

The Right to Religious Freedom: Thomistic Principles of Nature and Grace

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“We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life. In the East, it is destroyed by the dealings and machinations of the ruling party. In the West, commercial interests tend to suffocate it. This is the real crisis. The split in the world is less terrible than the similarity of the disease plaguing its main sections. . . . Is it true that man is above everything? Is there no Superior Spirit above him? Is it right that man’s life and society’s activities have to be determined by material expansion in the first place? Is it permissible to promote such expansion to the detriment of our spiritual integrity?”

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,

The Harvard Commencement Address, June 8, 1978

Introducing the Problem: Religious Freedom as a Subject of Natural Law and Divine Right

Ironical as it might seem to some, modern Catholic insistence on the right to religious freedom codified in *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) at the Second Vatican Council has its unambiguous origins in the decree on papal primacy *Pastor Aeternus* (1870) articulated at the First Vatican Council. *Pastor Aeternus* defines as a dogma a number of truths with respect to the papacy. First, the Petrine office was intentionally instituted by Christ himself. Second, the Bishop of Rome enjoys a primacy of jurisdiction with respect to the whole Church that is plenary and immediate. Third,

when the pope speaks definitively on matters of content with respect to divine revelation and morals, whether by means of a conciliar definition or the extraordinary pronouncement of a teaching *ex cathedra*, he does so infallibly.

How are such affirmations the proximate origin of the subsequent development in *Dignitatis Humanae*? The latter teaching stems implicitly from the second of these three doctrinal affirmations. The First Vatican Council affirmed that the pope has a plenary jurisdiction over the whole of the body of the visible Church so as to emphasize that the modern secular state does not have legitimate jurisdiction over the decisions of ecclesiastical government that are made *internal* to the Church. The Third Republic, for example, does not have the right to determine for the pope who the bishops of the Catholic Church in France are to be, nor to suppress the presence and activity of Catholic schools that may teach freely the Catholic faith.

What is crucial to understand here is the corollary to this affirmation.¹ Not only was the First Vatican Council seeking to assure the political rights of the Church within the context of the political life of the modern state; it was also taking leave of the classical appeal to a corollary power of the Church to introduce and promote her teachings through the direct action of the state. The Church–state relation in classical medieval Christianity (and often in modernity) was reciprocal and twofold: the state granted an establishment privilege to the Church and the Church allowed the state to introduce means by which it might regulate the affairs of the Church from within (not least by allowing ministers of the state to determine the assignment of bishops and clerics to various ecclesiastical posts). But if the first of these privileges was delimited at Vatican I, then most certainly the second of them was upended as well, in what amounted to an alteration of the normative paradigm governing Church–state relations. After the social revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Church—in declaring the universal primacy—was making normative the practice of a kind of mutual separation of jurisdictional powers. The Church is not recognized as established by the state (through state-induced measures) and the state does not attempt to determine the internal workings of the Church with regard to her plenary right to evangelize.

¹ I am greatly indebted to Russell Hittinger for this line of argumentation, which echoes ideas he presented in a public lecture, “The Catholic Magisterium and Religious Freedom,” on Sept. 21, 2012 in New York, sponsored by the Thomistic Institute. The essay is forthcoming in *Nova et Vetera*.

What, then, preserves the freedom of the exercise of the Catholic religion in the midst of the modern, secular state? In the absence of “established” forms of mutual support, a theoretical basis needed to be developed by explicit appeal to the right to religious liberty. And so it was normal that soon after the First Vatican Council, already in the pontificate of Leo XIII in his encyclical *Immortale Dei* (1885), the Pope should set out to articulate a natural law argument for the right to religious freedom that engages with the political climate of the modern nation-state, arguing directly for the Church’s religious freedom in the modern world.² This is the view codified and expanded at Vatican II in *Dignitatis Humanae* as a consequence of these precedent teachings. It stems from them in homogeneous continuity. It is true that the teaching of Vatican II did constitute a new stage of development in Church teaching. It took time for the Church fully to recognize and articulate that the freedom of the Church entailed a corollary freedom of religious conscience for the individual. It is for this reason that *Dignitatis Humanae* appeared to many to be a new teaching. The doctrine of the Council, however, is not based on the introduction of new principles regarding religious freedom, but is only a further elucidation and prudential application of those principles in a given historical setting.

Although *Dignitatis Humanae* does contain an explicit body of philosophical, natural law argumentation, it contains distinctively theological argumentation as well. Any adequate treatment of the document needs to take into account this twofold set of ideas and the way they interrelate. The philosophical argumentation in the document is grounded in principles of reason pertaining to God as the natural end of man, the metaphysical irreducibility of free human actions, the inalienable rights of the moral conscience, and the hierarchy of social goods. The theological argumentation is based upon an appeal to the supernatural responsibilities of the Church with regard to the lives of baptized Christians, and a corresponding insistence on the importance of the free embrace of the Catholic faith. It is grounded in principles of revelation regarding the supernatural end of man, the dignity of the human person, the free embrace of the gift of supernatural faith, and the nature of the Church. The Church has a divinely mandated authority from God to preach the Gospel. In proposing the truth of divine revelation, she may act directly upon the consciences of all human persons. In turn, the Church may also

² See Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter on the Christian Constitution of States *Immortale Dei*, Promulgated November 1, 1885 (New York: America Press, 1936), §§3, 10, 16, 23–34, 39.

act indirectly upon the actions and liberties of civil society and the state. She does so principally through the free, conscientious acceptance of her teachings by citizens, who in turn promote these teachings in the public square and translate them into public policy and action.

In this essay I would like to consider the interplay between these two foundations of the Church's doctrine of religious freedom. I wish to include under this notion of religious freedom both sets of principles aforementioned and to consider their interrelation. That is to say: how should we understand the philosophical, natural law defense of the rights of religious belief and practice in the modern secular state, and how is this defense related to the traditional theological understanding of the Church's civic freedom and her accompanying right of appeal to the consciences of all civic agents? I will consider first the natural law argumentation and then the theological argumentation, and finally compare the two. I will not pretend here to offer a comprehensive presentation of the doctrinal teaching of the Church on this matter. I will, however, seek to interpret and defend the intelligibility of elements of this doctrine by recourse to principles articulated by Aquinas or by the Thomistic school. In other words, what follows claims only to be *one* potential form of theological interpretation of *aspects* of the Church's official teaching. The basic claim of the essay is the following: the Church's teaching on religious freedom invites us to clarify the relation between the supernatural and natural final ends of man, seeing them in a non-competitive, hierarchical way. Any argumentation from natural reason presupposes that we can make some form of public appeal to a religious, final end to human action. *According to the argument of reason itself*, there is an intrinsic openness to or possibility of the superior manifestation of the supernatural. The appeal to the supernatural end, meanwhile, plays a fundamental role in the Church's traditional claims regarding her *theologically sanctioned* right to religious freedom with respect to the state. This appeal must be cast, however, in such a way as to respect sufficiently the natural ends of man and their hierarchical nature. It is precisely because the grace of Jesus Christ can so respect the human structure of nature without destroying the hierarchy of goods that it can assimilate to itself an architectonic influence over all lesser entities, including (in theory) all the natural practices of the temporal state.

Religious Freedom and the Secular State: Natural Law and Natural Ends

The Second Vatican Council document *Dignitatis Humanae* makes the following affirmation of natural reason regarding the religious freedom of human beings:

It is in accord with their dignity that all men, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing 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 direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth. . . . Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective attitude of the individual but in his very nature.³

If we approach this affirmation from a Thomistic point of view, we might note first that Aquinas offers arguments in the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* for the metaphysical reality of human freedom and its spiritual character. I will not rehearse the arguments in detail.⁴ He first studies the intentional character of human reason (our conceptual form of thinking) and the universal character of our human intentionality. Human beings are capable of thinking in conceptual terms by abstracting from material individuals to obtain to the common essence shared by multiple singulars.⁵ We do not know only Peter, Rebecca, or Andrew, but also, the human nature that is common to them all. Based upon the abstract character of human cognition (which attains to the essences of

³ Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, in *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), §2. Unless otherwise specified, translations from the Second Vatican Council documents are taken from this edition.

⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) I, q. 75, which presents a complex set of arguments regarding the human soul. I take it that the key arguments regarding the spirituality and incorruptibility of the human soul are given in aa. 2, 5, and 6. All translations of the *Summa Theologiae* are taken from the English Dominican Province Translation of 1920, found in *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947). See also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter, *SCG*) II, trans. J. F. Anderson (New York: Doubleday, 1956), chs. 49–51.

⁵ *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2. See the helpful analysis of Aquinas' treatment of this subject by Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2009), 151–162.

realities, grasped in a universal mode), Aquinas argues for the necessary immateriality of elements of human thought. Abstraction entails the capacity to grasp what is essential in a given substance in distinction from its material individuality. But this means human intellectual knowledge attains to, and in a sense assimilates intentionally, the forms of the things we know. But we do not become the things we know. For instance, one may know what fire is *essentially in its very being*, and therefore refrain rationally from putting one's hand in a fire. Of course in doing so, the mind does not become fire ontologically while thinking about the topic, but attains knowledge of *what the reality is in itself* in a purely conceptual way. A material substance can only assimilate a new form by becoming that thing essentially (like wood catching fire). We, however, are capable of becoming that reality intentionally without being the form of the thing we know. Consequently, our manner of knowing other things is immaterial.⁶

Intellectual knowledge, meanwhile, also serves as the premise of free will, since rational perception of the good permits rational appetite or rational desire to emerge.⁷ The latter is evoked through a series of acts that follow upon human knowledge and that characterize human volition. What we know can in turn become the object of our desire, intention, consent, choice, free engagement, and spiritual enjoyment.⁸ The human being, then, is characterized by a capacity for free self-determination that takes place through rational self-orientation toward the good. Man is inevitably, intrinsically marked metaphysically by spiritual freedom that persists at the core of his being, whether he should wish it or not. He desires the good and cannot fail to seek happiness in and through all his free acts.⁹ And as a consequence, Aquinas says, free contingency characterizes his actions.¹⁰ That is to say, human behavior is not marked either by an intrinsically inclined necessity (nature forcing us to choose this or

⁶ See the argument to this effect in *ST* I, q. 75, a. 5; Thomas Aquinas, *In de Anima* III, lec. 7, n. 680–81 (translated as *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, by K. Foster and S. Humphries [South Bend: Dumb Ox, 1994]); and Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, a. 14 (translated as *The Soul* by J. Rowan [St. Louis & London: B. Herder Book Co., 1949]).

⁷ *ST* I, q. 82, aa. 3–4.

⁸ *ST* I, q. 83, aa. 1–3; I-II, qq. 11–16. See the study of Aquinas' treatment of human freedom in Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁹ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 1.

¹⁰ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 2; q. 19, a. 8; I-II, q. 10.

that good) or an extrinsic necessity of imposition or coercion (someone choosing the good for us). This free form of contingent self-determination for the good, through rational intention, consent and choice, is not unnatural to man or somehow above his nature, but perfectly and intrinsically natural, insofar as man is rational.

What concerns us especially about this vision of human freedom, however, is the important role Aquinas accords in this process to the final end of the human person. Human volition is characterized, for St. Thomas, by inevitable first principles and also by inevitable final ends. These in turn give a kind of structure to the free human act that cannot be evaded, or that is normative for every human person, due to his or her rational nature.

The first principles of human volition stem from the fact that the human being who advances to the age of reason inevitably begins to perceive intellectually the goodness of various realities, and this elicits a rational appetite for the good.¹¹ Human beings from an early age express voluntary desires and begin to make rational discernments and choices about their desires for diverse goods (for better or worse). Thus complex, practical deliberation about the good is born and habits of choosing are formed.

Undergirding this process of ongoing deliberation from the beginning is a fundamental, prevenient inclination. This is the overarching desire for happiness. No matter what particular goods a person chooses and no matter what choices he or she makes, the person inevitably, always, and everywhere wills to attain some form of happiness. It is simply not possible for the human being to avoid this basic inclination of the rational will, and consequently, the first principle of practical reason is “that the good is to be chosen and evil avoided.”¹² Such is the case independently of whatever real or apparent goods a human person (or community of persons for that matter) might eventually settle on as intended goods for him or their selves. In other words, this inevitable first starting point does not exclude diversity of opinion about what is in fact good or best, or the possibility of grave moral error and wrong-doing, whether individual or collective.¹³ On the contrary, the search for happiness stands at the front of not only the possibility of virtue but of vice as well.

¹¹ *ST* I, q. 79, a. 12; Thomas Aquinas, *Truth (De Veritate)*, eds. Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn, and Robert W. Schmidt, 3 vols. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), q. 16, aa. 1–2, (hereafter, *De Ver.*)

¹² *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

¹³ *ST* I-II, q. 94, aa. 4 and 6.

The inevitability of the final end is of a very different kind and the analysis Aquinas provides of it presupposes a sustained and elevated degree of philosophical reasoning. He affirms that the human will is naturally inclined toward the good. Good realities are multiple, however, and there are inherent limitations to the diverse goods the human being encounters in the world. Moreover, each of these goods when viewed ontologically exhibits intrinsic dependence upon others for its very continuance in being, and this pattern of causal derivation in the order of existence points us in an indirect but real fashion to the existence of an uncreated first cause.¹⁴ That cause is the primal origin of the goodness of all secondary realities and therefore must possess goodness in a primal, derivative way.¹⁵ The goods we come to know and love, then, are “participated” goods, manifestations that partially disclose (but also veil from us) the unparticipated, sovereign goodness of the first cause. (His is a goodness that is utterly transcendent of but also immanent to the created world.) It can be affirmed to exist with certitude according to demonstrations of human reason, but also remains essentially incomprehensible to our natural human understanding. Such goodness, while real, is veiled for us in darkness.¹⁶ This is one way of indicating what human beings refer to (however imperfectly) when they speak of God.¹⁷

The human intellect is capable of attaining to truth not only of finite things, but also of the transcendent reality of God (albeit quite imperfectly), and therefore the human being is capable of aspiring to the knowledge of God.¹⁸ And the human being is capable of acknowledging

¹⁴ *De Ver.* q. 21, a. 5; *ST I*, q. 47, aa. 1–2.

¹⁵ *ST I*, q. 6, a. 3.

¹⁶ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 12.

¹⁷ Aquinas refers, in *SCG III*, ch. 38, to the knowledge of God commonly possessed by all human beings, which is awakened through ordinary experience and by a kind of imperfect inference. Human beings can typically grasp from the temporal and contingent, yet ordered character of all the realities we experience that there must be an eternal, primary cause of the world who can govern reality providentially. In *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, Aquinas examines in a more technical sense what it might mean to call God “good” by analogy, based on our ordinary experiences of realities that are imperfectly good.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius’ De Trinitate*, in *Faith, Reason and Theology*, trans. A. Mauer (Toronto: PIMS, 1987), q. 1, a. 2. This view has been affirmed doctrinally in the subsequent Magisterium of the Catholic Church: “Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the things that were created through the natural light of reason, for ‘ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature . . . has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’

God's presence, providence, and goodness through acts pertaining to the virtue of religion.¹⁹ That is to say, the human being is naturally capable of a genuine religious aspiration toward the knowledge of God and the service of God in the form of religious thought and behavior.²⁰

For our purposes the particularities of this argument are not of central importance. What is of essential consideration is that Aquinas thinks that the human will, precisely because it is a spiritual appetite for the good that follows upon human reason, is inherently inclined to the universal good, who is in fact God, and who alone is the "objective" final true end of man.²¹ But this means that the human person is structurally inclined toward God as his or her ultimate final end (whether he or she wishes it or not), and bears within an *ineffaceable* natural capacity for the knowledge and love of God.²² The capacity is ineffaceable because it is inscribed

(Rom 1:20)." (First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 1, in Heinrich Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 43rd ed., ed. P. Hünermann, R. Fastiggi and A. Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012], hereafter, DH), §3004. See likewise Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, §3: "God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word (Jn 1:3), provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities (Rom 1:19–20)."

¹⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 81, aa. 2 and 5.

²⁰ Aquinas qualifies this affirmation in *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 3. Although the human being is naturally capable of religious actions and is naturally inclined to the preferential love of God above all things, he or she is wounded by the effects of original sin in such a way that it is impossible (without grace, and in the fallen state) to love God effectively above all things with a natural religious love. This does not alter the fact that man is naturally inclined to be religious. The effects of sin do not eradicate the root natural tendencies of the soul toward God (*ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 1). However, they do hinder the right exercise of man's religious capacities, so that human religiosity is in many ways conflicted and ambiguous. The Second Vatican Council (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, §13) restates the idea as a truth of natural reason, one best understood in conjunction with the teaching of *Dei Filius* cited just above: "Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things." References to *Gaudium et Spes* are taken from *Denzinger*, 43rd edition.

²¹ *ST* I, q. 104, a. 2; *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7; q. 2, a. 8; q. 3, aa. 1, 3, and 6.

²² *ST* I, q. 93, a. 4: "Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself. Where-

into the very potencies of the spiritual faculties of the person that tend ontologically toward given forms of perfection. It is true that human beings can remain religiously indifferent or err gravely with regard to the true knowledge and love of God. Human beings can sin by failing culpably to acknowledge God as their final end. Theologically speaking, they can even damn themselves to eternal separation from God. They cannot, however, eradicate from themselves this structural orientation of the human spirit toward God as the sovereign good and final end of all things. However frustrated or even tormenting the orientation becomes (even eternally tormenting), it remains inherent to the spiritual nature of man.²³

It may seem like this medieval vision of the final end of the human person is utterly irrelevant to the modern nation-state. After all, we might object, most people in the modern world do not attain to or even entertain this form of speculative reflection on human freedom, much less seek to practice a form of religious life that reflects such metaphysical convictions. In fact, however, this is beside the point. Aquinas himself presupposes that most people remain philosophically unaware of this highest outcome of human rational aspiration. Rather, they often muddle through their decisions about the goodness of created things by knowledge and love of finite creatures that give them a certain imperfect but real happiness through life in this world. What is of essential importance is that people do inevitably seek happiness in even their most basic free human actions, and these actions are inevitably open to the objective structure of the good. This structure itself has a transcendent horizon, such that the free rational agent cannot delimit its freedom merely to the immanent sphere of temporal or created things, no matter how sublime that sphere may seem. Consequently, every human being remains in the use of his or her freedom necessarily and inextricably open to the possibility of religious self-orientation to the transcendent God. It follows from this that even in the non-religious or religiously misguided person, *the capacity to know and choose has a dignity not reducible to the immanent sphere of empirical things alone*, and so the person possesses a deeper dignity

fore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. *First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God*; and this aptitude consists in the *very nature of the mind, which is common to all men*. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory” (emphasis added).

²³ ST I-II, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1; SCG IV, ch. 95.

grounded in the nature of the spiritual life as such that cannot be merely subsumed into the world of temporal affairs.

We can conclude from this that when a government seeks to delimit the range of free behavior so that religious beliefs and practices regarding God are excluded or suppressed, the state necessarily acts against the very structure of deliberative human freedom itself, with respect to both its deepest initial inclinations and its ultimate transcendent horizon. Such behavior is, therefore, violent in a uniquely interior way. This truth was underscored by both Pope Leo XIII in *Immortale Dei* (1885) and Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis* (1979).²⁴ Each pointed his readers toward a common idea: in the face of modern absolutist conceptions of statehood and its function, respect for human religious freedom serves as one of the most profound foundations for all the rights of human freedom in general. For the right of the full exercise of freedom can only be respected if the final natural term or end of freedom is acknowledged, at least in the form of a civic right or permission, and if that end is distinctively religious in kind. Only if the exercise of freedom is respected in its complete arc and with regard to its plenary extension is it in turn truly respected in every lesser instantiation. Otherwise, the lesser instantiations are in fact always blunted from taking on their full flowering in view of, and subordination to, the final end of man. Furthermore, if the final end, the sovereign good, can be excluded by the state from the free deliberative action of the individual, then it follows necessarily that any inferior, merely created good can be excluded as well, in principle. For whoever can exclude the eternal, transcendent, and utterly superior can also exclude the temporal, immanent, and inferior. Setting the state up over and against God sets an ominous precedent, as it prepares the way for the state to set itself up over and against the dignity and rights of

²⁴ Compare *Immortale Dei*, §§17, 30, 24–27, and 38 with Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Redeemer of Man *Redemptor Hominis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979) §17. The points of emphasis are distinct (the rights of the Church vis-à-vis the state, as distinct from the religious rights of each human person, respectively). However, as regards the dignity of the human person as made for the truth regarding God, the principles in the two documents are identical. Pope John Paul II comments upon *Dignitatis Humanae* in the following way, principally in response to atheist regimes: “Certainly 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. The curtailment and violation of religious freedom are in contrast with man’s dignity and his objective rights.”

the human person, the integrity of the human conscience in its search for the truth, and (if possible) the natural structure itself of human and non-human beings.

Thus far we have argued that Aquinas' teleological conception of freedom helps to safeguard an authentic sense of religious and civic rights of freedom. One question that should emerge, however, is whether the inverse is not the case as well. Can the philosophical articulation of God as the final end of man not be employed as an argument of public reason in view of the religious negation or denial of the importance and integrity of temporal goods?

One way to respond to this question is to ask whether the final good should be seen as in some sense an exclusive good, or as in some way an inclusive good. That is to say, how does the knowledge and religious service of God affect one's capacity to desire and actively pursue a wide array of created or temporal goods, including those that inevitably help constitute the common good of civic society? The answer should obviously be inclusivist. In fact, the notion of participated goodness invoked earlier is helpful when considering this question. For if the goodness of created things is that which indicates in the first place the reality of the sovereign good, hidden from full human comprehension, then the acknowledgement of the goodness of God need not, and in a sense cannot, mitigate against the more immediate acknowledgement of the goodness of created realities. Meanwhile, if all that is created by God participates in his goodness, then there is no rivalry possible between God and the world, for there is nothing in the creation that can add to the goodness of God, and the goodness of the creation is simply an expression of God's inner and unseen goodness.²⁵ As Dionysius the Areopagite states, in a sense, the transcendent God simply is the world, insofar as he is the cause of the world.²⁶ Hierarchy and transcendence

²⁵ *ST I*, q. 47, a. 1: "Hence we must say that the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For he brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever."

²⁶ Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, ch. 5, as discussed by Aquinas in *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2. (*De Div. Nom.* V, 9 [PG 3, 825].)

have to be maintained along with non-competition and participation.

This metaphysical realism regarding the creation has practical consequences at the deepest levels of human behavior. What it implies is that human beings can choose lesser goods in ways that orient them toward more ultimate goods, just as they can choose lesser realities as relative ends that are also means in view of higher ends.²⁷ In this way, without denying the necessary importance of lesser ends, practical reason can orchestrate all things architectonically toward a final end. A simple example is domestic: one can cook food simultaneously to nourish a family and to facilitate the affability of social interaction. Due to the primary good (God), however, these actions can be subject hierarchically and teleologically toward a transcendent end, in such a way as to *enhance them from within* with the perfection of religious acts. For it is naturally possible to cook, to nourish a family, and to enjoy human social interaction all for and under the aegis of divine life. Even if there is a hierarchy of goods in our social and civic life that is practically basic to all our behavior, there is also always the intrinsic capacity of human practical reason to orient all other goods toward the supreme good through the good of religion.

This does not mean, however, that human beings cannot choose lesser goods in such a way as to do harm to greater goods. It is true that there are always diverse goods available to human deliberative choice that are incompatible with one another, and which are equally morally “permissible” without thereby being morally equivalent. One might study this or that subject, or live in this or that city, such that one decision excludes another. Or one might choose to become a journalist rather than a philosopher, something arguably less noble, but not inherently morally illicit. Sometimes, however, choices of lesser goods necessarily harm or destroy the integrity or possibility of the greater good.²⁸ This is the case with regard to intrinsically evil acts.²⁹ Adultery naturally aims at a certain

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3, and q. 13, a. 3 ad 2.

²⁸ See *ST* I-II, q. 75, a. 1 corp. and ad 3 on the disordered love of a mutable good as the cause of sin: “. . . the will in failing to apply the rule of reason or of the divine law, is the cause of sin. Now the fact of not applying the rule of reason or of the divine law has not in itself the nature of evil . . . before it is applied to the act. Wherefore, accordingly, evil [as mere privation] is not the cause of the first sin, but some good lacking some other good.” See also *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 1 ad 1.

²⁹ On acts that are intrinsically evil due to their object, see *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 2 and q. 19, a. 2. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §§1755–1756: “A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together. An evil end corrupts the action, even if the object is good in itself (such as praying and

set of goods pertaining to the senses, the affectivity, and sometimes the human spirit (friendship of a sort). Yet it does grave harm to a person's spouse, marriage and children, as well as other important civic goods. The greater goods are harmed by the unreasonable preference for the lesser good, and so in actions of evil and good, vice and virtue, we see the emergence of an implicit hierarchy that human synderesis and ethical reasoning are capable of acknowledging at least in principle. For example, the well-being of one's children is more important than the temporary pursuit of sensual pleasure. The failure to acknowledge such a truth (by any person deemed capable of ordinary rationality) cannot stem from mere innocence, but betrays a kind of affected ignorance, and is therefore morally culpable.

When we speak of the rights of religious freedom, then, we should perceive clearly that one can employ the goods of created nature in ways that fail to acknowledge and serve not just any important created good, but the very uncreated goodness of God himself.³⁰ For example, a culture that would oblige religious citizens to forgo religious instruction, or that would force its citizens to participate in the destruction of unborn human life, would be in some sense a profoundly unethical and

fasting 'In order to be seen by men'). The object of the choice can by itself vitiate an act in its entirety. There are some concrete acts—such as fornication—that it is always wrong to choose, because choosing them entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil. It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) which supply their context. There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it." See in particular the discussion of this point by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter on the Splendor of Truth *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston: St Paul Books and Media, 1993), §§79–83.

³⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, §79: "The primary and decisive element for moral judgment is the object of the human act, which establishes whether it is *capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God*. This capability is grasped by reason in the very being of man, considered in his integral truth, and therefore in his natural inclinations, his motivations and his finalities, which always have a spiritual dimension as well. It is precisely these which are the contents of the natural law and hence that ordered complex of 'personal goods' which serve the 'good of the person': the good which is the person himself and his perfection. These are the goods safeguarded by the commandments, which, according to Saint Thomas, contain the whole natural law (Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 100, a. 1)." Vatican Website: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html#-3M.

antireligious society. Why is this the case? Because from the standpoint of mere natural reason, these are both deeply irrational, unethical, and irreligious actions.

At the same time, there is the need to acknowledge the respect of goods not only in the ascending but also in the descending order. The freedom of religious practice is capable of assuming to itself a host of inferior but intrinsically important activities of the civic and domestic, intellectual and artistic life of human persons and cultures. Yet in their historical religious practices human beings have also shown themselves capable of grave disrespect of human dignity and of other important natural goods (such as scientific learning, private property and so on) stemming from religious motives. Aquinas terms such practices “superstition” insofar as they represent an irrational or unethical vitiation of the virtue of religion itself.³¹ An obvious example pertains to human sacrifice, which was widespread in a myriad of ancient cultures. Likewise we could think of practices that harm the common good and lives of individuals: anti-scientific obscurantism, religiously motivated racism, cult-like practices, violence or terrorism based upon religious motives, religiously motivated suicide.

The conclusion of these reflections on the natural right to religious freedom should be twofold. First, the recognition of God in religious activity can orient human prudence with respect to the use of all secondary goods. Because it is inscribed in the very nature of human rationality and desire for happiness, religious behavior is an inevitable part of human culture (as long as human nature persists) and is a necessarily social reality, one that can justly have a public presence within the common life of society. The state or local community should be bound to recognize religious forms of social organization be they strictly for purposes of worship or ordered toward more proximate temporal ends (education or health-care, for example) insofar as these ends aim ultimately to serve both the common good of the temporal society (out of religious motivations) and the final religious orientation of man.³² Second, however, due precisely to the integrity of the common good, the state or the local community

³¹ *ST* II-II, q. 92.

³² *Dignitatis Humanae*, §4: “It comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious communities should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity. . . . [T]he social nature of man and the very nature of religion afford the foundation of the right of men freely to hold meetings and to establish educational, cultural, charitable and social organizations, under the impulse of their own religious sense.”

should in principle be able to ask religious persons and associations to respect the natural and civic order.³³ This presupposes, of course, that the state is aware of the structure of the natural law, and does not wish to violate it. Conflicts arise when there is disagreement about the content of these two principles, that is to say, regarding what genuinely pertains to the order of religious organizations and their right of free exercise, and what genuinely pertains to the goods and prudential activities that the state must defend or promote.

We can conclude by noting that a religiously inclusive conception of the hierarchy of goods needs to be maintained within any just form of societal common life. This inclusive hierarchy is ascending insofar as it makes way for the freedom of religious belief and practice. But it is descending as well, since it insists on a respect for temporal goods that are subject in a certain measure to the competence of the state as such. Just as respect for the freedom of religion should permit the human subject to orient the whole sphere of created life in society toward God, even in a public way, so also the religious orientation of life toward God should respect and promote the authentic goods of the temporal order, and the legitimate free exercise of the political life of a society. Seen in this light, human deliberations about temporal goods and the transcendent goodness of God are mutually complementary and not mutually exclusive. The transcendent and ineffable goodness of God is understood from the beginning as an end that is to be obtained in and through the pursuit of temporal goods and in and through a public life in society. The wisdom that stems from the public acknowledgement of God is architectonic with respect to the lesser sciences regarding all created goods. The prudence that governs our lives in view of God can assimilate respectfully the sane political prudence that governs our acts with respect to all temporal realities.

³³ Ibid., §3: "The search for truth . . . must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely, by free enquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue. It is by these means that men share with each other the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in such a way that they help one another in the search for truth. Moreover, it is by personal assent that men must adhere to the truth they have discovered."

The Supernatural End and Ecclesial Freedom: Theological Considerations

Traditional Catholic theology posits distinctively theological arguments in favor of the Church's civic freedom to proclaim the Gospel. This is a kind of collective right of the Church as an institution of divine origin, one having its primary foundation in the express will of Christ and the apostles. An important dimension of this "right" pertains to the freedom of the Church to promote the Catholic religion in a public and institutional way. This freedom, however, is of a twofold kind, one with regard to the internal structure and governance of the polity of the Church, the other with respect to the external political order. As a consequence of the former, the Church proclaims a right of jurisdiction (exercised by the pope and the bishops) with regard to the internal temporal life of the Church and her institutions (as was emphasized at both the First and Second Vatican Councils).³⁴ As a consequence of the latter, the Church proclaims a theological freedom for all citizens from religious coercion at the hands of the secular state.³⁵ The Church also correspondingly proclaims a right of the non-baptized to freedom from coercion by the baptized.³⁶ In a simpler fashion, one could say that the public life of society must respect both the theological rights of the baptized to practice the Christian religion and the theological rights of non-Christians to freely embrace or refuse baptism by their own deliberate choice. Since this order of reasoning is complex, we should seek to present it in a series of stages from within a Thomistic purview.

In its theological treatment of the grounds for religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* §11 states:

³⁴ First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 3. The teaching is strongly reiterated in Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, §§22–24.

³⁵ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §13: "Among those things that pertain to the good of the Church and indeed to the good of society here on earth, things which must everywhere and at all times be safeguarded and defended from all harm, the most outstanding surely is that the Church enjoy that freedom of action which her responsibility for the salvation of men requires. This is a sacred liberty with which the only-begotten Son of God endowed the Church which he purchased with his blood. Indeed it belongs so intimately to the Church that to attack it is to oppose the will of God." This statement is virtually a citation of Leo XIII's Encyclical on the Church in Bavaria *Officio Sanctissimo*, Promulgated December 22, 1887, §13, referred to in the Vatican II document.

³⁶ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §§2, 10.

God calls men to serve him in spirit and in truth. Consequently they are bound to him in conscience but not coerced. God has regard for the dignity of the human person which he himself created; the human person is to be guided by his own judgment and to enjoy freedom. This fact received its fullest manifestation in Christ Jesus in whom God revealed himself and his ways in a perfect manner.

We might summarize the claims being made here in a threefold way. First, God calls all human beings to a life of grace fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Second, the human person by virtue of his innate dignity is endowed with personal judgment and freedom. Third, this dignity reaches its greatest perfection in the service of Christ and his mystery.

Aquinas articulates the vocation of the Christian life in terms of his teleological action theory discussed above. The human being can naturally know a diversity of goods and can freely order his or her choice-making prudently in view of a diversity of ends.³⁷ It follows from this, then, that he or she can also structure human life around a given end as a final end.³⁸ Correspondingly, then, if a human being is newly moved and inclined by grace to the knowledge and love of God revealed in Christ, then the human person can in turn also order his or her life toward the mystery of God as a unique final end.³⁹ And this pursuit, even if it is supernatural, is not unnatural, for it presupposes and speaks to the human desire for happiness. The distinctively *Christian* life is ordered teleologically toward a most final and ultimate degree of happiness or beatitude, the happiness of the vision of God, or the beatific vision.⁴⁰ In short, the Christian is called to aim in each and every action at the

³⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7.

³⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 6.

³⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8.

⁴⁰ In saying this I am not ignoring that Henri de Lubac and others have argued that the human being *naturally* desires the immediate vision of God. I will return to this topic below. Here, however, I am only presuming the following: if man can *naturally* desire the immediate knowledge of God, he does so through the medium of the formal objects of knowledge that are connatural to him. Based on indirect, natural knowledge of God, he can desire to see the first cause or Creator immediately, even while recognizing that he cannot realize this possibility by his own powers. However, this natural knowledge and desire are distinct from the supernatural knowledge of the Holy Trinity as such, and from the inspired hope to see God face to face by the grace of supernatural beatitude. Aquinas is categorical about the difference. See *ST* I-II, q. 62, aa. 1–3. It is to the latter inclination that I am referring in this discussion.

most happy of all lives, the plenary participation in the life of God.

Aquinas is concerned to show that such a conception of human ethics is not unnatural, and that it does no violence to human nature. In his discussion of the natural love of angels for God, he makes the point that angels and men must be able to love God above all things according to the very structure of their nature (by way of a natural love of God distinct from the love of charity). Otherwise, the infused grace of charity, divine love, would be something so wholly alien to our nature as to remain purely extrinsic to our identity as persons.

[S]ince God is the universal good, and under this good both man and angel and all creatures are comprised, because every creature in regard to its entire being naturally belongs to God, it follows that from natural love angel and man alike love God before themselves and with a greater love. Otherwise, if either of them loved self more than God, it would follow that natural love would be perverse, and that it would not be perfected but destroyed by charity.⁴¹

The point here is not that all human beings are religious. (Aquinas analyzes the human capacity for irreligiosity in some detail.)⁴² Rather, the claim being made pertains to the very essence or structure of human action, irrespective of its eventual historical exercise in any given person. Just because we are the kind of rational being that remains innately capable of knowing and loving God, due to our spiritual nature, the work of grace in us is not something wholly unnatural or intrinsically alien, however secularized our human behavior may be in concrete history prior to or outside of the workings of grace.⁴³ Likewise, just as we are naturally capable of having God as a final end through the religious service of God, so the graces of infused faith, hope, and charity do no violence to the human being but elevate human persons into a

⁴¹ ST I, q. 60, a. 5.

⁴² ST II-II, qq. 92–100.

⁴³ Analogously, consider *Gaudium et Spes*, §14: “Now, man is not wrong when he regards himself as superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man. For by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things. He plunges into the depths of reality whenever he enters into his own heart; God, Who probes the heart, awaits him there; there he discerns his proper destiny beneath the eyes of God. Thus, when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the proper truth of the matter” (trans. DH).

form of existence that allows them to be more fully and more perfectly themselves. Charity allows us to regain a kind of (previously thwarted) access to our innermost selves as beings destined for happiness in God.⁴⁴ Catholic Christianity affirms, then, that the human being is capable of loving God above all things in the supernatural life of grace, and in a distinctively Christian way marked by the charity of Christ. This life is not contrary to human nature but in fact heals and elevates what is most profound and best in human nature.⁴⁵

We should note that the vision being articulated thus far implies a necessary respect for the order of the hierarchy of goods previously discussed in the first section of this essay. We are capable, it was said, of choosing the ultimate good in a religious manner in such a way as to respect the temporal order of created goods (in descending perspective) and we are capable of appreciating created goods in such a way as to order them religiously in view of God as a final end (in an ascending perspective). This vision is preserved but also recapitulated within the order of grace that has now been introduced. Human society “under” grace is capable of ordering the world of temporal goods toward the mystery of God revealed in Christ without destroying the integrity of that natural, temporal, and political order.⁴⁶ And likewise, political society is intrinsically open to the final good that is the Gospel, and can be “reanimated” from within, in view of specifically evangelical ends. The Gospel is not violent to human political society, and so, likewise, such society need not be inimical to the Gospel in order to preserve its own best integrity and natural practices. On the contrary, the openness of a person or a society to the life of grace serves as a gain to make it more fully itself and to invite into it a deeper form of flourishing and authentic

⁴⁴ ST I-II, q. 109, a. 3. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, §21: “The Church holds that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to man’s dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God. For man was made an intelligent and free member of society by God who created him, but even more important, he is called as a son to commune with God and share in His happiness. She further teaches that a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives. By contrast, when a divine instruction and the hope of life eternal are wanting, man’s dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attest; riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved with the frequent result that men succumb to despair” (trans. DH).

⁴⁵ See likewise *Gaudium et Spes*, §§ 38 and 40.

⁴⁶ This idea is thematic in *Gaudium et Spes*, but it was already underscored forcefully by Leo XIII in *Immortale Dei*, especially §§13, 14 and 32.

happiness. A civilization without Christ is a naturally diminished civilization, even gravely so.

Up to this point I have argued that the supernatural end of man invests the temporal order with a higher end, but not in such a way as to do violence to the natural integrity of the order of nature. In addition, however, *Dignitatis Humanae* suggests that this invitation to divine life not only ennoble human persons, but also reveals an inner core of human dignity understood uniquely in the more ultimate light of Christ. “The heaven of the Gospel has long been at work in the minds of men and has contributed greatly to a wider recognition by them in the course of time of their dignity as persons.”⁴⁷ From a Thomistic point of view, how might this point be amplified? The human nature of every person is invested with an intrinsic capacity for the life of grace, and an inalienable dignity accrues to the person by virtue of this fact. Moreover, just as each human being is capable of orienting him- or herself toward divine life freely (presuming the prior initiatives of grace), so there is a dignity to the internal religious judgments and decisions of each human person that is in some way inviolable. No merely temporal or created (secular) authority can determine from itself what fundamental religious or areligious choices a human being should make.⁴⁸ The state should respect the human freedom of each human person most ultimately because each person is capable of responding to the grace of Christ.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §12.

⁴⁸ This is why Aquinas argues (in quite a nuanced way) that a person may enter into religious life against his or her parents' wishes without prejudice to the virtue of piety (*ST* II-II, q. 189, a. 6). Likewise, a person can offer his or her own life to Christ in martyrdom to bear witness to the truth, even if this seems to many (falsely) to threaten the collective good of the state (*ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 1).

⁴⁹ A point underscored forcefully by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis*, §12: “Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’ (Jn 8:32) These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man’s soul, his heart and his conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still being given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint!”

A traditional teaching of the Catholic Church flows from this principle: the idea that non-baptized persons should not and may not be subject to compulsion or coercion by Christians with respect to matters of religion. Christianity can only be embraced freely, through the self-determination of individual and familial choices. “Although in the life of the people of God in its pilgrimage through the vicissitudes of human history there has at times appeared a form of behavior that was hardly in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel and was even opposed to it, it has always remained the teaching of the Church that no one is to be coerced into believing.”⁵⁰

Aquinas bears witness to this principle in a series of articles in the *Summa theologiae* concerned with the civic respect of the non-baptized and the free embrace of the Catholic faith. In part II-II, question 10, article 8, for example, he asks if unbelievers (*infideles*) ought to be compelled to the faith. He argues that they should not “in order that they may believe, because to believe depends on the will.” In other words, coercion of the non-baptized would imply something like the necessary privation of faith considered as such. Aquinas does, in this article, defend the rights of the Christian polity to defend the free practice of the faith by Christians and is thinking here no doubt about the state-privileged establishment of the Catholic religion, as well as the armed defense of the Catholic religion by means of the state. But he does insist that even in these cases it is impermissible for faith to be compelled from any human person. Furthermore, in article 10 of the same question he goes further in asking whether Christians might themselves be subject to the legitimate authority of a non-believer. Aquinas is not concerned merely with hypothetical settings, or the pre-Christian past, or territories outside medieval Europe. For in his own time the emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) had publicly apostatized from the Christian faith, and yet kept his authority over much of Europe despite antagonism against the papacy. Interestingly, Aquinas affirms the possibility of a legitimate authority in such a case, because “the divine law which is the law of grace, does not do away with human law which is the law of natural reason. Wherefore the distinction between the faithful and unbelievers, considered in itself, does not do away with dominion and authority of unbelievers over the faithful.”⁵¹ He does recognize that such authority can readily be employed in ways that

⁵⁰ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §12. In fact, the Catholic Church has perennially held that no sacrament can rightly be coerced either on the side of the minister or the recipient.

⁵¹ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 10.

do harm to Christian culture, and he rightfully underscores the traditional teaching that ultimately the temporal order is subject to the order of grace. Consequently, the Church is not subject to temporal authority whenever the latter would seek to submit citizens to any practice that would oblige them to violate their obligations owed to God or neighbor on account of the law of God.⁵² In other words, Aquinas insists palpably on the rights of religious conscience and on complete freedom for the Gospel in the face of anti-Catholic forms of government.

In part II-II, question 10, articles 11 and 12 of the *Summa*, Aquinas treats specifically the question of the Jewish people. In article 11 he asks whether the rites of unbelievers should be tolerated, and here enunciates a classical doctrine of the foundations for civic tolerance. Tolerance emerges naturally as a practice of the virtue of prudence, and is based on the idea that we should do well to sacrifice a lesser good if it will help us preserve a greater good. Likewise, lesser evils should be put up with so that we avoid greater evils. The case in point, here, has to do with non-Christian religious practices. The lesser evil is the civil tolerance shown to religious practices that are not in accord with the Catholic faith. The greater evil is the disregard for the dignity and respect of the human religious conscience even when it errs. Aquinas refers in a twofold way to the evil that would come from political coercion: “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.” In other words, if the Church were to employ force to suppress the religious practices of non-baptized persons, this would give rise to resentment and scandal at the institution of the Church. This could in turn do more to inhibit free conversion and eventual salvation than to encourage it. Speaking of the Jews here, however, Aquinas also mentions that their continued role in history alongside Christian persons has a positive function distinguishing them from members of other religions. Their practice bears witness to the antiquity of the revealed faith and their continued existence points toward the mystery of Christ’s eventual eschatological coming.

In part II-II, question 10, article 12, Aquinas asks whether the children of Jews and other non-believers might be baptized despite their parents’ wishes, and answers that they cannot, for a reason of fundamental human justice. Children rightly are educated and cared for by their parents, and so to enter into the life of the family for religious motivations in such

⁵² Ibid.

a way as to undermine familial unity and the prerogatives of parental education is to undermine the structure of the natural law.⁵³ This argument is in fact quite consequential, for since the family is (in truth and in Aquinas' thinking) the basis for any society and as family life requires the support of a larger society for its continuation and flourishing, so to acknowledge the rights of the non-Christian family to exist is to acknowledge in some basic way the rights of non-Christian society to exist in the midst of Christian society.⁵⁴ The Jewish culture has a limited but real right of social exercise for Aquinas, even at the heart of medieval culture. Extrapolating from the principles he establishes, even at the heights of medieval Christendom, it is clear that he thinks that there exists for Jews and other non-Christian religious cultures a fairly robust form of the right to religious freedom. We might note that this last argument is based on natural law, and resembles the argument presented in the first section of this essay. It is significant, however, that Aquinas maintains such a principle at the heart of his treatment of the prerogatives of faith. In other words, to rephrase Aquinas' point in the language of the Second Vatican Council: the dignity of the believer that stems from faith does not do away with, but should lead to a deeper appreciation of, the rights of religious conscience that stem from the natural law.⁵⁵

I have referred above to Aquinas' notion that the Church must possess the freedom to practice the faith, even in the midst of any non-Christian society. *Dignitatis Humanae* reiterates the idea in stark terms: "The freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle governing relations between the Church and public authorities and the whole civil order. . . . [T]he Church claims freedom for herself in human society and before every public authority."⁵⁶ When the modern Magisterium defends this principle, it tends to appeal overtly to the hierarchy of human ends. The natural order is subject to the supernatural order, just as all ends that are natural to man, no matter how exalted, are ultimately utterly

⁵³ ST II-II, q. 10, a. 12: "It would be contrary to natural justice, if a child, before coming to the use of reason, were to be taken away from its parents' custody, or anything done to it against its parents' wishes. As soon, however, as it begins to have the use of its free-will, it begins to belong to itself, and is able to look after itself, in matters concerning the divine or the natural law, and then it should be induced, not by compulsion but by persuasion, to embrace the faith."

⁵⁴ Aquinas follows Aristotle in thinking that the domestic household is the basic cell of political society. See his *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, ed. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), lec. 1, nn. 11–18.

⁵⁵ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §13.

subordinate to the supernatural end of divine life.⁵⁷ Consequently, just as the pope must govern the Church in view of the salvation of human persons in grace, so he must be able to delineate when they may and may not cooperate with temporal government, insofar as the latter disposes them toward or hinders their attainment to eternal life. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, “[w]hen the principle of religious freedom is . . . implemented sincerely in practice, only then does the Church enjoy in law and in fact those stable conditions which give her the independence necessary for fulfilling her divine mission.”⁵⁸

The positive restatement of the idea is found in the notion that the Church should possess the exercise of civic liberty not only to propose the Catholic faith, but also to enjoy the public expression of that faith in the form of institutions of Christian learning and charity (hospitals, schools, universities, religious orders). The public character of the Church is essential to her constitution and consequently must be admitted to any civil society that would rightly accept the complete exercise of evangelical religious liberty. This is the case in a twofold way. First it is necessary that the Church be able to govern her own internal affairs in accord with the demands of the Catholic religion in such a way that the state does not intrude unjustly into the determination of the norms and practices of the Catholic Church. Consequently, the Church has the plenary right to give the sacraments to those she deems rightly disposed, and to deny the sacraments to those who violate the basic tenets of the Gospel, whether in word or in deed. Concretely speaking, this means that all public citizens should have the natural, political right to convert to the Catholic faith, just as there is the divine right of the Church to welcome all those who wish to practice the Catholic faith. Likewise, the Church has the divine right and responsibility to excommunicate members of the Church for a just reason, to protect the common good of the larger ecclesial body, and to clarify the truth of the Church’s teaching when it is contested in a way that risks seriously to mislead others. By extension, the Church must have the freedom to govern all of her institutions founded according to principles of charity (hospitals, universities, schools) in light of all the principles and practices of the Catholic faith, barring none.

Second, however, this teaching on the freedom of the Church also requires that the Church be permitted to influence the civic life of public

⁵⁷ Leo XIII’s *Immortale Dei* is explicit about this in §§4–10. See likewise Pius XI, *Firmissimam Constantiam*, Promulgated March, 28, 1937, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 29 (1937), 196, as well as the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, §76.

⁵⁸ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §13.

society in its ordinary ethical practices. This last affirmation may seem inherently problematic. After all, is the Church not supposed to respect the diversity of viewpoints present in the public domain, just as she asks non-Catholics to respect her temporal autonomy? That is to say, should the Church not divorce herself from the world of temporal affairs and the views and practices of those who are not Catholic Christians, as a sign of shared respect and mutual non-coercion?

The objection fails to observe that the Church can seek to influence civic culture in ways that are in accord with the just norms of civic deliberation and dispute, and free legislative procedures. For in the first place, the Church proposes in the civic square, above all, the kinds of natural law arguments that are in principle accessible to all human persons independently of their stance with regard to supernatural divine revelation.⁵⁹ Recalling and advocating for moral norms at the heart of the civic life of a society is not only permissible, but necessary and indeed at some level inevitable. Each civilization conducts disputes about the content of right ethical practices and the Church reserves the right to be fully engaged in that dispute, according to the norms of public natural reason. In addition, however, the Church can certainly advocate, especially in a society composed of a high percentage of Catholic Christians, for practices of the state that respect and even promote reasonably the practice of the Christian religion.⁶⁰ A benign but symbolic example is the request of Bene-

⁵⁹ See, in this regard, the 2002 Doctrinal Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on "The Participation of Catholics in Public Life," §5, which warns against an ethical relativism in the public square: "... no Catholic can appeal to the principle of pluralism or to the autonomy of lay involvement in political life to support policies affecting the common good which compromise or undermine fundamental ethical requirements. This is not a question of 'confessional values' *per se*, because such ethical precepts are rooted in human nature itself and belong to the natural moral law. They do not require from those who defend them the profession of the Christian faith, although the Church's teaching confirms and defends them always and everywhere as part of her service to the truth about man and about the common good of civil society. Moreover, it cannot be denied that politics must refer to principles of absolute value precisely because these are at the service of the dignity of the human person and of true human progress" (trans. Vatican Website: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html#_ftnref10).

⁶⁰ See the nuanced statements in this regard in *Gaudium et Spes*, §76, and Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles laici*, Promulgated December 30, 1988 (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, 1989), §42.

dict XVI in his 2012 apostolic visit to the historically Catholic country of Cuba that the communist government recognize Good Friday as a national holiday.⁶¹ Analogously, in countries where authentic democracy exists, a majority Catholic populace might promote ecclesial institutions such as schools, universities, and hospitals *by means of state mechanisms*, if they do so without any disrespect for the rights of religious freedom of non-Catholic or non-Christian minorities.

The kind of influence being articulated in these last examples (by either advocacy for natural law or for the Catholic faith itself) is of an indirect nature. *Directly*, the Church appeals to the consciences of human beings in their deliberative prudence. She can appeal to all persons *both* through the natural law *and* by means of explicit appeals to divine revelation and to the Gospel. However, her influence on the institutions of civic government is thereby only *indirect*. It is because the subjects of the government, whether in positions of leadership or as voting members of a democratic polity, decide to act on the appeals made to their consciences that the Church acts in the civic sphere. Her action is mediated through the consciences and prudential deliberations of the agents who themselves enact governmental norms. It is possible in principle to have a Catholic democratic state, for example, where by constitutional charter, voting and governmental self-determination, the people freely subordinate the natural common life and its various goods and ends to the highest end of divine life. In principle, the Church and the modern nation state can co-exist quite irenically, according to the various metaphysical and ethical principles delineated by *Dignitatis Humanae*. At the same time, we should retain the realism underscored so powerfully by Leo XIII: in a fallen world, it is difficult for human persons and the societies composed of them to grasp the full range of conclusions that derive from the natural law, let alone to live in accord with its teachings. It is for this reason that a just and balanced establishment of the true religion by the state is preferable in principle.⁶² If administered humanely and according to Christian principles of justice and prudential tolerance, such a state would better initiate human persons to the right knowledge and recognition of the truths about human nature, moral virtues, and the care for the common good.

⁶¹ Similarly, the Cuban government made Christmas a national holiday following a request made by Pope John Paul II during his 1998 visit.

⁶² See *Immortale Dei*, §§6–7 and 26–27.

The Harmony of the Natural and Supernatural Ends: Toward a More Perfect Religious Freedom

Dignitatis Humanae makes no overt appeal to a teleological conception of human action, let alone to the particular conception of human action that is articulated in the Thomistic moral tradition. Nevertheless, it is safe to presume that the Council Fathers considered Thomistic action theory one important form—perhaps even the most privileged form—of reflection on such matters in the Catholic philosophical tradition.⁶³ Given that this is the case, it is legitimate to consider what implications the document might have for a Thomistic theory of the final end of man, and vice versa. How might a Thomistic conception of human final ends, both natural and supernatural, allow us to understand the internal harmony of the diverse arguments that have been elaborated above?

In the last section of this essay, then, I would like to consider briefly not only the harmony but also the distinction between the natural and supernatural final ends that the arguments of *Dignitatis Humanae* would seem to presuppose. In a sense the document even theoretically requires such a distinction. Why is this the case?

The basic claim I have made up to this point is the following: *Dignitatis Humanae* offers us two forms of argumentation in favor of the rights of religious liberty. One is based on the natural law and the other on revelation. Interpreted in a Thomistic perspective, the first argument appeals to the natural truth that human beings are capable of a religious final end that precedes all others. They can, in principle, seek God and recognize that he exists, contemplate God (however indirectly and imperfectly), serve him religiously, and even naturally desire to know God immediately, if possible.⁶⁴ The second appeals to the supernatural truth that

⁶³ See, for example, the Second Vatican Council's appeal to Aquinas' philosophical and theological teaching as normative for seminary training (Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam Totius*, §§15–16).

⁶⁴ Aquinas refers to the “imperfect beatitude” that human beings can naturally aspire to in many places. See, for example, *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 6, and q. 62, aa. 1–3. As is well known, Henri de Lubac argued (*Surnaturel: Études historiques* [Paris: Aubier, 1946]) that Aquinas envisages only one ultimate final end for man, the immediate vision of God, which is supernatural. This interpretation has been defended by many renowned modern interpreters of Aquinas. I will not seek to clarify precisely how my reading of Aquinas converges with or differs from that of De Lubac. See, in this regard, Thomas Joseph White, “Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man: Thomas Aquinas and the Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy,” *The Thomist*, 78 (2014): 247–89. For the purposes of the argument in this essay the following can simply be noted. I am presuming (1) that the

human beings are capable by grace of participating in the divine life of the Holy Trinity, and of seeing God face to face. Aquinas distinguishes, then, between the connatural end of man, and the supernatural end. The nature of the human person is incapable, by its own resources, of attaining either to knowledge or love of the supernatural end. For this, grace is necessary.

The theological virtues direct man to supernatural happiness in the same way as by the natural inclination man is directed to his *connatural end*. Now the latter happens in respect of two things. First, in respect of the reason or intellect, in so far as it contains the first universal principles which are known to us by the natural light of the intellect, and which are reason's starting-point, both in speculative and in practical matters. Secondly, through the rectitude of the will which tends naturally to good as defined by reason. But these two fall short of the order of supernatural happiness, according to 1 Cor. 2:9: "The eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him." Consequently in respect of both the above things man needed to receive in addition something supernatural to direct him to a *supernatural end*. First, as regards the

human being possesses innate natural inclinations toward proportionate connatural objects of knowledge and love, and that the ultimate horizon of the natural human desire for the truth and for love of the good is God himself. This natural desire to know God is rendered consciously explicit or is awakened, according to Aquinas, through the natural knowledge of God. (2) Based on the *imperfect beatitude* that man is capable of by an indirect natural knowledge of the First Truth, he can desire naturally to know God immediately, by direct vision, if this were possible. This is what the Thomist commentators traditionally referred to as a "conditional, elicited desire" to see God (although Aquinas does not employ that terminology himself). According to St. Thomas, the rationality of this desire is *philosophically defensible*. Natural reason may demonstrate that man is capable of, and in a sense made for, the immediate knowledge of God. The principles of this argument do not stem from divine revelation as such. (3) This natural desire to see God is not identical in origin or aspiration to the supernaturally inspired inclination to know the Blessed Trinity, revealed in Christ. The latter aspiration is possible only by means of the infused theological virtues, which are not "anticipated" ontologically by any natural inclination of the human soul. It is only possible to aspire to the grace of the beatific vision (leading to immediate knowledge of the Trinity) by the prior initiative of God, which is supernatural. According to Aquinas this object of hope can be known *only by means of divine revelation*, and not by means of philosophical demonstration.

intellect, man receives certain supernatural principles, which are held by means of a divine light: these are the articles of faith, about which is faith. Secondly, the will is directed to this end, both as to that end as something attainable—and this pertains to hope—and as to a certain spiritual union, whereby the will is, so to speak, transformed into that end—and this belongs to charity. For the appetite of a thing is moved and tends towards its connatural end naturally; and this movement is due to a certain conformity of the thing with its end.⁶⁵

I have argued throughout this essay that the good of religion and natural temporal goods may be pursued in a non-competitive, hierarchical way. This is true already on a natural level, regarding the good of religion “philosophically” and considering it in relation to other rationally discernible goods. This order of ascending and descending hierarchy is preserved and recapitulated in the supernatural life of grace. Grace acts to orient human persons toward a supernatural final end in such a way that it does no intrinsic violence to what is authentically best and most ultimate in human government and in human religious practices.⁶⁶ On the contrary, it works to purify and elevate such practices.

It follows from these considerations, however, that there must exist in some real sense a *philosophically identifiable* natural final end of man that is religious (characterized by knowledge and love of God) and that is distinct both ontologically and logically from the supernatural end of man. The reason for this is the following. The formal object of supernatural faith and hope is supernatural beatitude (the immediate vision of the Holy Trinity). This is something known only through the medium of divine revelation.⁶⁷ If there were a uniquely supernatural end of human existence, then it would be impossible to argue from the premises of natural law and philosophical reason to the conclusion that human beings have a natural possibility to orient themselves religiously toward a good

⁶⁵ In *ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 3 (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ For an example of this principle in Aquinas, see *ST* II-II, q. 26, on the *ordo caritatis*, where he shows that the grace of charity preserves and elevates the order of natural loves that stem from the human family and society.

⁶⁷ As Aquinas teaches (*ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 3) and De Lubac agrees in his mature position (*The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, [New York: Herder and Herder, 1998], 208–209). This idea is also necessarily entailed by the teaching of *Dei Filius*, chs. 2–3, on the formally supernatural character of the mysteries of faith and their intrinsic inaccessibility to natural human reason.

that transcends the state, and indeed, the created order as such.⁶⁸ The right to religious freedom is intelligible to human reason only on the precondition of the affirmation of such a natural end. Otherwise, one of two things would follow necessarily. Either we would be able to prove from principles of natural reason that there exists a supernatural final end (which is tantamount to a form of rationalist error officially condemned by Catholic teaching), or we would be unable to form any kind of natural law argument at all for the innately religious orientation of all human action. This, however, would stand in direct contradiction to *Dignitatis Humanae*.⁶⁹ Consequently, the only reasonable option is to hold that we can affirm by the arguments of natural reason the inherent good of a religious form of life because religious action (by knowledge and service of God) forms a kind of natural end for the human person.⁷⁰

It might be objected, understandably, that this kind of language seems very much to reflect a “two-story” theory of nature and grace, in which grace and the world of the supernatural are portrayed as something wholly extrinsic to a natural and political order that is already in some way complete without grace. This is a mischaracterization for two reasons. The first is because the argument offered above pertains to the structure of human actions, not their concrete historical exercise. Aquinas holds that the natural structure of the human person is such

⁶⁸ For the sake of argument, we might concede that a diversity of interpretations of the “final end of man” would be compatible with *Dignitatis Humanae* on this point. One might argue, for example, that the immediate vision of God is the unique natural end of man, but that this can be known by a demonstration that is formally *philosophical and rational in nature*, and not uniquely through the medium of faith. For an argument of this sort (which I think differs in noteworthy ways from that of De Lubac), see Adriano Oliva in “La Contemplation des Philosophes selon Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 96 (2012): 585–662, esp. 631–641. In this case, one must distinguish the *material object* of the natural desire of man (the immediate knowledge of God) from the two distinct *formal objects* under which the person may aspire to this end: as known philosophically (mediately through creatures, very imperfectly) and as known theologically by means of divine revelation.

⁶⁹ *Dignitatis Humanae*, §9: “The declaration of this Vatican Council on the right of man to religious freedom has its foundation in the dignity of the person, whose exigencies have come to be fully known to human reason through centuries of experience.” See also §2.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Healy, Jr. offers an interpretation of De Lubac that seeks to preserve an adequate sense of natural teleology, overlapping in significant ways with the traditional Thomist position (“Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate,” *Communio* 35 [Winter, 2008]: 535–564).

that the being of man is inherently ordered toward religious action. But this action can be distorted or disordered in many ways. As I have noted above, Aquinas argues that in the concrete historical order, the human person is incapable of loving God above all things, even naturally, without grace.⁷¹ Therefore, it is possible to argue even philosophically that human beings ought to be religious in some way (that religion is not unnatural), and yet it is not possible to procure religious acts that are truly virtuous in any unambiguous sense, without the work of the grace of Christ. Why, then, we might ask, ought one even to bother with rational, philosophical argumentation at all? The reasons are multiple, but one answer is that we should not reject one extreme so as to fall into the other. If human beings cannot be “successfully” religious without grace, that does not mean that without grace they simply become an abyss of irreligiosity. Fallen human beings are capable of being traversed by religious instincts and intuitions and may be open to the public arguments of religious persons, including arguments stemming from appeals to philosophical realism, and principles of the natural law. More to the point, the grace of Christ can also work precisely through and on the occasion of such arguments, calling human beings through reason to a life of grace, and through grace, to a life of reason. Grace invites the human person to an end that human nature cannot obtain by its own powers, but it also heals human nature even as it elevates.

The second reason that a “two-story” theory of nature and grace is a mischaracterization is that philosophical argumentation regarding the natural end of man is not meant to exclude or render superfluous the appeal to the supernatural life as the final end of man. Paradoxical as it might seem, the natural end is in a certain sense the necessary foundation and presupposition for any theological appeal to an ultimate final end possible only through the work of grace.⁷² For only if the supernatural life of grace is not something wholly extrinsic to human natural desires is it in turn something that can fulfill and elevate human striving *intrinsically*, albeit gratuitously. When we speak of a natural final end of human beings that is religious, therefore, we need to add a qualification, drawn from Aquinas himself. Our desire for God insofar as it is natural, is a desire based upon mediate knowledge of God as the transcending cause

⁷¹ ST I-II, q. 109, a. 3.

⁷² I argue in this vein at greater length in “Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man.” See also Reinhard Huetter, “Aquinas on the Natural Desire for the Vision of God: A Relecture of *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, c. 25, après Henri de Lubac,” in *The Thomist* 73, no. 4 (2009): 523–591.

of created existence and the providential guardian of human history.⁷³ Human religiosity attempts, however misguided, to respond to the gift of created existence and to appeal to divine intervention in the midst of the travails of human life.⁷⁴ But such mediate knowledge and such appeals are utterly impotent of themselves and have in themselves no sure foundation as to the perfect knowledge of God, or as to the acquired religious destiny of the human person and the human community.⁷⁵ In our concrete fallen state, the effective exercise of the natural final end of man (the desire for perfect knowledge of God and loving service of God) is not only wounded or fragile (as noted above) but also inherently obscure and imperfect. We remain necessarily bound to seek for more than the political state can provide. But what it is that we seek remains also quite elusive, and a lucid understanding of the reality of God often utterly eludes us. Consequently, the more we appreciate the natural end of man and its imperfection, the more we see the fitting need for revelation.

Contrary to the initial suspicion, then, the concern to safeguard a natural end that is religious is not meant to impede the appeal to God's supernatural revelation of himself to human beings in Christ. Rather, a more exacting study of the structure of this natural desire shows its intrinsic openness or capacity to receive the supernatural mystery of Christ. Such a philosophical form of reflection shows that whatever the secularization or religious confusion of the human community throughout history, human persons remain structurally, innately made for the knowledge of God, and therefore open to conversion to Christ.⁷⁶ One cannot demonstrate from natural reason that the Christian mystery is true. If it is true, however, and if a supernatural beatitude exists, then there exists a plausible rational coherence between the mystery of faith and the

⁷³ See, in particular, *SCG* III, chs. 48–51, and *ST* I, q. 12, a. 1, where Aquinas explicitly appeals to an argument from philosophical reason for the natural character of the desire to see God immediately and its natural possibility. Meanwhile, Aquinas also insists that man has no natural power to attain this goal (*SCG* III, c. 52).

⁷⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 1.

⁷⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 99, a. 3 corp. and ad 2, and q. 98, a. 5; II-II, q. 85, aa. 1 and 4, and q. 94, aa. 1–2.

⁷⁶ Aquinas even speaks of an “innate desire” to see God immediately that is awakened by a consideration of God based on his created effects. See *De Virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 10, corp (*Disputed Question on the Virtues in General*, trans. R. McNerny [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999]). And yet, he is also clear that there is no natural inclination toward the formally supernatural object of faith as such (*ST* I-II, q. 62, aa. 1–3). And so our innate inclination toward God must be healed and elevated by grace to a yet higher object than that to which it might attain naturally.

natural religious inclinations of the human person. For the human person is inherently inclined by the desire for the good toward a transcendent end that is religious, but one that the human intellect only perceives (if at all) very imperfectly and in a mediated fashion. Consequently, the grace of supernatural beatitude comes to awaken, rectify, and elevate this natural inclination both gratuitously and intrinsically, accomplishing what nature by its own powers could aspire to only ineffectively and through a kind of moral velleity.

The supernatural end of man, therefore, makes demands upon the natural teleological orientation of man. However, in keeping with the argument elaborated above, we should note that the demands work the other way as well. The supernatural end must speak to the aspirations of the natural end, and be able thereby to complete all human longing for the good. Insofar as grace intersects with the structure of human nature, however, it also must fulfill and elevate the whole teleological edifice of human behavior with respect to the hierarchy of goods. That is to say, the life of grace must respect the aforementioned structure of nature and the ordered diversity of goods that falls under the consideration of the natural law.⁷⁷ Appeals to supernatural revelation that would seek to violate the natural order are not rationally defensible. Forms of religious behavior that lay claim to the mystery of revelation, of Christ or of grace, but which do violence to human life, human civilization, human psychological or moral health: these are all incompatible with a right understanding of the Catholic faith.⁷⁸ We can think here again of Aquinas' affirmation that Jewish children cannot be baptized by force. What presupposition lies behind this teaching that is found in the heart of his treatise on the faith? It is a presupposition of the natural law. It is in fact problematic to seek to understand the dignity of the supernatural vocation without a corresponding reflection on natural justice and the final end of man,

⁷⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* strongly suggests this point of view in §§74, 79 and 89, all of which insist on the distinction but inter-connection between promotion of the proclamation of the Gospel, the natural law, and the common good.

⁷⁸ Benedict XVI underscored this point in his Encyclical Letter on Charity in Truth *Caritas in Veritate* (Washington, D.C.: United States Council of Catholic Bishops, 2009), §29: "Today, in fact, people frequently kill in the holy name of God, as both my predecessor John Paul II and I myself have often publicly acknowledged and lamented. Violence puts the brakes on authentic development and impedes the evolution of peoples towards greater socio-economic and spiritual well-being. This applies especially to terrorism motivated by fundamentalism, which generates grief, destruction and death, obstructs dialogue between nations and diverts extensive resources from their peaceful and civil uses."

for without such a reflection, we might not only fail to promote natural justice, but also defame or render obscure the integrity of the Christian mystery itself.

What follows from these reflections is a twofold warning. In the absence of a robust concept of the natural final end of man as a religious end, one of two difficulties might emerge for theology. On the one hand, there is the danger that we might lose all manner of articulating in the public square the rational basis for the right to religious freedom. Consequently, theology will make appeal only to a private right of conscience that differs for public reason in no sufficiently discernible way from the appeal to a preferred aesthetic, recreation, diet, or popular entertainment. In a world where there is increasingly little if any concerted thought given to the nature of human religious capacities, it is important for Christian philosophers and theologians to pay special attention to the articulation of the metaphysical and natural law foundations for religious freedom and the rational integrity of religious practice. Denial of a natural end of the human person decidedly puts theology in peril on this important front.

Second, in a world in which religious practices are often decidedly irrational, violent, and cult-like, there is the danger that all normative religious practices might be seen as intrinsically alienating to reason. Consequently, the attentiveness to the distinction and interplay of the natural and supernatural dimensions of religious practice is important so as to protect and advance a traditional, rational, and just form of religious belief and practice. That is to say, a form of religious practice that takes responsibility for the common good, for the dignity of human learning in the arts and sciences, for the rights of human conscience, and for the respect of religious freedom. To have an adequate *theological* articulation of these values, sacred theology must make use of an adequately realistic philosophical understanding of the religious character of human persons and of human culture.

Conclusion

The thoughts offered above may seem to be utopian. In fact, we know that religious liberty (particularly that of Christians) is far from secure in many parts of the world. Human beings labor under the consequences of sin, such that far from entertaining the philosophical merits of any religious orientation toward God, they often neglect such an idea altogether. The consideration of the structural truth about the human person and the nature of religious freedom is imperative, however. For only

when we can see clearly what health is, are we able to understand the characteristics of the disease, and the nature of the cure. *Dignitatis Humanae* gives us important clues as to what constitutes genuine health for human religious culture in the twenty-first century. If we would be cured from the sickness of religious alienation and indifference in the world today, we would do well to heed its teachings. It is the truth of Christ, and the true religion of Christ, that genuinely manifest in depth the dignity of man. N&V