

The Church as the Defender of Conscience in Our Age

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“CONTEMPORARY men are becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person and more and more of them are demanding that, in acting, men should enjoy and use their own counsel and responsible freedom without being subjected to coercion but rather being led by the duty of conscience.”¹ Thus begins Vatican II’s declaration on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*. In this opening sentence of the declaration three central themes of the document are enunciated: the dignity of the human person, responsible freedom,² and conscience.³ These three ideas along with that of truth not only furnish the fundamental dynamics which inspire the formulation of this document but are also intimately interconnected with each other as will become evident in the course of this article. The declaration goes on to introduce the basic political concern it aims to address, namely, “the limitation of public powers lest the ends of virtuous/moral freedom and of the person and of associations be excessively circumscribed by them,”⁴ and specifies more

¹ “Dignitatis humanae personae homines hac nostra aetate magis in dies conscii fiunt, atque numerus eorum crescit qui exigunt, ut in agendo homines proprio suo consilio et libertate responsabili fruantur et utantur, non coercitione commoti, sed officii conscientia ducti.” My translation.

² The qualification of the word “freedom” by “responsible” indicates that we are not dealing with any absolutist conception of freedom.

³ The notion of conscience is not completely obvious in the translation by Laurence Ryan in *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1998), 799: “[I]nspired by a sense of duty.”

⁴ Ibid.: “Itemque postulant iuridicam delimitationem potestatis publicae, ne fines honestae libertatis et personae et associationum nimis circumscribantur.” My

narrowly the concern of the Council, namely, that freedom in society is chiefly concerned with spiritual goods,⁵ especially those that regard the free exercise of religion. In brief, *Dignitatis Humanae* is concerned with the free exercise of religion in society as an expression of the objective constitution of the human person as well as with its contribution to the common good. If it is truly a virtue and as such conduces to the well-being of the human person, religion will also direct citizens towards the common good.⁶

The declaration situates the themes of freedom, conscience, and truth in the context of the natural law. It does not, however, expound upon the basis or nature of human freedom or its relation to conscience; neither does it clarify the relationship between conscience and truth. It presupposes, rather, a particular understanding, one which receives expression in the papal writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as well as being informed by the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. In what follows, I will elucidate the relationship between freedom, conscience, and truth as construed in these sources in order to gain a more adequate understanding of conscience, that is to say, an understanding that accords with the existential reality of the human person in its entirety. This understanding is fundamentally at variance with that which commonly informs contemporary discourse and practical affairs. The understanding espoused by the Church views human nature as inscribed by God with its specific structure and natural inclinations. The natural inclinations which are rooted in our psychosomatic nature are expressions of God's providential care for us. They both provide us with clearly discernible guides for moral action and direct us towards final union with God as the ultimate Good. Since they are intrinsic to human nature itself they in fact furnish the conditions for

translation. Ryan translates this sentence as: "At the same time they are demanding constitutional limitation of the powers of government to prevent excessive restriction of the rightful freedom of individuals and associations."

⁵ Ibid.: "[A]nimi humani bona." To translate "bona" as "values," as Ryan does, introduces a subjectivist tenor which is arguably alien to the intent of the document's authors.

⁶ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 58, a. 5: "Now it is evident that all who are included in a community, stand in relation to that community as parts to a whole; while a part, as such, belongs to a whole, so that whatever is the good of a part can be directed to the good of the whole. It follows therefore that the good of any virtue, whether such virtue direct man in relation to himself, or in relation to certain other individual persons, is referable to the common good, to which justice directs: so that all acts of virtue can pertain to justice, in so far as it directs man to the common good." The scope of this essay doesn't permit a full-scale discussion of the notion of the common good in Catholic social teaching or in St. Thomas. For some clarification, however, see the appendix.

a proper exercise of freedom and in no way undermine it. Thus human freedom is at once embodied and has its ultimate ground in God.

The anthropology espoused by the Church differs radically from that which predominates in some form or other in the Western world; consequently, her understanding of freedom and conscience also diverges substantially from that which characterizes this society. Therein lies the source not only of a clash of cultures with regard to bioethical and sexual ethical issues but also the source of attacks on the right to religious liberty, the beginnings of which we arguably have witnessed in Obama's healthcare bill in the USA, in the refusal to allow Catholic adoption agencies in the UK to refer children to heterosexual families alone, and in the desire to remove the Catholic Church from education in Ireland. This article aims to illustrate why the natural inclinations have become a ferocious battle ground between contemporary democracies and the Church as the guarantor of freedom and conscience. The first step in illustrating this position requires, as already intimated, that we explicate the understanding of freedom espoused by the Church, a freedom that is both grounded in God and embodied.

The Divine Ground and Embodied Constitution of Human Freedom

Following St. Thomas, John Paul II succinctly describes the relationship between God, human reason, the moral law, and human law: "*The moral law has its origin in God and always finds its source in him*: at the same time, by virtue of natural reason, which derives from divine wisdom, it is *properly human law*."⁷ Creation means that the autonomy that is ascribed to practical reason is what *Veritatis Splendor* terms a "*participated theonomy*."⁸ We possess in ourselves a law but not in the sense that we are free to create values and moral norms. Kantian-inspired fears of heteronomy are easily discounted since the moral life is not here viewed as if it "were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom."⁹ Rather, God expresses His providential care to human beings in a way that is at once an expression of the very structure of human being itself, namely, "through reason, which by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law, is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions."¹⁰ Martin Rhonheimer

⁷ *Veritatis Splendor* §39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, §41.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §43.

expresses this point well with reference to practical reason's moving principle, namely, the natural inclinations:

In order for the ordering and lawgiving act of the practical reason (as a cognitive participation in the eternal law) not to be falsified, the human reason can never "emancipate" itself from its moving principle, the *actus proprius* of the natural inclinations. The *ordinatio rationis* of the natural law is not a law that has these natural inclinations at its disposal, but is rather an ordering *in* the natural inclinations, since they are an expression of the plan of divine providence, at the level of the very structure of our being. They participate in the "directive power" of the eternal law.¹¹

Not only are the specific natural inclinations—to self-preservation, to procreation and education of offspring, and to knowledge of the truth—inscribed within the structure of the human being by God's providential creative act, but as expressions of the basic inclination to the good they are teleologically ordered towards ultimate fulfilment in God, the Supreme Good. God draws all things to Himself in virtue of the innate principles that He has inscribed within their being. In the case of human beings, these principles are reason and the natural inclinations: reason reflecting upon the natural inclinations directs the human being to final union with God. As Thomas writes: "The natural law is promulgated by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known by him naturally."¹²

If human freedom is to be understood correctly, however, it must be grasped not only in its reference to its Creator but also in the truth of its own constitution. Anthropology and conceptions of freedom go hand in hand. A true conception of freedom necessarily takes account of the human person in his entirety, that is to say, as a psychosomatic unity. Freedom properly construed is therefore not absolute but is embodied. Following St. Thomas on this point, the Church proclaims "*the unity of the human person*, whose rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body." John Paul II goes on to elaborate the implications of this point as follows:

¹¹ Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 250–51. See also John M. Haas, who writes: "There is no hint of heteronomy in a morality grounded in the doctrine of creation, because the moral law is but an expression of one's very nature. Man's very being comes from an external Source—God. But there is a way in which the Source does not remain external. In the very act of creation, the image of the Source becomes an attribute of man himself, body and soul" ("Crisis of Conscience and Culture," in *Crisis of Conscience*, ed. John M. Haas [New York: Crossroad, 1996], 41).

¹² *ST* I–II, q. 90, a. 4, ad 1.

The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole—*corpore et anima unus*—as a person. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. *The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts.* The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. It is in the light of the dignity of the human person—a dignity which must be affirmed for its own sake—that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined. And since the human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure, the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a mere means also implies, by its very nature, respect for certain fundamental goods, without which one would fall into relativism and arbitrariness.¹³

True human freedom has parameters outside of which it cannot venture without undermining the conditions of its own exercise and these parameters are set by human nature itself, which nature is at once spiritual and corporeal. To exalt the spiritual dimension in such a way as to allow it to lord it over and to manipulate the bodily dimensions of human

¹³ *Veritatis Splendor* §48. For a magisterial account of Thomas's anthropology, see Gilles Emery, O.P., "The Unity of Man, Body and Soul, in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 209–35. The confines of this article do not permit a defense of the notion of the human as psychosomatically constituted. For a contemporary philosophical defense of this view, see David Braine, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Braine argues that human beings are not "assemblages of parts, inner and outer," but rather "wholes—psychophysical wholes—wholes in whose operations the mental cannot be extricated from the physical and the physical cannot be understood apart from the mental" (ibid., 22–23). Lawrence A. Shapiro, *The Mind Incarnate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) draws upon a variety of sources (e.g., neuroscience, evolutionary theory, and embodied cognition), to develop an argument that converges with the positions of Thomas, John Paul II as representative of the Catholic magisterium, and Braine. Shapiro writes that "as embodied cognition research progresses, the traditional boundaries between mind and body will either continue to fade or will require extensive realignment. In short, my bet is that the mind is far more incarnate than most philosophers, and certainly most laypersons have appreciated" (ibid., 228). Thomas, John Paul II, and the Catholic magisterium are not to be included among "most philosophers" and "most laypersons."

being is properly speaking a violation of true human freedom and of the dignity of the human person.

The foregoing discussion of the divine ground and embodied constitution of human freedom is a necessary prelude to an understanding of magisterial teaching concerning conscience. As the next section will clarify, conscience is intimately bound up with freedom in that it too presupposes the natural inclinations in its exercise and can therefore also be rightly considered God's herald and messenger.

Embodied Conscience as God's Herald and Messenger

It is precisely man's constitution as a psychosomatic unity that explains how the precepts of the natural law, the first principles of human actions, structure the mind.¹⁴ Thomas employs the traditional term *synderesis* to express this idea: "*Synderesis* is said to be the law of our mind, because it is a habit containing the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions."¹⁵ The first two precepts mentioned by

¹⁴ Thomas states the precepts of the natural law at *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2: "Since, however, good has the nature of an end and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law. Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue with this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, *which nature has taught to all animals*, such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to the know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination."

¹⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2. While it is true that this term appears less frequently in the *Summa Theologiae* and *De Malo* than in the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* and the *De veritate*, the essential doctrinal content of Thomas's treatment of first principles seems to remain constant throughout his career. For the doctrinal history of *synderesis*, see Odon D. Lotin, "Syndérèse et conscience aux xiie et xiiie siècles," Vol. 2, pt. 1: *Problèmes de morale* (Louvain: Abbaye de Mont César, 1948), 101-349; Vernon J. Bourke, "The Background of Aquinas' Synderesis Principle," in *Graceful Reason: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens, CSsR*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), 345-60;

Thomas are predicated upon the inclination to preservation of one's existence and to the procreation and education of offspring. The first inclination we share in common with all beings, animate and inanimate, the second with the other animals. Both these inclinations issue from our embodied condition, which condition does not, however, stand over against practical reason but rather constitutes its very foundations and determines the direction for its right unfolding. Jean Porter gives expression to this idea when she states, "Because we are both creatures and animals, we too manifest . . . orderly patterns of action. In this way, the intelligible structures of natural processes provide the basis for the properly rational activities of the human creature—and these rational activities, in turn, are given coherence and direction by the natural processes out of which they stem."¹⁶

Of course, it is not only the case that the first two inclinations, rooted as they are in the somatic condition of our being, enter into the constitution of the very wellspring of practical reasoning; they in turn are suffused with the life of reason and their expression is therefore radically different than in the case of even the highest of the other animals. Indeed, we can note in passing that the fact that they are infused with the life of reason explains why their realization in concrete action can be imbued with religious significance, bearing in mind that the inclination to act in accord with the nature of reason expresses itself in "a natural inclination to the know the truth about God."¹⁷ Thus, for example, eating is an essential means of preserving one's existence but can also take on a religious significance. The Eucharist is the preeminent example. Marriage, to offer another example, which furnishes the conditions that conduce to the optimal flourishing of offspring, participates in Christ's spousal relationship with His Bride, the Church, when it is sacramentalized.

The immediacy with which the first practical principles are known leads St. Thomas to compare them with the first principles of speculative reason: "[T]he precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles."¹⁸ Thomas expresses this point at greater length

and Michael Bertram Crowe, "Synderesis and the Notion of Law in Saint Thomas," in *L'homme et son destin d'après les penseurs du moyen âge*, Actes du Premier Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale, 1958 (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1960), 601–9.

¹⁶ Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 71. While this comment concerns the scholastics in general, it clearly applies to St Thomas in particular.

¹⁷ ST I–II, q. 94, a. 2. It is of course obvious that this realization is not universal.

¹⁸ Ibid.

elsewhere: "Accordingly we conclude that just as, in the speculative reason, from naturally known indemonstrable principles, we draw the conclusions of the various sciences, the knowledge of which is not imparted to us by nature, but acquired by the efforts of reason, so too it is from the precepts of the natural law, as from general and indemonstrable principles, that the human reason needs to proceed to the more particular determination of certain matters."¹⁹ Practical reason is therefore led (*deducitur*) from first principles which are *per se nota* in the same way as speculative reason is.²⁰ Thomas refers to this knowledge of first principles as "a kind of seed plot containing in germ all the knowledge which follows."²¹

Synderesis, this "kind of seed plot containing in germ all the knowledge which follows," is the foundation of conscience. As Ralph McInerny explains, "conscience is distinguished from *synderesis*" in that "it applies the common principles [precepts of the natural law] to particular deeds."²² John Paul II writes:

[W]hereas the natural law discloses the objective and universal demands of the moral good, conscience is the application of the law to a particular case; this application of the law thus becomes an inner dictate for the individual, a summons to do what is good in this particular situation. Conscience thus formulates *moral obligation* in the light of the natural law: it is the obligation to do what the individual, through the workings of his conscience, *knows* to be a good he is called to do *here and now*.²³

Thus, conscience cannot be construed as the first rule of human acts. It is in fact a measured measure—in Thomas's words, "a kind of rule which is itself regulated."²⁴ Since *synderesis*, which "is said to be the law of our mind, because it is a habit containing the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions,"²⁵ is inscribed by God in the structure of human being as psychosomatically structured, and since "conscience is an act proceeding from the natural habit of *synderesis*, God is said to have imprinted it [conscience] in the way in which He is said to be the source of all knowledge of truth which is in us."²⁶ Understood in this way, conscience can be said not only to bear witness to an individual

¹⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 3. See also *ST* I, q. 79, a. 12.

²⁰ See also *In II Sent.*, d. 24, q. 2, a. 3.

²¹ *De veritate*, q. 16, a. 1.

²² Ralph McInerny, "Conscience and the Object of the Moral Act," in *Crisis of Conscience*, ed. Haas, 93–110, at 97.

²³ *Veritatis Splendor* §59.

²⁴ *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 2, ad 7.

²⁵ *ST* I–II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2.

²⁶ *De veritate*, q. 17, a. 1, ad s.c. 6.

concerning his own rectitude or iniquity but is, as John Paul II writes, “*the witness of God himself*, whose voice and judgment penetrates the depths of man’s soul, calling him *fortiter et suaviter* to obedience.”²⁷ His quotation from St. Bonaventure makes this point in a striking way: “Saint Bonaventure teaches that ‘conscience is like God’s herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God’s authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force.’”²⁸ Of course, the fact that conscience has its wellspring in the natural inclinations and is intimately bound up with our reasoning processes means that it is not externally imposed upon human experience. The voice of God is proportioned to and mediated through the objective constitution of the human condition in so far as this constitution is respected in all its integrity.

It turns out therefore that conscience and freedom are intimately bound up with each other: both have God as their ground and both presuppose the natural inclinations in a being that is psychosomatically constituted. Just as to exercise freedom in a way that subverts the natural inclinations is to undermine the very conditions of the exercise of freedom, so too this exercise constitutes a violation of one’s conscience, albeit a self-inflicted violation. If one can say that conscience is the ultimate expression of the dignity of the human person, then to act in a manner that is contrary to the evident indications of the natural inclinations constitutes a violation of one’s personal dignity.

Having clarified the notions of freedom and conscience as employed in magisterial teaching, I now return to a consideration of religious freedom. As already indicated, the right to religious freedom is rooted in the third natural inclination concerning which Thomas writes: “[T]here is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society.”²⁹ When writing about the virtue of religion itself, Thomas maintains that it is the acquired virtue *par excellence* that directs the human person to God as his end.³⁰ The following account is based on Vatican II’s declaration on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, a document that is foundational in contemporary Catholic thinking in

²⁷ *Veritatis Splendor* §58.

²⁸ Ibid. The quotation is from *In II Librum Sentent.*, dist. 39, a. 1, q. 3, conclusion: Ed. Ad Claras Aquas, II, 907b.

²⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 94, a. 2: “Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria, sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat.”

³⁰ See *ST* II–II, q. 81, a. 6.

this area. The declaration deals with religious freedom both as an individual right and as a right ascribed to religious communities.

Freedom of Religion: An Individual and Community Right

Dignitatis Humanae 2 opens with a forthright declaration of the right of the human person to religious freedom. Such freedom of course implies that everyone should be immune from coercion from any quarter whatsoever, so that “within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others.” The adoption of rights discourse is due in no small degree to the influence of Jacques Maritain, who in his engagement with modern thought argued, “The true philosophy of the rights of the human person is . . . based upon the idea of natural law. The same natural law which lays down our most fundamental duties, and by virtue of which every law is binding, is the very law which assigns to us our fundamental rights.”³¹ Ultimately, the thinking of *Dignitatis Humanae* is grounded in St. Thomas’s natural law theory, which states that man has a natural inclination both to know the truth about God and to live in society.³² This inclination is singular in its reality but expresses itself in a twofold manner: first, to know the truth about God; second, to live in society. *Dignitatis Humanae* 2 in turn states that all human beings “are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially reli-

³¹ Jacques Maritain, *Christian Democracy & The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 145. It is of course well-nigh impossible to engage in moral and political debate without the currency of rights language and yet, as *Evangelium Vitae* recognizes, that language is also employed to promote a culture of death. For a treatment of the limits that rights language places on our ability to discuss moral and legal matters, see Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991). G. J. McAleer writes that “some express the concern that Catholic social thought has become too closely allied to liberalism’s advocacy of rights to be able to launch an adequate critique of liberalism” (G. J. McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics: A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2005], 160). Drawing upon Aurel Kolnai, he proposes a theory of privilege in order to counter “liberal equality, upon which are based both the argument for abortion (Nussbaum) and the argument against welcoming the stranger (Jarvis Thomson).” This liberal equality “makes the unborn (and in principle all of us) *persona non grata*” (ibid., 161). McAleer argues: “This ‘bias for immoralism’ is structurally part of the drive to equality on the part of liberal democracy, for it necessarily includes a denial of the very idea of intrinsic goods and evils as these presume hierarchy. It is, of course, for this reason that sexual politics is such a battleground in liberal democracies, for nothing quite exemplifies an order of values like purity and lust.”

³² See *ST* I–II, q. 94, a. 2.

religious truth” and that “the exercise of this right cannot be interfered with as long as the just requirements of public order are observed.” As intimated by Thomas, the quest for religious truth cannot run counter to the order of society since societal ordering is a function of the same faculty of reason that inspires the search for God. When the order of society is seriously disrupted by a particular expression of religious pursuit, this pursuit must naturally be called into question.

Grounded in human nature, the inclination to know the truth about God in turn grounds the right to know the truth about God as well as making pursuit of this truth a matter of conscience. Indeed, the practice of religion can be considered to be a greater matter of conscience than matters of conscience flowing from the other inclinations. These latter, when properly ordered, are ultimately inclinations to the Good, namely, God. They are, moreover, subsumed into the life of reason itself on account of the hylomorphic constitution of the human person. Since the practice of religion is an inclination to the good according to the nature of human reason, it consists primarily, according to *Dignitatis Humanae* 3, “of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a man directs himself to God.” Since, moreover, acts that are voluntary and free internal acts lie beyond the realm of commandment or proscription on the part of human authority, so too do acts that are expressions of religious belief—provided of course that they do not interfere with public order.

In fidelity to Thomas’s formulation of the third precept of the natural law, which pertains to the inclination to the good in accordance with the nature of reason, *Dignitatis Humanae* 3 argues for freedom of public expression of one’s religious convictions: “[H]is own social nature requires that man give external expression to . . . internal acts of religion, that he communicate with others on religious matters, and profess his religion in community.” The denial of this freedom of expression in the absence of any detrimental consequences for public order would be an injustice to the human person. It would also constitute an injustice with regard to the divinely established order, since the inclination to act in accord with the nature of reason that finds its expression in religious practice and societal life is at once an expression of God’s providence for human beings whereby He directs them to final union with Himself.³³

³³ See *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2: “[S]ince all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law . . . it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both

While the same inclination that expresses itself in religious practice also expresses itself in seeking societal harmony, there is nonetheless a crucial difference between these expressions. Societal harmony conduces to the attainment of the common good in the temporal order, whereas religious practice entails acts, both private and public, that “transcend of their very nature the earthly and temporal order of things.” Thus, while civil authority in its care for the common good in the temporal order is morally bound to “look with favor on the religious life of the citizens,” it ought not to arrogate to itself the right to control or to restrict religious activity. If and when it does so it exceeds the limits of its proper power. This situation obtains both in the case of the individual exercise of religious freedom and in the case where people act in community. *Dignitatis Humanae* 4 once again calls attention to the intimate link between the religious and social instincts inscribed in human nature: “Religious communities are a requirement of the nature of man and of religion itself.” They too must be free to act without coercion in religious matters just as individuals are. Provided there is no harm to public order they therefore have “a right to immunity so that they may organize themselves according to their own principles.” This point brings us to an application of our considerations thus far to State-Church relations for, as we are told in *Dignitatis Humanae* 13, “The freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle governing relations between the Church and public authorities and the whole civil order.”

The next section of this essay passes on to a consideration of the implications for society of the Church’s teaching concerning freedom and conscience as well as to a consideration of the implications of society’s rejection of this teaching from its anthropological foundations upwards. The difficult situation in which the Church increasingly finds herself is that of at once being the sole guarantor of genuine freedom and conscience as well as being increasingly discriminated against for this very reason. In other words, the Church’s right to religious liberty, the exercise of which facilitates the protection of the dignity of the human person and of the common good of society, is under threat. The Church’s right to express her religious beliefs in practice goes hand and hand with objectively constituted personal and societal well-being.

The Freedom of Ecclesial Conscience and Societal Well-Being

In a consideration of magisterial teaching concerning freedom and conscience we saw that the Church construes them both as grounded in

for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.”

God and as being embodied realities. Contemporary culture rejects this understanding, a point made with particular clarity and force in John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. There he deals first with freedom before proceeding to deal with "the deepest roots of the struggle between the 'culture of life' and the 'culture of death,' " namely "the eclipse of the sense of God and man, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism."³⁴ Showing great perspicacity with regard to the way society was even then developing, John Paul II notes that this secularism "with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test."³⁵ He discerns a negative dynamic reciprocity between the loss of a sense of God and the loss of a sense of the human person. On the one hand, when there is a loss of the sense of God, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of the human person. Put bluntly, this tendency expresses itself in a lack of regard for the human being's dignity and even her (his) life. On the other hand, "the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity" constitutes the source of "a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence."³⁶ John Paul II refers to this dynamic that obtains between the darkening of moral reason and the eclipse of God as a "sad vicious circle."³⁷

This negative dynamic reciprocity between the darkening of moral reason and the eclipse of God can be explained on the basis of the natural inclinations in the human person as psychosomatically constituted. Thus, to turn away from God or even to become lukewarm about God as the final end of one's existence is to subvert the basic inclination to the good that underlies the other inclinations. In keeping with the psychosomatic constitution of the human person, this subversion necessarily distorts the directionality of practical reason's unfolding and it does so at the very inception of this process. In other words, it occasions a darkening of moral reason. By extension, this altered directionality imparts a radically different character to the experience of conscience, a point that ought to be clear from our earlier discussion. Thus, for example, abortion and euthanasia come to be portrayed as compassionate responses to unwanted pregnancy and suffering respectively, while pro-life responses are depicted as the attempted impositions of moral dictators. Appeal to feeling trumps any attempt at moral reasoning that engages with reality as it presents itself. Anthony Fisher remarks that "By the 1960s conscience

³⁴ *Evangelium Vitae* §21.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

had become something like strong feeling, intuition or sincere opinion—what Allan Bloom called ‘the all-purpose ungrounded ground of moral determinations, sufficient at its slightest rumbling to discredit all other obligations or loyalties.’ To appeal to conscience was to foreclose all further discussion and to claim an immunity to reasoned argument or the moral law.”³⁸ This foreclosure of discussion is, according to John Paul II, part and parcel of a construal of conscience as “an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil.”³⁹ When subjective sincerity becomes the predominant understanding of what constitutes conscience—a subjective sincerity that resists any appeal to reasoned argument or to the moral law—then moral consensus in society is undermined, since there are no shared objective principles on which everyone can agree. The result, as Fisher describes it, is that “appeal to conscientious belief degenerates into window-dressing for the raw expression of preference or power.”⁴⁰ Moreover, given that the natural inclinations lie at the basis of the self-evident goods that function as the principles of practical reason, their subversion necessarily results in a set of self-evident “goods” that are in many respects antithetical to those that are construed in the light of the natural inclinations. The possibility of dialogue between proponents of these two radically different moral universes is sabotaged at the very foundations of the reasoning process.

To distort the natural inclinations is, moreover, to divert or at least to weaken the ordination of the person as a unitary whole towards his Final End, namely God, the Good.⁴¹ Expressed otherwise, the conception of conscience as a positive affective experience of subjective sincerity leads in the direction of atheism. Naturally, conscience so construed contests Church teaching as well as tending to conform itself to the spirit of the age. And one characteristic of the spirit of our age is the practical primacy of affectivity over reason. In this respect one can discern the continuing dynamics of the Cartesian will, which Michael Allen Gillespie describes as being like that of God in that it is “infinite, indifferent, and perfectly free, not subordinate to reason or any other law or rule.”⁴² Placed on a par with

³⁸ Anthony Fisher, *Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41.

³⁹ *Dominum et Vivificantem* §43; see also *Veritatis Splendor* §60.

⁴⁰ Fisher, *Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium*, 50.

⁴¹ For a more developed version of this argument, see Kevin E. O'Reilly, “Medieval Voluntarism and the Culture of Death,” *Studia Moralia* 48 (2010): 207–11.

⁴² Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 55. Elsewhere, Gillespie writes: “The God that Descartes first imagined and feared was a titanic God, beyond reason and nature, beyond good and evil. Descartes won his struggle with this fearsome God only by taking this God’s

the divine will or rather believing itself to have superseded the divine will, the human will is able to resist God as it proceeds to exert its control over nature and—more alarmingly—over other human persons. The loss of a sense of God and the loss of a sense of the human person go hand in hand.

The loss of a sense of God in our contemporary secularized society combines with construals of freedom and conscience that are in no way grounded in human nature as hylomorphically constituted to create serious difficulties for the Church in its relations with the State. In order to elucidate this point, let us turn briefly to the implications of Christ's words concerning God and Caesar: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). According to Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, this distinction, namely, "the distinction between Church and State"⁴³ is fundamental to Christianity. The Church cannot assume the role of a political player, that is to say, "She cannot and must not replace the state."⁴⁴ At the same time she cannot remain a simple observer of whatever injustices may be operative in society. Her role is rather to "help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest."⁴⁵

In his pre-papal writings Benedict/Ratzinger elaborated this point. Thus he wrote that Christ's words concerning what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God separate sacral authority from state authority and lie at "the origin and the permanent foundation of the western idea of freedom."⁴⁶ The dynamics of this freedom, which receives its most important expression in freedom of conscience, have been founded upon the existence of these two societies, related to but not identical with each other and neither of which has been capable of exercising a totalizing power. In this regard, Ratzinger writes that the state has not been "the bearer of a religious authority that reaches into the ultimate depths of conscience, but for its moral basis refers beyond itself to another community."⁴⁷ This community is of course the Church, which "understands itself as a final

power on himself. He thereby opened up the hope and aspiration for human omnipotence, a hope that has manifested itself repeatedly since in monstrous form" (Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 206).

⁴³ *Deus Caritas Est* §28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: St. Paul Publications, 1988), 161.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

moral authority which however depends on voluntary adherence and is entitled only to spiritual but not to civil penalties.”⁴⁸ Each of these communities has therefore been “circumscribed in its radius, and on the balance of this relation depends freedom.”⁴⁹ The implications of doing away with the Church as a public authority in counterbalance to the state should be apparent. I nevertheless quote from Ratzinger, for the import of this point cannot be overstated:

[W]hen the Church is done away with as a public and publicly relevant authority, then too freedom is extinguished, because the state . . . claims completely for itself the justification of morality; in the profane post-Christian world it does not admittedly do this in the form of a sacral authority but as an ideological authority—that means that the state becomes the party, and since there can no longer be any other authority of the same rank it . . . becomes total itself.⁵⁰

Without the duality of the co-existence of Church and state as players of equal authority, totalitarianism inevitably begins to develop, and freedom of conscience both on the part of individuals and on the part of the Church as a whole is imperilled. Indeed, this problem is one that does not pertain to the Church and her members alone, for the autonomy and sovereignty of everyone in society is put at risk—a point made by John Paul II in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

[T]he totalitarian State tends to absorb within itself the nation, society, the family, religious groups and individuals themselves. In defending her own freedom, the Church is also defending the human person, who must obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29), as well as defending the family, the various social organizations and nations—all of which enjoy their own spheres of autonomy and sovereignty.⁵¹

This conception of autonomy and sovereignty, which does not lead to an isolationism that runs contrary to the interests of the common good but which is rather essential to and promotes the common good, reflects a particular conception of the human person. Expressed otherwise, one's conception of the nature of the political body is a function of one's conception of the human person. Society is man writ large, to quote Plato.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 162–63.

⁵¹ *Centesimus Annus* §45.

⁵² Plato, *Republic* 368c–d. Although Plato employs this notion to refer to character types, I think that it can just as well apply to conceptions of human nature.

Eric Voegelin refers to this principle, which posits that society is a “micro-anthropos,” as the “anthropological principle.”⁵³ St. Thomas agrees, as the following passage illustrates:

As the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 2): *We observe in an animal a despotic and a politic principle: for the soul dominates the body by a despotic power; but the intellect dominates the appetite by a politic and royal power.* For a power is called despotic whereby a man rules his slaves, who have not the right to resist in any way the orders of the one that commands them, since they have nothing of their own. But that power is called politic and royal by which a man rules over free subjects, who, though subject to the government of the ruler, have nevertheless something of their own, by reason of which they can resist the orders of him who commands. And so, the soul is said to rule the body by a despotic power, because the members of the body cannot in any way resist the sway of the soul, but at the soul’s command both hand and foot, and whatever member is naturally moved by voluntary movement, are moved at once. But the intellect or reason is said to rule the irascible and concupiscible by a politic power: because the sensitive appetite has something of its own, by virtue whereof it can resist the commands of reason. For the sensitive appetite is naturally moved, not only by the estimative power in other animals, and in man by the cogitative power which the universal reason guides, but also by the imagination and sense. Whence it is that we experience that the irascible and concupiscible powers do resist reason, inasmuch as we sense or imagine something pleasant, which reason forbids, or unpleasant, which reason commands. And so from the fact that the irascible and concupiscible resist reason in something, we must not conclude that they do not obey.⁵⁴

Examination of Thomas’s account of the relationship between the passions/emotions and reason shows that he deems the former to be essential to the functioning of the latter—with the proviso they be rightly ordered in the light of reason. As Mark D. Jordan expresses this point, “so far as the passions are brought under right reason, they increase the exercise of reason and so nearness to the good.”⁵⁵ This right-ordering is achieved, however, by way of the participation of the emotions in the life

⁵³ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 61. Voegelin distinguishes two aspects of this principle. According to the first aspect it is “a general principle for the interpretation of society” (ibid.). According to the second, “it is an instrument of social critique” (ibid.).

⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 81, a. 3, ad 2.

⁵⁵ Mark D. Jordan, “Aquinas’s Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986): 92.

of reason and most emphatically not as a result of the dictatorial imposition of reason itself.⁵⁶ When one construes the constitution of society on the analogy of the relationship between reason and sensuality, one must necessarily value and promote what one might call the participated autonomy of individuals and groups within society. The autonomy in question is participated because the rulers ideally represent the best interests of the ruled in view of the common good, while the ruled are in a position to resist the direction in which the rulers are taking society if they deem this direction to be undesirable. Thus, as G. J. McAleer writes:

It is the fact of this moral knowledge original to sensuality that establishes the appropriateness of thinking of reason's rule over sensuality in terms of the political analogy of rulership. Sensuality is naturally ordered to reason and yet the natural involvement of the two, and their mutual relations of dependence, is but a vehicle for a lived relationship of moral authority and persuasion, as well as obedience *and* to some degree even consent.⁵⁷

Rulers and ruled can, of course, and all too often do pursue ends that are objectively disordered, thereby undermining the common good. Nevertheless, the lack of coercion exercised on others by those in authority itself constitutes a basic building block that is required for the attainment of the objective common good.

Totalitarianism finds its anthropological analogy in the despotic rule of the soul over the body. Thomas writes, in the passage quoted above, that "the soul is said to rule the body by a despotic power, because the members of the body cannot in any way resist the sway of the soul, but at the soul's command both hand and foot, and whatever member is naturally moved by voluntary movement, are moved at once." The tyrant or tyrannical state claims absolute freedom over subjects. Indeed, the freedom exercised by the various totalitarian regimes in recent history is arguably more radical than that described by Thomas's analogy. Perhaps John Paul II's portrayal of a dominant contemporary attitude towards the human body communicates better the dynamics of contemporary totalitarianism. This attitude does not extend simply to the physical members of the human body but penetrates even to the natural inclinations. It treats this corporeal reality "as a raw datum" that is "devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ For an exposition of this point see Kevin E. O'Reilly, "The Vision of Virtue and Knowledge of the Natural Law in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 51–56.

⁵⁷ McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics*, 37.

⁵⁸ *Veritatis Splendor* §48.

In this view the human body is viewed simply as a material condition for freedom to make its choice, a condition that is external to the human person. The anthropology involved is dualistic: it places human personhood over against human embodiment and it gives free reign to reason to manipulate the corporeal conditions of human being according to its own designs and all too often contrary to the indications inscribed within those very conditions themselves. Such is the logic that fuels the various manifestations of the culture of death. In this culture even crimes against life are deemed to be “*legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights.*”⁵⁹ In light of the anthropological principle stated above, the following observation by McAleer ought to come as no surprise: “The architects of modernity, and thinkers who at best are only ambiguously related to Christianity . . . speak of a violent control of sensuality. Kant, for example, speaks of the need for reason to ‘stamp out’ the ‘rabble’ and ‘mob’ of sensuality.”⁶⁰

If the natural inclinations are to be understood as ecstatic in that they are ordered towards particular instantiations of the good—instantiations of the good that defend and promote individual human life, family life, and the life of reason that manifests itself in the pursuit of truth, especially the truth about God, and in the ordering of society—then their subversion leads to a view of the individual as an isolated atom within a wider multitude of isolated atoms. McAleer offers a striking portrayal of the consequences of a culturally sanctioned subversion of the ecstatically ordered natural inclinations: “Liberal politics is the defense of the enstatic body, the body in principle isolated both from ecstatic reason (the *ostiarus* of the Law) and ecstatic sensuality. Such a body rejects its own propensity to self-diffusion, separating itself from ecstatic Being; therewith it rejects the foundling in enstatic sex; the unborn stranger in the womb; in its violent refusal of the order of good and being, it rejects civil society; and in favoring a utopian politics, it rejects God.”⁶¹ Decisionism directed against even human life itself and isolationism are thus the fruits of an absolutist construal of freedom grounded in a dualistic understanding of the human being. Within this culture of decisionism and isolationism, as John Paul II writes, “the body is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world.”⁶²

⁵⁹ *Evangelium Vitae* §18.

⁶⁰ McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics*, 156–57.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 159–60.

⁶² *Evangelium Vitae* §23.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing discussion, the Church's defense of religious liberty as outlined in *Dignitatis Humanae* and the battles that she is currently fighting in various jurisdictions have wide implications for civil society. The anthropology that underpins the defense of religious liberty sees the human person as ecstatically ordered towards union with God as the source of all good by means of all the natural inclinations. The exercise of religion, grounded in the inclination of reason to the truth, is an explicit expression of what remains implicit in the other inclinations: all the inclinations aim at assimilation with God as their final cause. One ought not to be surprised therefore—in the context of the wider culture in the so-called “developed world” in which a contraceptive mentality predominates, in which abortion is commonplace, in which there is pressure to legalize assisted suicide, and where homosexual “marriage” has been sanctioned in various countries—that the practice of religion should also begin to come under attack. The human person is psychosomatically constituted, and to subvert one natural inclination is therefore in some way to undermine all the natural inclinations in some way. Let us recall a point made earlier: in the human *compositum* the inclinations to self-preservation and to the procreation and education of offspring are subsumed into the life of reason. It follows therefore that to subvert the expression of the natural inclination to act in accord with the nature of reason, which expression receives its most exalted form in religious practice, is to subvert the other two natural inclinations. The contrary dynamic also obtains: the subversion of the inclinations to self-preservation and to the procreation and education of offspring inevitably sabotages the inclination to act in accord with the nature of reason, which naturally seeks the truth about God.

When the organs of state begin to legislate for contraception, abortion, euthanasia, homosexual “marriage,” and so on, the Church has due cause for alarm; or, to be more precise, when the organs of state began to promote the phenomena of the culture of death, the Church had due cause for alarm. Now this cause for alarm has begun to be realized. In other words, the Church is coming increasingly under attack as the advocate of the natural inclinations and, concomitantly, as the advocate of genuine conscience, that is to say, of conscience whose judgments are objectively grounded in and directed by the natural inclinations. According to the line of thinking proposed in this article, the Church appears as society's greatest ally, that is to say, as the institution that most promotes its harmony and well-being. Let us recall in this regard that the inclination to

act in accord with the nature of reason is also at once an inclination to live in society as well as to seek the truth about God. The fragmentation that characterizes a society that has rendered human nature to a large extent artificially “enstatic”⁶³ ought therefore to come as no great surprise. The Church’s anthropological vision is the great but largely unknown hope for the society’s reintegration. As the great defender of conscience in our age, the Church finds herself at once to be the great enemy of those liberal democracies that exhibit totalitarian tendencies.

Appendix

Following Russell Hittinger we can discern at least three main foci for the common good—also referred to by the term “solidarity.” (See Russell Hittinger, *First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003], 277–82, for a more detailed account.) Firstly, there are goods that we share by virtue of our common humanity. Hittinger tells us: “By virtue of our common humanity, three notions arise: (1) common status, in the sense that no person is more or less human than another; (2) common ontological perfections, such as health, knowledge, and religious devotion; (3) common utilities, such as money, food, and technology” (ibid., 277). The inclusion of religious devotion here tallies with what we say in the course of the article about the natural inclinations in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas: religion is an expression of the third of these inclinations, namely, the inclination to the good according to the nature of reason.

The second focus of the common good and solidarity regards “*common activities*” (ibid., 278). In John Paul II’s encyclicals the activities in question relate to “domestic political order, international relations, the initiatives of intermediate societies, and economic life” (ibid.). In *Centesimus Annus*, for example, he argues that man in his work does not simply employ the things of this world as objects and instruments and make them his own. He continues:

By means of his work man commits himself, not only for his own sake but also *for others* and *with others*. Each person collaborates in the work of others and for their good. Man works in order to provide for the needs of his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately all humanity. Moreover, he collaborates in the work of his fellow employees, as well as in the work of suppliers and in the customers’ use of goods, in a progressively expanding chain of solidarity. (*Centesimus Annus* §43)

⁶³ This term is borrowed from McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics*.

The focus here is on the goods intrinsic to human activity itself. It is in relation to common activities that the question of subsidiarity arises, for the goods inherent to them can be lost by the inappropriate intervention of “higher” powers. As Hittinger writes, a proper understanding of subsidiarity “depends on a concept of solidarity that preserves the intrinsic value of collaborative activity” (Hittinger, *First Grace*, 279).

In the third meaning constitutive of the common good, John Paul II adds the note of *communio*. Thus, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* he writes:

Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue. In what has been said so far it has been possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (cf. Jn 13:35). . . . Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word “communion.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §40)

While the diverse notions of the common good are included in what John Paul refers to as the “civilization of love,” Hittinger points out that the theological concept of communion is “the main model for what the papacy means by the proposition that man is inherently social” (Hittinger, *First Grace*, 282).

Finally, lest there be any confusion, Catholic social teaching does not regard the good of the state as being instrumentally subservient of the individual and family. As Benedict XVI expresses the point: “Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the State” (*Caritas in Veritate* §38). In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* §166, we read:

The demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights. These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom. Nor must one forget the contribution that every nation is required in duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for

the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations also.

With regard to the role of the State in promoting the common good, we read:

The responsibility for attaining the common good, besides falling to individual persons, belongs also to the State, since the common good is the reason that the political authority exists. The State, in fact, must guarantee the coherency, unity and organization of the civil society of which it is an expression, in order that the common good may be attained with the contribution of every citizen. The individual person, the family or intermediate groups are not able to achieve their full development by themselves for living a truly human life. Hence the necessity of political institutions, the purpose of which is to make available to persons the necessary material, cultural, moral and spiritual goods. The goal of life in society is in fact the historically attainable common good. (Ibid., §168)

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