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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: HOMOGENEOUS OR HETEROGENEOUS DEVELOPMENT?

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ONE OF THE most difficult questions to confront those who hold for a natural-law conception of Catholic moral teaching which does not change with the development of the times is the area of the freedom of religion in the political order. The traditional teaching on this subject is expressed in many places. The most difficult *locus* for anyone who wants to defend the traditional opinion is found in *The Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX. In this document, the following canons are explicitly enumerated:

77. In this age of ours it is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be the only religion of the state, to the exclusion of all other cults whatsoever.
78. Hence in certain regions of Catholic name, it has been laudably sanctioned by law that men immigrating there be allowed to have public exercises of any form of worship of their own.
79. For it is false that the civil liberty of every cult, and likewise, the full power granted to all of manifesting openly and publicly any kind of opinions and ideas, more easily leads to the corruption of the morals and minds of the people, and to the spread of the evil of indifferentism.¹

¹“77. Aestate hac nostra non amplius expedit, religionem catholicam haberi tamquam unicum status religionem, ceteris quibuscumque cultibus exclusus. 78. Hinc laudabiliter in quibusdam catholici nominis regionibus lege cautum est, ut hominibus illuc immigrantibus liceat publicum proprii cuiusque cultus exercitium habere. 79. Enimvero falsum est, civilem cuiusque cultus libertatem, itemque plenam potestatem omnibus attributam quaslibet opiniones cogitationesque palam publiceque manifestandi conducere ad populorum mores animosque facilius corrumpendos ac indifferentismi pestem propagandam.” Denzinger-Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, n. 1777-1779 (2977-2979), hereafter referred to as *DS*.

In this text, freedom of religion is clearly condemned. Yet one finds about one hundred years later the issue of religious freedom discussed by Vatican II. Here the conclusion reached seems quite different.

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others. The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.²

These two documents seem to represent a significant change in the teaching of the church. Beyond the obvious change in attitude towards religious freedom, many moral theologians also see another change: the very language of the decree signals a departure from the traditional basis of the law of nature by a reference to the dignity of the human person. One example will suffice:

It may also be a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional concept of 'nature' which has contributed in recent years to the focus of moral attention moving from 'human nature' to 'human person'

² "Haec Vaticana Synodus declarat personam humanam ius habere ad libertatem religiosam. Huiusmodi libertas in eo consistit, quod omnes homines debent immunes esse a coercionem ex parte sive singulorum sive coetuum socialium et cuiusvis potestatis humanae, et ita quidem ut in re religiosa neque aliquis cogatur ad agendum contra suam conscientiam neque impediatur, quominus iuxta suam conscientiam agat privatim et publice, vel solus vel aliis consociatus, intra debitos limites. Insuper declarat ius ad libertatem religiosam esse revera fundatum in ipsa dignitate personae humanae, qualis et verbo Dei revelato et ipsa ratione cognoscitur. Hoc ius personae humanae ad libertatem religiosam in iuridica societatis ordinatione ita est agnoscendum, ut ius civile evadat." Vatican II, *Declaratio de Libertate Religiosa: Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2. Translations are taken from *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1975).

or 'human dignity.' Thus, the Second Vatican Council was certainly not unaware of the whole moral tradition centered on the law of nature when it nevertheless considered basing objective moral standards on 'the dignity of the human person,' and finally decided to propose the need for such standards as based on the 'nature of the [human] person and his acts.'³

Modern moralists think that the emphasis on the human person is completely new. They think that the old natural-law ethics has been replaced by a personalistic ethics. For them, norms which expressed the law of nature and were exceptionless have given way to norms which demand that exceptions be made. There are too many factors and difficulties at work in this sort of thinking⁴ to be fully examined in a short article like this. Suffice it to say at the beginning that the issue of religious freedom is often invoked as an example of such a change. Not only is this offered as a change in the basis for the teaching on religious freedom, but this issue has been used to support a more general proposition that the church can and has changed her teaching completely on other matters.

Some say that this claim of a change in church teaching is used as a justification for not taking the papal teachings on sexual ethics and birth control seriously: If one just waits long enough, the teaching of the church will be changed on these matters as it has already been changed on the issue of religious freedom. Still others say that the document of the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom is so startling a change that it falsifies the council and shows that at least this document is not the work of the Holy Spirit. The teaching contained in this document is so compromising to the traditional teaching of the church that they even call into question the authority of the Pope to teach it and suggest that perhaps Pope Paul was not a true Pope. This is a radical opinion, it is true, but it is one point of

³ John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 113-114.

⁴ Cf. Brian Mullady, *The Meaning of the Term Moral in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

view, exacerbated perhaps by the fact that Pope Paul called this "one of the major texts of the Council."⁵

The apologists for the document make their case more on juridical rather than on theoretical grounds. As the issue is not merely juridical, this seems to weaken their argument. One of the principal apologists for the document is the great American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray. Though his explanation is somewhat limited from the theoretical point of view, it contains a great deal of merit as to the practical and juridical parameters of the problem.⁶ However, although John Courtney Murray was sure that this document represented a development in doctrine, he was not certain what this development might be. In the original translation of the document of the Second Vatican Council into English he states, "The course of the development between the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) and . . . [this decree] . . . still remains to be explained by theologians. But the Council formally sanctioned the validity of the development itself; and this was a doctrinal event of high importance for theological thought in many areas."⁷

Many moralists today see in this development a place where the church has entirely changed her teaching on a subject of importance. They argue that there is really no magisterial teaching which is forever fixed. This applies to many areas of interest but has been used in a particularly effective way by those who have opposed the teaching of the church on birth control in *Humanae Vitae*. There are numerous examples of theologians who think this way. For example,

Even this brief look at the history of our moral teaching should prompt us to describe our teaching competence in more modest terms. Either we must admit a drastic relativism which would allege that all of that teaching was right in its day or we must admit

⁵ W. M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: 1966), p. 674; cited in Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, n. 150.

⁶ I shall not go into the juridical history of this problem in this paper. For those who are interested in this, they can profitably read John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of Religious Freedom* (Westminster, Maryland: 1965).

⁷ Abbott, *Vatican II*, pp. 673, 672. Quoted in Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, pp. 114-115.

the presence of error in the history of the pilgrim church . . . To stress this point: . . . the teaching of Gregory XVI and Pius IX that it was 'madness' to allege religious freedom as a right of man and a necessity in society, and the proclamation of Vatican II that such freedom is a right and necessity in society—such teachings are not consistent or mutually irreconcilable. Even full recognition of the historical context that spawned these statements does not establish doctrinal continuity.⁸

In this article, Daniel Maguire applies this conclusion of a lack of any sure doctrinal continuity in magisterial statements to many other moral teachings of the Magisterium, including those on usury and on contraception. Obviously, this presents a very real challenge to the continuity of any doctrinal statement. One is tempted to say that no doctrinal or moral statement is universally true through time. This would compromise the very nature of the truth and the ability of the church to define doctrines. Maguire expresses the implications very well: "Still, to assert that in all this there is no change but simply development is to play semantic games."⁹

In this article, then, I would like to examine the question of whether the teaching of the church has really changed or not. Is this development truly homogeneous or heterogeneous (change)? If the former is true, then the teaching of the Second Vatican Council should be viewed not as a conformity to the spirit of this age, but rather as an application of the same traditional teaching of the church looked at from a different point of view to correspond to new problems found in the signs of our times. In other words, we may have always taught the same teaching as Vatican II about religious freedom, but may not have emphasized this part of the truth because of other moral problems in other times. I would like to suggest that the religious freedom condemned in the *Syllabus of Errors* refers to religious freedom looked at from the point of view of the action of the intellect, or freedom respecting the truth; whereas the freedom of religion

⁸ Daniel C. Maguire, "Morality and Magisterium," in *Readings in Moral Theology: No. 3*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

guaranteed and encouraged by *Dignitatis Humanae* refers to religious freedom looked at from the point of view of the action of the will in morals. In other words, those who see in these different expressions a change in teaching are committing the fallacy of univocity of terms in logic. The terms "freedom" refer to two very different acts of the soul.

One of the difficulties in discerning this truth comes from the historical problem of the confessional state. John Courtney Murray makes a good examination of this problem from the point of view of jurisdiction in law. I believe that this is the only basis on which the problem of the confessional state need be discussed. In other words, the union of throne and altar is a practical problem truly limited to one particular epoch in history and really has little to do with the problem discussed in this paper. Regardless of whether there is a state religion or not, both the *Syllabus of Errors* and *Dignitatis Humanae* present their teachings as universally and necessarily true.

Another difficulty which must be addressed in this article is the issue of the natural law as the basis for morals. Many moral authorities have used the supposed change in doctrine in Magisterial teaching as a sign that the church has changed the basis upon which the church decides the reasonability of her teaching.¹⁰ As a result, I would also like to show that the personalistic norm is itself just another way of expressing what has always been meant by the natural law, and that this in turn is truly the basis for the different meanings of religious freedom in the documents of the Magisterium.

The tradition of the church before Vatican II had already be-

¹⁰ For example, "But the founding of the right to religious freedom on the dignity of the individual human person can be seen as a further indication of the move from human nature to the human person and his dignity as the basis for moral reasoning. In the circumstances it is significant that the criterion of person rather than nature can be seen as flourishing in the thought of John Paul II, . . . in which, with reference to the subject of contraception, he invites theologians to shed more light on 'the biblical foundations, ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons behind this doctrine.'" Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, p. 114.

gun to invoke a distinction with respect to the term "freedom of religion." For example, Leo XIII says,

Another liberty is widely advocated, namely, *liberty of conscience*. If by this is meant that everyone may, as he chooses, worship God or not, it is sufficiently refuted by the arguments adduced. But it may also be taken to mean that every man in the State may follow the will of God and, from a consciousness of duty and free from every obstacle, obey his commands. This indeed, is true liberty, a liberty worthy of the sons of God.¹¹

In this text, one can see that the Pope himself long before Vatican II makes a distinction between a freedom of conscience which suggests "everyone may, as he chooses, worship God or not" and that every man "in the State may follow the will of God and, from a consciousness of duty and free from every obstacle obey his commands."

Vatican II explains this distinction very clearly:

The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on . . . [the] dignity of all men because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and . . . are both impelled by their nature and bound by moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth.¹²

This clearly refers to the religious obligation of the truth which is invoked in the encyclical of Leo XIII. There is no freedom of religion regarding this because the truth about God is one. Religious freedom regarding the content of religious truth is also obviously what is condemned in the *Syllabus of Errors*. This freedom is always condemned in the context of nineteenth century liberalism, which viewed the supernatural as something basically unable to be defined. Real dogma was not possible, because one could really express nothing about God, or alternately, any expression about God could be true. Because God acted in

¹¹ Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestissimum*, 30.

¹² "Secundum dignitatem suam homines cuncti, quia personae sunt, ratione scilicet et libera voluntate praedicti ideoque personali responsabilitate aucti, sua ipsorum natura impelluntur necnon morali tenentur obligatione ad veritatem quaerendam, illam imprimis quae religionem spectat." *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2.

the world only through human reason, the laws of the State should be the ultimate criteria for the truth of religion; the State would establish the fact that all religions were the same.

Vatican II goes on to explain another aspect of the truth of religion:

But men cannot satisfy their obligation in a way in keeping *with their own nature* unless they enjoy both psychological freedom and immunity from external coercion. Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective attitude of the individual, but in his very nature.¹³

This clearly refers to the liberty of conscience which Leo XIII expressed as the freedom to pursue one's duty free from every obstacle. The teaching of the Council on this expresses the right of a person to embrace any truth from the interior movement of his will. One should notice in these texts—"with their own nature" and "in his very nature"—that the basis for the judgment about the differences in which the civil law relates to freedom of will and freedom of intellect is human nature itself. This is a clue to the fact that the Council in no way changed the criteria for judgment concerning the basis for religious freedom. What forms the basis for the seeming contradiction in the statements of the texts of the Magisterium? Far from being a change in doctrine as to morals, these different judgments simply respect a classic distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas between the functions of reason and will in the moral order. The word "freedom" may express the necessary freedom from external coercion in any moral act of the will for it to truly be an act of the will; it may also express a judgment as to whether the objective truth of God binds all men to seek it. The word refers to different powers with different objects, and this situation demands that one examine the nature of those powers respecting truths about God.

¹³ "Tenentur quoque veritati cognitae adhaerere atque totam vitam suam iuxta exigentias veritatis ordinare. Huic autem obligationi satisfacere homines, modo suae propriae naturae consentaneo, non possunt nisi libertate psychologica simul atque immunitate a coercitione externa fruuntur. Non ergo in subiectiva personae dispositione, sed in ipsa eius natura ius ad libertatem religiosam fundatur." *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2.

This examination should lead to some insight not only into the place of the civil order in coercion about these truths, but into the place of coercion in general as well. A corollary would include the possibility of any religious truth leading to true human freedom. All of this is based, of course, on the difference between how the conscience relates to the will and how the conscience relates to the intellect.

Accordingly, I will examine the different ways in which the conscience relates to the will and to the intellect, *based on the nature of each in man*. Please note that although various actual situations may call for different emphases in this discussion (one may emphasize the relation to the will at one point, the intellect at another), such a change in emphasis in no sense falsifies the previous teaching. Rather, the various emphases in the teaching complement each other and help to give a complete picture of the various foundations of the human act in general, an action which follows nature. The references to the human person in *Dignitatis Humanae* clearly refer not to a new historically-determined condition, but rather to a transhistorical nature which is found in all men. The teaching of the whole Magisterium about religious freedom is in no way an attempt to change the teaching of the church to correspond to the spirit of the age. Just the opposite is the case. The universal is not an impoverished sense experience which must be continuously reformed according to the culture. The way in which the intellect acts as it binds the conscience in truth and the way in which the will acts as it freely embraces the truth are based on those very powers of the soul.

The term "freedom of religion" cannot be used in a univocal sense. In the *Syllabus of Errors* and in *Dignitatis Humanae* this term refers to freedom looked upon from two very different objects in two very different powers of the soul. The term "freedom" can become very confusing unless it is delineated as to precisely what it means. Normally it is used to translate free will in human acts. At the outset of the section in the *Summa Theologiae* on morals, St. Thomas makes the point that free choice by which man is lord of his acts is expressed by the term

"*liberum arbitrium.*" There he explicitly states that free (*liberum*) choice (*arbitrium*) means a faculty which includes *both the intellect and will.*¹⁴ For an act to be truly human, it must be immanent. It must issue from both intellect and will. Acts which do not issue from both do not befit rational beings and are not placed in the genus of morals.¹⁵

However, there are not two acts with two objects present in an act of free choice. The act of free choice must be essentially one. This act may be two in power, but only one actual act.¹⁶ So, in free choice, both the intellect and the will concur, but in different ways. Free choice is primarily an act of the will but guided always by the act of the intellect.¹⁷ Still, the intellect and the will contribute to the act of free choice each according to its own manner of being as a power. One must then examine the contribution of each to the one act of free choice.

The same object can be desired by the will and known by the intellect. This object forms the basis for the distinction of powers. For example, the same object may be seen, tasted, smelled, heard, and touched, and this same object would form the basis for all of the experiences of the senses as to their objects. In the case of the movement of our souls, all objects may be looked upon in their relation to the soul. This includes God as an object of religion. There is a twofold relationship of things to the soul. A being outside the soul, whether an apple or God, has the possibility of being in the soul as it exists in itself, but experienced in

¹⁴ "Est autem homo dominus suorum actuum per rationem et voluntatem: unde et liberum arbitrium esse dicitur *facultas voluntatis et rationis.*" Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 1, c.

¹⁵ "Illa ergo quae rationem habent, seipsa movent ad finem: quia habent dominum suorum actuum per liberum arbitrium, quod est *facultas voluntatis et rationis* . . . Illa ratione carent, tendunt in finem per naturalem inclinationem, quasi ab alia mota, non autem a seipsis." Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 2, c.

¹⁶ "Liberum arbitrium est tantum una potentia formaliter, sed duae virtualiter." Aquinas, *In Commentaria Super Sententias II*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2; *De Veritate*, 24, 5.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 13, a. 1, c.

the spiritual way the soul exists. This makes something knowable.¹⁸

A thing may also be related to the soul in that the soul is inclined to desire the thing as it exists in itself. I may desire or love God or an apple in my will as this being exists in its own right. In fact, until I actually experience the being in its mode of existence love is not satisfied.¹⁹ There is a certain circularity in knowing and loving. The circle begins with the act of knowledge which is drawn to experience an object in the manner of the intellect and the act of the will which is drawn to experience the object as it exists.

Basically, it is the contribution of each of these powers to the act of free choice which divides morals into genus and species. This is even the basis for the division of the treatment of morals in the *Summa Theologiae*. St. Thomas treats of the contribution of the will to morals in *ST* I-II, qq. 6-17. An act is placed in the genus of morals insofar as it is free, that is, voluntary. In his treatment of this, St. Thomas examines the various conditions under which an act done by a man could not be voluntary. Common to all those conditions is the presence of a certain violence which compels a person to act against his will. Violence cannot be done to the act of the will itself (elicited). However, a person can be compelled by exterior forces to do acts of his other powers which he can command (imperated or commanded acts).

As regards the commanded acts of the will, then, the will can suffer violence, insofar as violence can prevent the exterior members from executing the will's command. But as to the will's own proper act, violence cannot be done to the will . . . In like manner a man may be dragged by force, but it is contrary to the very notion of violence, that he be thus dragged of his own will.²⁰

¹⁸ "Res autem ad animam invenitur duplicem habitudinem habere: unam secundum quod ipsa res est in anima per modum animae, et non per modum sui." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 22, 10.

¹⁹ "Aliam secundum quod anima comparatur ad rem in suo esse existentem." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 22, 10.

²⁰ "Quantum igitur ad actus a voluntate imperatos, voluntas violentiam pati potest, inquantum per violentiam exteriora membra impediri possunt ne im-

This violence introduces a condition into any human act which compromises the existence of the genus of morals in it. This violence may be the result of some compelling force. Someone takes my hand and stabs someone else using it. He overpowers me in doing so. It may also take the form of a kind of interior violence. My emotions are incited to such great anger that I am blinded by rage through no fault of my own. I commit murder as a result. I have committed an objective sin, but I am not responsible for the sin because my will was compelled by some force outside of it. The more these exterior forces bind the judgment of reason and move the will without this consultation, the less freedom there is in such an act.²¹ An act of any kind, especially an act of faith, cannot be truly human and responsible unless it is in the genus of morals. The more outside factors compel such an act, the less free it is and the less it is in the genus of morals.

An act becomes human because it is voluntary and results from the will. It becomes good or evil according to the judgment of reason. No human act can be good unless this act is according to the truth. For this reason, Pope John Paul II says often that freedom does not mean freedom from the truth but freedom for the truth. Truth is not judged by the same standards as the freedom of will in an act. In fact, it is the compelling nature of the truth which is the basis for the freedom in any act of will.

The truth of a moral act must be judged not on the basis of the lack of violence done to the will, but on the basis of reason. This reason forms the foundation of the judgment of any moral act as good or evil. "Thus good and evil in human acts are considered insofar as the act is in accord with reason informed by

perium voluntatis exequantur. Sed quantum ad ipsum proprium actum voluntatis, non potest ei violentia inferri . . . Similiter etiam potest homo per violentiam trahi: sed quod hoc sit ex eius voluntate, repugnat rationi violentiae." Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.6, a. 4, c.

²¹ "Aliae vero causae sunt quae inclinant voluntatem ad peccandum, praeter naturam et ordinem ipsius voluntatis, quae nata est moveri libere ex seipsa secundum iudicium rationis." Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 73, a. 6, c.

the divine law, either naturally, by instruction, or by infusion . . . [and] it is evil for the soul to be outside reason as for the body to be outside of nature."²²

The conclusion naturally follows from this that the moral goodness or evil of a human act is judged by a different criterion from the human freedom of the act. For an act to be in the genus of morals it must not suffer exterior violence. For the will to be drawn to a good, all kinds of exterior influences may be brought to bear on it, but until the individual accepts a given act as good in his intellect and so moves his will, any good movement he makes will not be completely under his lordship and so it will not be a deep act of love. The union which such an act produces with the being to which it is united will be weak. Though the truth is the primary criterion for what is good and should be willed, one cannot really be compelled to embrace the truth by violence. This is true of any human assent. It is even more true of the assent of faith. This is based on the very nature of the will and the object of faith who is God Himself.

Among the unbelievers there are some who have never received the faith, such as heathens and Jews: and these are by no means to be compelled to the faith, in order that they might believe, because to believe depends on the will: nevertheless they should be compelled by the faithful, if it be possible to do so, so that they do not hinder the faith.²³

It seems obvious to me that this text is clear about the fact that the act of religion must be an act of freedom of will at least for those who are not Christians. Though it is true that St. Thomas later in the same article says that Christians may be compelled by corporal punishment to return to a faith which they

²² "Unde bonum et malum in actibus humanis consideratur secundum quod actus concordat rationi informatae lege divina, vel naturaliter, vel per doctrinam, vel per infusionem . . . quod animae malum est praeter rationem esse, corpori praeter naturam." Aquinas, *De Malo*, 2, 4.

²³ "Infidelium quidam sunt qui numquam susceperunt fidem, sicut gentiles et Iudaei. Et tales nullo modo sunt ad fidem compellendi, ut ipsi credant: quia credere voluntatis est. Sunt tamen compellendi a fidelibus, si facultas adsit, ut fidem non impediunt." Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 8, c.

have already freely professed, the point that the primary act of faith must be an act of will seems clear enough. St. Thomas makes no distinctions in this article about the tolerance of unbelief in a state, though he does speak about it later. This shows that the teaching of Vatican II in this matter was present in germ many centuries before Vatican II. It also demonstrates that the basis for this teaching does not have its origins in twentieth century personalist philosophy. The expression of the teaching in Vatican II may use terms like "personalist norm"; but these terms are founded on all the rich tradition of the natural law about the kind of moral acts which befit someone with a reasoning soul. The teaching is based on the *nature* of the freedom of the will in the act of morals.

It seems equally clear to me that the teaching in the *Syllabus of Errors* is based on the common teaching of St. Thomas about truth in the intellect. The human intellect comes to experience all beings in its manner. The being of the thing it experiences as to its essential constitution is one. Each being expresses truth which corresponds to it. "Truths which are in things are many, as are the entities of things."²⁴ These truths are in some ways accidental to the human intellect. They would still be things in their essence if no human intellect existed. But they are not inseparable in any sense from the truth which God's intellect communicates to them. They are formed by his one idea in the Word. His Providence governs them. God is the cause of all these things and so their truth is one in Him. The truth is primarily seen as He sees it. His truth is one and there cannot be many conflicting ideas about Him which are all true. His truth is one and every human intellect is bound to know this truth to be moral and to be good insofar as it is able. The measure or standard for any truth is one if that truth is compared to the mind of God which thinks it.²⁵

²⁴ "Veritates autem quae sunt in rebus, sunt plures, sicut et rerum entitates." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 1, 4.

²⁵ "Si ergo accipiatur veritas proprie dicta secundum quam omnia principaliter vera sunt, sic omnia sunt vera una veritate, id est veritate intellectus divini." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 1, 4.

If this unity of truth is applied to things in general it is even more applicable to faith. Faith has as its object the first truth which makes all things one. In faith, one begins to look at the world from God's point of view, wherein the unity of creation, the order of divine Providence, and the actions of human persons become more evident. If there cannot be many truths about things looked at from God's point of view, there certainly cannot be many different conflicting ideas of God which are all true.²⁶ The truth of religion is such a truth. As to which religion is true, then, there is no question. There is only one.

Further, the teaching of Vatican II has often been used to justify dissent within the church as a sign of "healthy pluralism." This seems strange as the council expressly states the following:

So while the religious freedom which men demand in fulfilling their obligation to worship God has to do with freedom from coercion in civil society, it leaves intact the traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of individuals and societies towards the true religion and the one Church of Christ.²⁷

Clearly Vatican II did not have any changes in mind regarding the traditional teaching of the church that all are bound in conscience to form a right conscience. The right conscience must pay an obligation to the order of reality. The human person does not create the truth in the order of reality with respect to any moral good, let alone religion. As to the order of truth, the presence of the thing in the mind as the mind assents to the thing in a spiritual way, the equation of the idea and the thing are necessary for truth to be present. Though there can be no such equation with God, God has revealed his inner character both in nature and in revelation. This revelation can only be one. The reflection of the human mind on it can only be of a piece and all human beings are bound in conscience to seek this insofar as they are capable.

²⁶ "Per se obiectum fidei veritas prima est . . . Veritas autem divinae cognitionis hoc modo se habet, quod primo et principaliter est ipsius rei increatae; creaturarum verum quodammodo consequenter, in quantum quidem cognoscendo seipsum omnia alia cognoscit." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 14, 8.

²⁷ Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

As to the freedom of the will in coming to assent to such a thing, the more outside pressures (outside not in the sense of instruction and teaching, but in the sense of violence done to the body or the emotions), the less the act of the will becomes involved in the truth to which the person is assenting. In this sense, the act of faith, or any other act, is more and more removed from the realm of morals. The potential for virtue is reduced in direct proportion to the freedom of the inner act of the will.

After this examination, it is possible to arrive at several conclusions. First, Vatican II made reference to a traditional argument found at least in Thomas Aquinas on the difference between the binding character of the truth and the freedom of the will in morals. Second, this distinction in no way calls into question the traditional basis of the natural law for deciding on human goods. Personalist terms may be used sometimes, but these perfectly reflect the constant philosophical tradition of the church. Third, the *Syllabus of Errors* and *Dignitatis Humanae* are in perfect theoretical accord on the nature of religious freedom. The former emphasizes the intellect as bound to seek the truth, the latter the will in its freedom from every exterior coercion in order to be a natural, human act. The fact that they represent different jurisdictional ideas about the state religion is due only to the application of these principles in various times. Fourth, both teachings have to do with freedom of conscience in the civil order and cannot be used to found the right of Catholics to dissent from the teaching of the church. The only intelligent conclusion is that there is a homogeneous and not a heterogeneous development of doctrine exhibited by the two documents.