmed by the preceding section, which says:

“Religious freedom, in turn, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore *it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.*”

Since the declaration clearly sets out to leave the traditional Catholic teaching of religious liberty untouched, a more careful reading of the traditional teachings of the Church on this matter is called for. It turns out that freedom from coercion in matters religious (which the Society concedes), has numerous roots in tradition,

dating all the way back to the time of the Church Fathers. For example, St. Athanasius, in his work *History of the Arians* (c. 360 A.D.), provided this teaching:

“For it is the part of true godliness not to compel, but to persuade, as I said before. Thus our Lord Himself, not as employing force, but as offering to their free choice, has said to all, ‘If any man will follow after Me’;¹⁵ and to His disciples, ‘Will you also go away?’¹⁶” (No. 67).

As another example, the Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) affirmed the rights of the Jews (as human persons) to practice their faith openly, rather than pretend to be Christians in the public sphere:

“Since some of those who come from the religion of the Hebrews mistakenly think to make a mockery of Christ who is God, pretending to become Christians, but denying Christ in private by both secretly continuing to observe the sabbath and maintaining other Jewish practices, we decree that they shall not be received to communion or at prayer or into the church, **but rather let them openly be Hebrews according to their own religion**; they should not baptize their children or buy, or enter into possession of, a slave. But if one of them makes his conversion with a sincere faith and heart, and pronounces his confession wholeheartedly, disclosing their practices and objects in the hope that others may be refuted and corrected, such a person should be welcomed and baptized along with his children, and care should be taken that they abandon Hebrew practices. However if they are not of this sort, they should certainly not be welcomed.” (Canon 8).

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his work *Summa Theologiae*, spoke regarding the rights of those who have never received the faith (i.e. heathens or the Jews) in Question 10 (from Part 2-2) on Unbelief in General, drawing from the teachings of Pope St. Gregory the Great and from Church Father St. Augustine:

“Among unbelievers there are some who have never received the faith, such as the heathens and the Jews: **and these are by no means to be compelled to the faith, in order that they may believe, because to believe depends on the will**: nevertheless they should be compelled by the faithful, if it be possible to do so, so that they do not hinder the faith, by their blasphemies, or by their evil persuasions, or even by their open persecutions. It is for this reason that Christ's faithful often wage war with unbelievers, not indeed for the purpose of forcing them to believe, because even if they were to conquer them, and take them prisoners, they should still leave them free to believe, if they will, but in order to prevent them from hindering the faith of Christ.” (Art. 8).

¹⁵ Matthew 16:24.

¹⁶ John 6:67.

“(Pope St.) Gregory (I)¹⁷ says, speaking of the Jews: ‘They should be allowed to observe all their feasts, just as hitherto they and their fathers have for ages observed them.’

“I answer that, Human government is derived from the Divine government, and should imitate it. Now although God is all-powerful and supremely good, nevertheless He allows certain evils to take place in the universe, which He might prevent, lest, without them, greater goods might be forfeited, or greater evils ensue. Accordingly in human government also, those who are in authority, rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain greater evils be incurred: thus Augustine says¹⁸: ‘If you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust.’ Hence, though unbelievers sin in their rites, they may be tolerated, either on account of some good that ensues therefrom, or because of some evil avoided. Thus from the fact that the Jews observe their rites, which, of old, foreshadowed the truth of the faith which we hold, there follows this good—that our very enemies bear witness to our faith, and that our faith is represented in a figure, so to speak. For this reason they are tolerated in the observance of their rites.

“On the other hand, the rites of other unbelievers, which are neither truthful nor profitable are by no means to be tolerated, except perchance in order to avoid an evil, e.g. the scandal or disturbance that might ensue, or some hindrance to the salvation of those who if they were unmolested might gradually be converted to the faith. ***For this reason the Church, at times, has tolerated the rites even of heretics and pagans, when unbelievers were very numerous.***” (Art. 11).

This teaching of freedom from coercion in matters of religious stems even from the very Popes the Society cites in its myriad arguments against the teachings of Vatican II. Take for example Pope Leo XIII, who in the very same documents cited above went on to make these observations:

Libertas Praestantissimum:

“Another liberty is widely advocated, namely, liberty of conscience. If by this is meant that everyone may, as he chooses, worship God or not, it is sufficiently refuted by the arguments already adduced. ***But it may also be taken to mean that every man in the State may follow the will of God and, from a consciousness of duty and free from every obstacle, obey His commands. This, indeed, is true liberty, a liberty worthy of the sons of God, which nobly maintains the dignity of man and is stronger than all violence or wrong — a liberty which the Church has always desired and held most***

¹⁷ Regist. xi, Ep. 15: cf. Decret., dist. xlv, can., Qui sincera

¹⁸ De Ordine ii, 4

dear. This is the kind of liberty the Apostles claimed for themselves with intrepid constancy, which the apologists of Christianity confirmed by their writings, and which the martyrs in vast numbers consecrated by their blood. And deservedly so; for this Christian liberty bears witness to the absolute and most just dominion of God over man, and to the chief and supreme duty of man toward God. It has nothing in common with a seditious and rebellious mind; and in no tittle derogates from obedience to public authority; for the right to command and to require obedience exists only so far as it is in accordance with the authority of God, and is within the measure that He has laid down. But when anything is commanded which is plainly at variance with the will of God, there is a wide departure from this divinely constituted order, and at the same time a direct conflict with divine authority; therefore, it is right not to obey.” (§30).

Immortale Dei:

“This, then, is the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning the constitution and government of the State. By the words and decrees just cited, if judged dispassionately, no one of the several forms of government is in itself condemned, inasmuch as none of them contains anything contrary to Catholic doctrine, and all of them are capable, if wisely and justly managed, to insure the welfare of the State. Neither is it blameworthy in itself, in any manner, for the people to have a share greater or less, in the government: for at certain times, and under certain laws, such participation may not only be of benefit to the citizens, but may even be of obligation. Nor is there any reason why any one should accuse the Church of being wanting in gentleness of action or largeness of view, or of being opposed to real and lawful liberty. The Church, indeed, deems it unlawful to place the various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion, *but does not, on that account, condemn those rulers who, for the sake of securing some great good or of hindering some great evil, allow patiently custom or usage to be a kind of sanction for each kind of religion having its place in the State. And, in fact, the Church is wont to take earnest heed that no one shall be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, for, as St. Augustine wisely reminds us, ‘Man cannot believe otherwise than of his own will.’*”

“In the same way the Church cannot approve of that liberty which begets a contempt of the most sacred laws of God, and casts off the obedience due to lawful authority, for this is not liberty so much as license, and is most correctly styled by St. Augustine the ‘liberty of self ruin,’ and by the Apostle St. Peter the ‘cloak of malice.’¹⁹ Indeed, since it is opposed to reason, it is a true slavery, ‘for whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.’²⁰ *On the other hand, that liberty is truly genuine, and to be sought after, which in regard*

19 1 Peter 2:16.

to the individual does not allow men to be the slaves of error and of passion, the worst of all masters; which, too, in public administration guides the citizens in wisdom and provides for them increased means of well-being; and which, further, protects the State from foreign interference.

“This honourable liberty, alone worthy of human beings, the Church approves most highly and has never slackened her endeavour to preserve, strong and unchanged, among nations. And, in truth, whatever in the State is of chief avail for the common welfare; whatever has been usefully established to curb the license of rulers who are opposed to the true interests of the people, or to keep in check the leading authorities from unwarrantably interfering in municipal or family affairs; whatever tends to uphold the honour, manhood, and equal rights of individual citizens-of all these things, as the monuments of past ages bear witness, the Catholic Church has always been the originator, the promoter, or the guardian. Ever, therefore, consistent with herself, while on the one hand she rejects that exorbitant liberty which in individuals and in nations ends in license or in thralldom, on the other hand, she willingly and most gladly welcomes whatever improvements the age brings forth, if these really secure the prosperity of life here below, which is, as it were, a stage in the journey to the life that will know no ending." (§36-38).

Pope Leo XIII’s words on both the freedom of the Church to preach the Gospel and on the distinction between freedom from coercion and a naturalistic freedom of conscience were echoed years later by Pope Pius XI in *Quas Primas* (On the Feast of Christ the King, 11 December, 1925) and *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* (On Catholic Action in Italy, 29 June, 1931) respectively:

“When we pay honor to the princely dignity of Christ, men will doubtless be reminded that the Church, founded by Christ as a perfect society, has a natural and inalienable right to perfect freedom and immunity from the power of the state; and that in fulfilling the task committed to her by God of teaching, ruling, and guiding to eternal bliss those who belong to the kingdom of Christ, she cannot be subject to any external power. The State is bound to extend similar freedom to the orders and communities of religious of either sex, who give most valuable help to the Bishops of the Church by laboring for the extension and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. By their sacred vows they fight against the threefold concupiscence of the world; by making profession of a more perfect life they render the holiness which her divine Founder willed should be a mark and characteristic of his Church more striking and more conspicuous in the eyes of all.” (*Quas Primas*, §31).

“We say, ‘the sacred and inviolable rights of souls and of the Church,’ and this is the reflection which concerns Us more than any other, being the more grave. Again and again, as is well known, We have expressed Our thought – or rather the thought of Holy Church – on these important and essential matters, and it is not to you, Venerable Brothers and faithful masters in Israel that it is necessary to say more. But we must add something for the benefit of those dear people committed to your care whom, as shepherds of souls you nourish and govern by divine mandate and who would hardly ever be able in these days, save for you, to know the thoughts of the common Father of their souls. We repeat: ‘The sacred and inviolable rights of souls are of the Church’; because this matter concerns the right of souls to procure for themselves the greatest spiritual work of the Church, the divinely appointed and so mandatory of this teaching and of this work in that supernatural order which is established in the blood of the Redeemer and is necessary and obligatory for all of us if we are to share in the divine redemption. It concerns the right of souls so formed to share the treasures of the redemption with other souls, thus participating in the activities of the Apostolic Hierarchy.

“It was in consideration of this double right of souls that We lately declared Ourselves happy and proud to wage the good fight for the liberty of consciences. Not indeed (as someone, perhaps inadvertently, has represented Us as saying) for ‘the liberty of conscience,’ which is an equivocal expression too often distorted to mean the absolute independence of conscience and therefore an absurdity in reference to a soul created and redeemed by God.” (Non Abbiamo Bisogno, §40-41).

There’s also the words of Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis Christi* (On the Mystical Body of Christ, 29 June, 1943):

“Though We desire this unceasing prayer to rise to God from the whole Mystical Body in common, that all the straying sheep may hasten to enter the one fold of Jesus Christ, yet We recognize that this must be done of their own free will; for no one believes unless he wills to believe.²¹ Hence they are most certainly not genuine Christians²² who against their belief are forced to go into a church, to approach the altar and to receive the Sacraments; for the “faith without which it is impossible to please God”²³ is an entirely free “submission of intellect and will.”²⁴ Therefore, whenever it happens, despite the constant teaching of this Apostolic See,²⁵ that anyone is compelled to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, Our sense of duty demands that

21 Cf. August., In Ioann. Ev. tract., XXVI, 2: Migne, P.L. XXX, 1607.

22 Cf. August., Ibidem.

23 Hebr., XI, 6.

24 Vat. Counc. Const. de fide Cath., Cap. 3.

We condemn the act. For men must be effectively drawn to the truth by the Father of light through the spirit of His beloved Son, because, endowed as they are with free will, they can misuse their freedom under the impulse of mental agitation and base desires. Unfortunately many are still wandering far from the Catholic truth, being unwilling to follow the inspirations of divine grace, because neither they²⁶ nor the faithful pray to God with sufficient fervor for this intention. Again and again We beg all we ardently love the Church to follow the example of the Divine Redeemer and to give themselves constantly to such prayer.” (§104).

The assertions of both Popes are confirmed by Pope St. John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty, 11 April, 1963). Indeed, the above passage from *Libertas Praestantissimum* is directly referenced:

“Also among man's rights is that of being able to worship God in accordance with the right dictates of his own conscience, and to profess his religion both in private and in public. According to the clear teaching of Lactantius, "this is the very condition of our birth, that we render to the God who made us that just homage which is His due; that we acknowledge Him alone as God, and follow Him. It is from this ligature of piety, which binds us and joins us to God, that religion derives its name."²⁷

“Hence, too, Pope Leo XIII declared that ‘true freedom, freedom worthy of the sons of God, is that freedom which most truly safeguards the dignity of the human person. It is stronger than any violence or injustice. Such is the freedom which has always been desired by the Church, and which she holds most dear. It is the sort of freedom which the Apostles resolutely claimed for themselves. The apologists defended it in their writings; thousands of martyrs consecrated it with their blood.’²⁸ (§14).

5b. Post-Conciliar Teaching:

So if the declaration immediately sets out to leaves intact traditional Catholic doctrine that man, as well as society, has a moral duty to adhere to Truth, how should what follows in the document be squared with the statements of the previous Popes cited above? The answer, and the interpretive key, lies with Pope St. John Paul II, who had no small hand in the document's drafting.

25 Cf. Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*: A.S.S., XVIII, pp. 174-175; Cod. Iur. Can., c. 1351.

26 Cf. August., *Ibidem*.

27 *Divinae Institutiones*, lib. IV, c.28.2; PL 6.535

28 Encyclical letter "*Libertas praestantissimum*," Acta Leonis XIII, VIII, 1888, pp. 237-238

In the first place is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which gave the definitive interpretation of the Vatican II documents, and the council's statements on religious liberty is no exception:

“2104. *‘All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it.’ This duty derives from ‘the very dignity of the human person.’ It does not contradict a ‘sincere respect’ for different religions which frequently ‘reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men,’ nor the requirement of charity, which urges Christians ‘to treat with love, prudence and patience those who are in error or ignorance with regard to the faith.’*

“2105. The duty of offering God genuine worship concerns man both individually and socially. This is ‘the traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of individuals and societies toward the true religion and the one Church of Christ.’ By constantly evangelizing men, the Church works toward enabling them ‘to infuse the Christian spirit into the mentality and mores, laws and structures of the communities in which [they] live.’ The social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to make known the worship of the one true religion which subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church. Christians are called to be the light of the world. Thus, the Church shows forth the kingship of Christ over all creation and in particular over human societies.

“2106. ‘Nobody may be forced to act against his convictions, nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others, within due limits.’ This right is based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth which transcends the temporal order. For this reason it ‘continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it.’

“2107. ‘If because of the circumstances of a particular people special civil recognition is given to one religious community in the constitutional organization of a state, the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom must be recognized and respected as well.’

“2108. The right to religious liberty *is neither a moral license to adhere to error, nor a supposed right to error, but rather a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities.* This natural right ought to be acknowledged in the juridical order of society in such a way that it constitutes a civil right.

“2109. *The right to religious liberty can of itself be neither unlimited nor limited only by a ‘public order’ conceived in a positivist or naturalist manner. The ‘due limits’ which are inherent in it must be determined for each social situation by political prudence, according to the requirements of the common good, and ratified by the civil authority in accordance with ‘legal principles which are in conformity with the objective moral order.’*” (Pt. 3, §2, Ch. 1, Art. 1, ¶2).

In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (On the Splendor of Truth, 6 August, 1993), he has this to say about man’s freedom:

“Patterned on God's freedom, *man's freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through this obedience does it abide in the truth and conform to human dignity.* This is clearly stated by the Council: 'Human dignity requires man to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings, and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means’”²⁹ (§42).

He later summarized this concept in the following line:

“...Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” (Homily at Camden Yards, Baltimore, MD, 8 October, 1995, §7).

In other words, the concept of religious freedom put forth by the declaration isn't rooted in following whatever religion we want, as the Society claims the declaration had in mind, but rather the right to pursue the Truth, which when properly ordered means the freedom to discover the Truth, in the fullness of Catholicism, without interference or coercion from a hostile agent or government.

Pope Benedict XVI confirmed his predecessor in this regard on numerous occasions throughout his papacy; for example, in an address to the US bishops during their ad limina visit on January 19, 2012 he states:

“With her long tradition of respect for the right relationship between faith and reason, *the Church has a critical role to play in countering cultural currents which, on the basis of an extreme individualism, seek to promote notions of freedom detached from moral truth.* Our tradition does not speak from blind faith, but from a rational perspective which links our commitment to building an authentically just, humane and prosperous society to our ultimate assurance that the cosmos is possessed of an inner logic

29 *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.

accessible to human reasoning. *The Church's defense of a moral reasoning based on the natural law is grounded on her conviction that this law is not a threat to our freedom, but rather a "language" which enables us to understand ourselves and the truth of our being, and so to shape a more just and humane world. She thus proposes her moral teaching as a message not of constraint but of liberation, and as the basis for building a secure future.*"

And later in his post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia In Medio Oriente* (The Church in the Middle East, September 14, 2012):

"Religious freedom is the pinnacle of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right. It includes on the individual and collective levels the freedom to follow one's conscience in religious matters and, at the same time, freedom of worship. *It includes the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one's beliefs in public.*³⁰ *It must be possible to profess and freely manifest one's religion and its symbols without endangering one's life and personal freedom. Religious freedom is rooted in the dignity of the person; it safeguards moral freedom and fosters mutual respect.*

"Religious tolerance exists in a number of countries, but it does not have much effect since it remains limited in its field of action. There is a need to move beyond tolerance to religious freedom. *Taking this step does not open the door to relativism, as some would maintain. It does not compromise belief, but rather calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between man, religion and God. It is not an attack on the "foundational truths" of belief, since, despite human and religious divergences, a ray of truth shines on all men and women.*³¹ *We know very well that truth, apart from God, does not exist as an autonomous reality. If it did, it would be an idol. The truth cannot unfold except in an otherness open to God, who wishes to reveal his own otherness in and through my human brothers and sisters.* Hence it is not fitting to state in an exclusive way: "I possess the truth". The truth is not possessed by anyone; it is always a gift which calls us to undertake a journey of ever closer assimilation to truth. Truth can only be known and experienced in freedom; for this reason we cannot impose truth on others; truth is disclosed only in an encounter of love."

30 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2-8; Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2011 World Day of Peace* (8 December 2010): AAS 103 (2011), 46-48; *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See* (10 January 2011): AAS 103 (2011), 100-107.

31 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

While it is true that Pope Benedict XVI mentions the notion of a freedom of religious choice, it should be noted that, in context, he is not endorsing a religious liberty free from any consideration of what is objectively true, as indeed he clearly states that religious freedom should not be taken as an opening to relativism or religious indifferentism, since the truth does not exist apart from God, and that it can only be experienced in freedom. And again, this is not freedom in the sense that people can do whatever they want, but freedom in the sense that people require it to choose God in the entirely free gift of the self which Christian charity demands, as Pope Pius XII noted in *Mystici Corporis Christi* (§104).³² Therefore, the traditional teaching of the Church against a modernist (or relativist) sense of religious freedom remains perfectly preserved here.

5c. The Teaching of the Current Pontificate:

The topic of religious liberty was brought up by Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel, November 24, 2013). Drawing from Pope Benedict XVI's teaching quoted above, he echoes Pope Bl. Pius IX in condemning the coercion inherent in forcing religious practice from of the public sphere out of a misguided concern for the respect of atheists or agnostics, or the idea that the State should be religiously neutral; exactly the sort of "modernist" notion of religious freedom rejected by *Quanta Cura* (§3):

"The Synod Fathers spoke of the importance of respect for religious freedom, viewed as a fundamental human right.³³ This includes 'the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one's beliefs in public'.³⁴ A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, ***does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions.*** In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace" (§255).

Also, during a papal address earlier that year (May 4, 2013), Pope Francis joined his predecessors in affirming the proper notion of freedom:

32 cf. John 4:42.

33 cf. Propositio 16.

34 Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* (14 September 2012), 26: AAS 104 (2012), 762.

“...a good mother not only accompanies her children in their growth, without avoiding the problems and challenges of life; a good mother also helps them to make definitive decisions with freedom. This is not easy, but a mother knows how to do it. ***But what does freedom mean? It is certainly not doing whatever you want, allowing yourself to be dominated by the passions, to pass from one experience to another without discernment, to follow the fashions of the day; freedom does not mean, so to speak, throwing everything that you don’t like out the window. No, that is not freedom! Freedom is given to us so that we know how to make good decisions in life! Mary as a good mother teaches us to be, like her, capable of making definitive decisions; definitive choices, at this moment in a time controlled by, so to speak, a philosophy of the provisional. It is very difficult to make a lifetime commitment. And she helps us to make those definitive decisions in the full freedom with which she said “yes” to the plan God had for her life.***”³⁵

6. Observations:

Dignitatis Humanae certainly seems among the more contentious of the documents sparking the November declaration, and was frequently discussed (and condemned) in Archbishop Lefebvre’s writings. Even today, along with *Nostra Aetate*, it is often cited as one of the remaining obstructions to the Society’s reconciliation with the Holy See.

The Society’s position does seem convincing at first, but upon closer examination of the conciliar documents, along with pre- and post-conciliar magisterium, their arguments end up appearing deficient and misleading due to omission of context. Since the many documents cited above discuss freedom and liberty in different meanings and with different usages, it is apparent that at least part of the confusion simply lies in the different ways that the term “religious freedom” is used.

It seems useful to reference a 1989 essay by Fr. Brian Harrison, O.S., who following the call of Pope St. John Paul II in *Ecclesia Dei* (§5) went about establishing the declaration’s compatibility with tradition.³⁶ After applying a hermeneutic of continuity (the approach advocated by both Popes St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI), noting the declaration’s specific intent to “(leave) untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ” (§1), he addresses the document’s

35 cf. Luke 1:38

36 Fr. Brian W. Harrison, O.S. “Vatican II and Religious Liberty: Contradiction or Continuity?”, *Social Justice Review*, July/August 1989 Issue.

approach to the following four traditional propositions of Popes Gregory XVI, Bl. Pius IX, and Leo XIII:

1. The civic community has a duty to pay public honor to God and to recognize the Catholic religion as uniquely true.
2. In view of #1, civil authority has the right and duty to protect the Catholic religion by penalizing, as much as necessary, those who violate religious or moral truth.
3. The common good will always require some restriction of religious and moral error above and beyond the minimum required for maintaining the peace.
4. Civil authority should tolerate the diffusion of religious and moral error as much as the common good requires, but it should not give positive approval or authorization to such, since no one has an objective right to believe or propagate what is false or do wrong.

Fr. Harrison's essay proposes these four corresponding solutions that demonstrate the declaration's continuity with those propositions:

1. *Dignitatis Humanae* confirms the obligation of the civic community towards the true religion (§1), along with the rights of the state to give special recognition to one religion (§6). According to Fr. Harrison, §6's language was written with an eye toward protecting Christians in Islamic and Buddhist states, but when read in tandem in the light of §1, it's clear the declaration does not preclude society's duty toward the Church.
2. Both tradition and *Dignitatis Humanae* are in agreement that the promotion of moral and religious error should be penalized **only to the extent required by the common good**, as even the declaration calls for due limits to the right of religious liberty (§§1-2, 7-8). However, the question of the type and severity of such penalization, and the extent to which the common good requires it, are not questions of doctrine, let alone unchangeable doctrine or dogmas, but rather of prudential policy (which can be adjusted). This is because the answers to those questions depend on the context of time and place. It can certainly be conceded that *Dignitatis Humanae* made adjustments in the area of policy, but it is a non-sequitur to say that it necessarily implies a modernist approach, especially because the declaration doesn't make any change to the fundamental doctrine underlying the above.
3. Rather than merely affirming the "naturalist" notion of public peace specifically condemned by *Quanta Cura* (Archbishop Lefebvre's inappropriately draconian interpretation of the condemnation

notwithstanding³⁷), *Dignitatis Humanae* identifies the public peace as only one of three considerations governments must consider, ***all of which must be applied in accordance with the objective moral order***,³⁸ when restricting religious liberty. The other two include:

- a. An appropriate guarding of public morality.
- b. The effective safeguarding of the rights of all citizens.

In short, Vatican II's notion of public peace blatantly rejects the modernist notion of public peace which insists on the absence of religion. Clearly Vatican II does not contradict *Quanta Cura*.

4. In its treatment of the religious liberties of non-Catholics, *Dignitatis Humanae* specifies only freedom from coercion (which Pope Leo XIII approved), not the supposed freedom to propagate error, which the 19th century Popes condemned. In anticipation of the accusation of "sophistry", it should be obvious to anyone that there is a clear line between tolerating error and actively promoting the teaching of error. Considering the entirety of *Dignitatis Humanae*, Vatican II clearly never crosses that line.

One could build on Fr. Harrison's essay with the following three observations. First, it should be noted that, whereas Gregory XVI, Bl. Pius IX, and Leo XIII were addressing and condemning the rights of error to exist, *Dignitatis Humanae* was discussing the rights of human beings to be free from coercion. This is an understandable misunderstanding since, as noted above, the 19th century Popes and Vatican II use the same term in different ways. However, this confusion is instantly cleared up by simply reading the opening sections of the declaration which, as a reminder, states that religious freedom, "which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society" and that the declaration "leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ." In other words, the 19th century Popes and the declaration are addressing two related but distinct concepts that do not contradict each other.

Second, one should also take historical context into consideration, given that the declaration was issued partially in response to the Cold War, where Christianity was persecuted in Russia, China and Poland. There was also an eye toward religious

37 Overly broad interpretations of condemnations go against the axiom "*Odiosa sunt Restringsenda*" which calls for restrictive and lenient interpretations of any penalty or condemnation. In this case, Archbishop Lefebvre's personal interpretation was that the State has the duty to repress public expression of other religions merely because they are false, and not just to safeguard the public peace. This interpretation is not only not implied by *Quanta Cura*, but it also violates the aforementioned axiom and contradicts the traditional teaching of the Church on that matter (see Section 5a above).

38 It should be remembered that both *Dignitatis Humanae* (§§7-8) and *Gaudium et Spes* (§76) insist on the Church's right and freedom to teach moral truth in society.

persecution in Islamic and Buddhist countries (as Fr. Harrison mentioned in his essay). It makes perfect sense that the Church would also want to make clear what it seeks from those governments (in particular, from Communist countries); namely, the freedom to evangelize the world. Not only does a proper reading of *Dignitatis Humanae* back this notion up, but so do the other conciliar documents mentioned above, as well as every teaching before and after.³⁹

Finally, any fear that *Dignitatis Humanae* might promote indifference of any kind, or give carte blanche to follow an ill-informed conscience, is put to rest by the very declaration itself:

“In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church.”⁴⁰ For the Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself. Furthermore, let Christians walk in wisdom in the face of those outside, ‘in the Holy Spirit, in unaffected love, in the word of truth,’⁴¹ and let them be about their task of spreading the light of life with all confidence⁴² and apostolic courage, even to the shedding of their blood.

“The disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ, his Master, ever more fully to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it, never-be it understood-having recourse to means that are incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel. At the same time, the charity of Christ urges him to love and have prudence and patience in his dealings with those who are in error or in ignorance with regard to the faith.⁴³ All is to be taken into account - the Christian duty to Christ, the life-giving word which must be proclaimed, the rights of the human person, and the measure of grace granted by God through Christ to men who are invited freely to accept and profess the faith.” (§14).

Fr. Harrison’s solutions appear to be borne out in the post-conciliar magisterial teachings of Popes St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, particularly in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.⁴⁴

39 cf. J. Likoudis & K. Whitehead, *The Pope, the Council, and the Mass*, 2006: Emmaus Road Publishing, Question 29, pp. 217-234.

40 cf. Pius XII, radio message, March 23, 1952: AAS 44 (1952) pp. 270-278.

41 2 Cor. 6:6-7.

42 cf. Acts 4:29.

43 St. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April, 1963, no. 55.

44 See Section 5b above, specifically nos. 2108-2109.

7. Conclusion

Taking all the above into account, it should be quite clear to the objective reader that *Dignitatis Humanae* is not, nor could it be, a Trojan horse concealing an erroneous notion of religious liberty. By using a careful reading of the document itself and by applying the hermeneutic of continuity of Pope Benedict XVI,⁴⁵ the Second Vatican Council ends up emphatically reaffirming these eminently traditional teachings that every Pope from Gregory XVI (and before) to Francis have made over and over again:

1. Man's freedom comes from God, and is defined not as freedom from the truth, but freedom from sin. Therefore, only by following God and rejecting sin does man find true freedom.
2. Freedom finds its fullest expression in the light of the Gospel.
3. Individuals have the right not to be forced to accept Catholicism.
4. The Church and the State are natural partners; a cooperation, rather than a separation, is beneficial both to the faithful and to the whole world.
5. The Church should have the freedom to evangelize the world.
6. The State should create the conditions in society ideal for a flourishing of religion, wherein the Church can most effectively carry out its mission of salvation.

The Society's arguments ultimately lack any kind of logical coherence; they are based on a faulty reading of the Vatican II documents, a misapplication of these documents to pre-conciliar teaching, and an inability to take into account technical, historical, and theological context. Not only are they incoherent, they are also demonstrably invalid. They should be rejected.

45 cf. Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia" (22 December, 2005).