



# **Was John Courtney Murray Right?**

**BY: LOUIE VERRECCHIO**

**An examination of the  
Second Vatican Council's  
Declaration on Religious Freedom**



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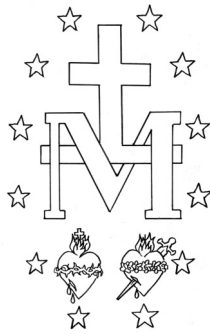
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**Salve Regina Publications, Inc.**  
**3210 Eves Way**  
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Email: [info@HarvestingTheFruit.com](mailto:info@HarvestingTheFruit.com)

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*Dedicated to the Immaculata*

## **Acknowledgment**

I would be remiss without expressing my sincere gratitude to Alejandro Bermudez, the Executive Director of Catholic News Agency (CNA), one of the fastest growing Catholic news providers in the English speaking world, and an organization I've been privileged to serve as a columnist since April 2009.

This booklet is largely based upon a series of columns, initially published by CNA in early 2012, the content of which most "mainstream" Catholic news organizations would have avoided at all costs; namely, a critical examination of the Second Vatican Council's treatment of religious freedom.

It is thanks to the courage and conviction of Mr. Bermudez and his staff that countless readers have been exposed to this important issue, and have responded by providing the overwhelmingly positive feedback and encouragement that gave rise to the present work.



## **CONTENTS**

### **Introduction - *i***

#### **Chapter One**

The Father of the Declaration – 1

#### **Chapter Two**

The Council Departs – 3

#### **Chapter Three**

The Traditional Doctrine – 5

#### **Chapter Four**

Murray's Novelties – 7

#### **Chapter Five**

In Search of Historical Nuance – 11

#### **Chapter Six**

A Foundation of Sand – 21

#### **Chapter Seven**

Murray's Post-Conciliar Assessment – 23

#### **Chapter Eight**

Neo-Conservative Rationalization – 31

#### **Chapter Nine**

The Social Kingship of Christ – 37

#### **Chapter Ten**

The Mission of the Church: Apostolic or Political? – 43

### **Conclusion - 48**





## INTRODUCTION

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**On December 7, 1965, Pope Paul VI officially promulgated *Dignitatis Humanae* - the Second Vatican Council's "Americanized" treatment of religious freedom: It was as though an American flag had been raised atop the cupola of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, supplanting the Cross of Christ the King; the same that had long since adorned not just the pinnacle of this most famous of all sacred buildings, but the very heart of Christendom itself...**

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As I write, religious liberty is under attack in an unprecedented way in the United States of America thanks to a Department of Health and Human Services mandate; one that requires all but a very narrowly defined group of religious institutions to provide insurance benefits to their employees covering such objectively immoral acts as sterilization and contraception, including abortifacients.

This, I'm afraid, is just the beginning.

In May of 2012, President Barack Obama made it official – he's in favor of so-called "gay marriage." Needless to say, he has the support of many in Congress; e.g. Representative Barney Frank of Massachusetts who is currently "engaged" to another man.

While it would be easy for us to say that we find ourselves in this difficult situation because we made the grave mistake of putting people like this in office, it's more accurate to say that our even greater mistake is that we have forgotten who they work for; Christ the King.

We don't talk an awful lot about Christ the King anymore, do we? Oh, sure, we celebrate a Feast in His honor every

November, but most of us tend to think of “Christ the King” as an honorific that we, the faithful, have bestowed upon the Lord; like a term of endearment born of Christian piety.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. What did the Risen Lord say?

*All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me...*  
(Matthew 28:18).

This all-encompassing power was never ours to give; rather, it was given to the Risen Lord by His Father by virtue of His merits; Jesus *earned* that kingly authority by His passion, death and resurrection!

When we speak of Christ the King, therefore, we are proclaiming the objective truth that He has sovereign authority, not just over spiritual things in Heaven, but also temporal things here on earth. That’s why the Church used to preach the *Social Kingship of Jesus Christ*.

When was the last time you heard a priest or bishop invoke - much less expound upon - this phrase? For most readers, the answer is *never*, but it’s certainly not because the Lord no longer reigns over society and all of its constituent parts.

The reason this phrase is foreign to most Catholics today is that the Second Vatican Council has in large measure provided the template for the way in which the Church addresses the world, and it mentions Christ the King only once and then only tangentially; remaining silent as to the extent of the Lord’s reign.

Imagine that; nearly 200,000 words in sixteen documents and Christ the King is all but absent!

Over the last nearly ten years, I’ve had the great privilege of speaking with Catholics all over the United States on the topic

Vatican Council II, and very frequently I must caution Catholics on the necessity of acknowledging the bitter truth that portions of the Council documents - sometimes subtly, sometimes plainly - represent an undeniable departure from the traditional teachings of the Church.

One of the most profound examples of such departure lies in the document, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, promulgated by Pope Paul VI just one day before he would formally close the Second Vatican Council.

This document is perhaps the most controversial of all the conciliar texts, even more so than the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. *And why is this the case?* For the simple reason that it represents what well-informed Catholics all over the ideological spectrum recognize as its rather stark departure from the Church's long held, centuries old, teaching that true religious freedom is the exclusive, divinely instituted, right of the Catholic Church alone because it, and only it, has been commissioned by Christ to proclaim the fullness of truth to the world over which He alone is Sovereign.

Our pastors and bishops have been invoking the propositions set forth in *Dignitatis Humanae* quite a lot lately (for obvious reasons) and the idea seems to be that the content of this document represents the solution to the persecution that we're currently facing.

Well, it is my conviction that the propositions set forth in *Dignitatis Humanae* are among the primary reasons we now find ourselves under attack! In other words; we've all but invited it.

Now, I do realize that this is a provocative statement to make. Since you're reading this book I think it's safe to assume that you're among those who believe that religion is good, and God

knows liberty is something every American treasures. So, since religion is good and liberty is indispensable, well then it only stands to reason that “religious liberty” as we so frequently hear it invoked these days must be well beyond reproach. But is it really?

In this booklet I will attempt to examine the traditional doctrine of the Church and the changes that came with the promulgation of *Dignitatis Humanae*. My goal is not simply to share my personal opinions (though doing so to some degree is entirely unavoidable) but to provide you, the reader, with the information necessary to explore by the light of sacred Tradition the foundational planks upon which these two disparate approaches to religious freedom must either stand or fall. From there you can prayerfully draw your own conclusions.

In order to do this, we must ask a question that relatively few among us seem willing to even consider:

*Was John Courtney Murray right?*



## CHAPTER ONE | THE FATHER OF THE DECLARATION

For many readers, “Was John Courtney Murray right?” is a rather strange title to a book that proposes to examine the topic of religious liberty, but make no mistake about it; this is precisely the question that Catholics need to ask.

Of course, it would help to know a little bit about who he is.

Fr. John Courtney Murray, S.J. was an American born Jesuit theologian. Ordained to the priesthood in 1933, Murray was intensely interested in reconciling the U.S. Constitutional approach to religious liberty with the traditional teaching of the Church - the former establishing religious pluralism as the ideal, the latter the reign of Christ the King.

To this end, Murray wrote and published numerous articles on the topic of Church-State relations, but in the 1950's the Holy Office (what we now call the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) censured Fr. Murray; ultimately forbidding him to publish on the topic any further because his views stood in direct conflict with Catholic teaching.

Fr. Murray was obedient; he continued to write on the topic, however, but rather than publishing his articles, he sent them to Rome for examination and hopefully for approval. That approval never came.

In spite of this, Fr. Murray was invited to participate in the Second Vatican Council as a “theological expert” in order to assist the Council Fathers in drafting a document on *guess what?* Religious liberty.

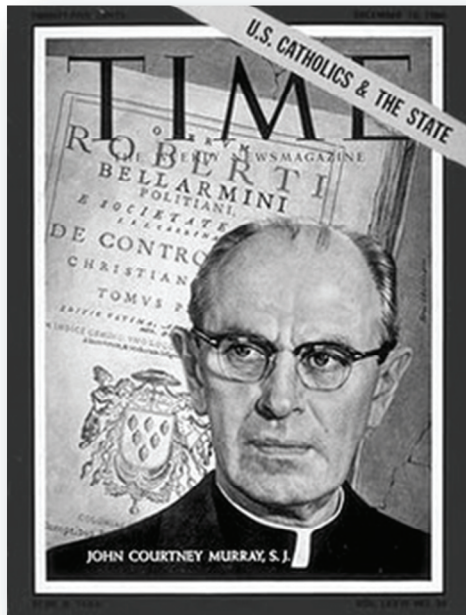
Yes, I know, we've just begun and already you're scratching your head, but it gets even better: Fr. Murray wasn't just one voice among many at the Council. No, He was the principal author of *Dignitatis Humanae* – a document that enshrined

many of the same novelties that were censured by the Holy Office less than ten years earlier.

So, what does this mean for us?

In order to comprehend the theological foundation upon which *Dignitatis Humanae* is presumably built we need to examine the writings of John Courtney Murray.

This booklet does not presume to explore the matter of religious liberty exhaustively – far from it. This is a rather dense topic that deserves further study, but the good news (or bad news depending upon one’s perspective) is that Murray’s propositions are founded on ideas that are surprisingly simple to evaluate. In other words, determining the degree to which his approach resonates with Catholic teaching is far from doctoral level theology; it’s really more a matter of rudimentary Catechesis and Catholic common sense.



John Courtney Murray, S.J.  
Sept. 12, 1904 - Aug. 16, 1967

## CHAPTER TWO | THE COUNCIL DEPARTS

Theologian Gregory Baum - a Council *peritus* who also participated in the drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae* - pulled no punches in articulating the tremendous implications of the Council's doctrinal about-face with regard to religious liberty in a 2005 interview with Catholic News Service.<sup>1</sup>

"The Catholic Church had condemned religious freedom [as conceived by the Council] in the 19th century," Baum stated, speculating that those bishops and theologians who resisted the Murray-inspired text did so because they "didn't want to admit that the Church was wrong."

Baum went on to portray the traditional teaching as that which maintained, "Truth has all the rights and error has no rights."

Summing up the contrasting opinion put forth by Murray, the same that prevailed at Vatican II, Baum concluded, "But, this is nonsense; truth is an abstract concept. People have rights."

Already one may sense a fundamental flaw in the conciliar argument as "truth" is far more than just an abstract concept; rather, it is the Person of Jesus Christ! But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Baum continued by pointing out, and accurately so, that the traditional teaching held that those who profess a non-Catholic creed (or what Pope Pius XI and others plainly identified as a "false religion") could at best be tolerated in society.

At this, it would helpful to take a closer look at religious liberty according to Tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0505798.htm](http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0505798.htm)



The Second Vatican Council formally opened on October 11, 1962 and was closed on December 8, 1965. The Council Fathers met in four separate sessions throughout those years during which the topic of religious freedom was one of the most vigorously debated.



## CHAPTER THREE | THE TRADITIONAL DOCTRINE

The Church has long held that man enjoys a certain right to religious liberty on the *individual level*. This liberty is properly understood not as a “right to err” (which is entirely irreconcilable with the conviction that all rights come from the God who is truth; in whom no darkness dwells); but rather as a *freedom from coercion*.

This “right” brings with it, however, the solemn obligation to seek the “true religion” - that which Pope Leo XIII said “cannot be difficult to find if only it be sought with an earnest and unbiased mind; namely, the Catholic faith, the one established by Jesus Christ Himself, and which He committed to His Church to protect and to propagate.”<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Church teaching clearly acknowledges that man often errs in his quest for truth, but the doctrine of freedom from coercion is not an open-ended license to propagate religious falsehoods *in the public arena*, which not only represents an attack against society (comprised as it is of other human beings who are duty bound to seek and embrace the true religion), but also an affront to Christ the King who reigns over all things and wills to draw all men to Himself through His Church.

It must also be noted that traditional Catholic doctrine has always made clear the obligation that is incumbent upon those who govern to exercise their authority in service to the one true King of all, Jesus Christ.

“No society can hold together unless some one be over all, directing all to strive earnestly for the common good, every body politic must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and has,

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<sup>2</sup> cf *Immortale Dei* 7

consequently, God for its Author. Hence, it follows that all public power must proceed from God. Everything, without exception, must be subject to Him, and must serve Him, so that whosoever holds the right to govern holds it from one sole and single source, namely, God, the sovereign Ruler of all. 'There is no power but from God.'"<sup>3</sup>

Does this mean to say that the State is absolutely required by divine law to suppress the public practice and dissemination of false religions? No. Even as rulers of nations have consistently been called upon by the Church to exercise their governance in service to Christ the King in all things, She has also traditionally held that it is within the rights of rulers of State to tolerate false religious practices in public when a greater evil can thereby be averted in service to the common good.

This teaching does not go so far, however, as to give rulers free reign to adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude toward religion in which all religions are essentially deemed and treated as equals, as though placing the Lord shoulder-to-shoulder with idols.

Pope Leo XIII summed up the traditional doctrine as follows:

"The Church, indeed, deems it unlawful to place the various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion, but does not, on that account, condemn those rulers who, for the sake of securing some great good or of hindering some great evil, allow patiently custom or usage to be a kind of sanction for each kind of religion having its place in the State. And, in fact, the Church is wont to take earnest heed that no one shall be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, for, as St. Augustine wisely reminds us, 'Man cannot believe otherwise than of his own will.'"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Immortale Dei* - 3

<sup>4</sup> *Immortale Dei* - 36

## CHAPTER FOUR | MURRAY'S NOVELTIES

Now let's take a look at the John Courtney Murray school of thought.

The first thing one who carefully examines Fr. Murray's arguments by the light of Tradition will notice, is that he takes great liberty in his treatment of the traditional teaching. He does so, however, in such a way that the casual observer may either miss it altogether, or perhaps may simply consider it so subtle as to be irrelevant to the overall discussion.

In reality, Murray's presumptions are profoundly bold, and they deserve intense scrutiny because they serve as the very foundation upon which he will build his entire case for religious liberty as adopted at Vatican II.

"The political criterion, whereby the issue of the possibility of intolerance or the necessity of tolerance is to be decided, is the public peace," he wrote of the traditional teaching in an article published the year prior to the promulgation of *Dignitatis Humanae*.<sup>5</sup>

In truth, the criterion for State tolerance of religious error most often articulated in the papal magisterium to that point is not the "public peace" but rather the "common good," and the difference between the two is substantial. Murray, in fact, admitted as much by noting in the very same article that there is indeed a "distinction between the common good and public order."

"The common good," Murray rightly (but incompletely) maintained, "includes all the social goods, spiritual and moral as well as material, which man pursues here on earth in accord with the demands of his personal and social nature. The pursuit

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<sup>5</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1964e.htm>

of the common good devolves upon society as a whole, on all its members and on all its institutions, in accord with the principles of subsidiarity, legal justice, and distributive justice.”

By contrast, he continued, “Public order, whose care devolves upon the state, is a narrower concept,” which according to Murray includes “the public peace, public morality, as determined by moral standards commonly accepted among the people, and justice, which secures for the people what is due to them.”

Now let’s examine these propositions more closely.

As noted, Murray begins his treatment by recasting the criteria for the tolerance of religious error from the “common good” to what he plainly admits is the “narrower concept” of “public order.” Remarkably, he offers precious little justification for this unilateral decision to alter the traditional teaching, but alas, that is precisely what he does.

Secondly, he fails to address the contradiction between his insistence that the purposes of the State belong in a category apart from the “common good,” the pursuit of which he clearly acknowledges as being the purpose of society and “all its members and all its institutions” which presumably includes the governing institutions of the State. Contradiction aside, Murray simply moves ahead as though confident in his justification for unilaterally recasting centuries-held Catholic teaching.

Lastly, his suggestion that “public morality” is a construct of “commonly accepted moral standards” is entirely irreconcilable with Catholic thought; so much so that it is a central tenet of secular humanism, and yet, this too forms an integral part of Murray’s foundation.

In essence, we can see already that the very basis of religious liberty as conceived by John Courtney Murray requires first and foremost the substantial removal of God from society, from its ultimate end, from its moral standards and from its governance; i.e., it rejects the Social Kingship of Jesus Christ.

By contrast, the Holy Fathers invoked the “common good” in their traditional treatment of religious liberty deliberately. Though the phrase is often misused and misunderstood today as pertaining to the temporal order alone; e.g., as having to do with things like economic prosperity, access to natural resources, education, healthcare and the like, in Catholic thought it encompasses both temporal and spiritual realities.

There is but one ultimate good that is common to every man, and that is union with God – He from whom all good things come, and toward whom all are willed by the Creator to return. The Church, therefore, has always concerned Herself with both spiritual and temporal realities, carefully placing each in its proper perspective with the ultimate destiny of humankind ever in mind.

Pope Leo XIII summed up this synthesis very succinctly, saying:

“Neither must it be supposed that the solicitude of the Church is so preoccupied with the spiritual concerns of her children as to neglect their temporal and earthly interests... By the fact that she calls men to virtue and forms them to its practice she promotes this in no slight degree. Christian morality, when adequately and completely practiced, leads of itself to temporal prosperity, for it merits the blessing of that God who is the source of all blessings.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> cf *Rerum Novarum* - 28



Pope Leo XIII, who reigned from February 20, 1878  
until his death on July 20, 1903

## CHAPTER FIVE | IN SEARCH OF HISTORICAL NUANCE

Having unilaterally redefined certain core constituents of the traditional teaching as articulated by Pope Leo XIII, Murray then insists on placing what remains in the context of an “historical problematic” with the intention of neutering whatever lingering doctrinal details may dare to refute his desired conclusion.

Pope Leo XIII, as Murray tells it, was not so much concerned with the exclusive rights of truth and likewise of Christ and His Church; rather “his central notion was ‘the freedom of the Church’” considered in a much broader context.

In other words, Murray wants us to believe that Leo XIII, if alive today, would alter his teaching to say that as long as the Church has the freedom that She requires, the State has no further obligation to truth, or to exercise what traditional teaching called the “care of religion.”<sup>7</sup>

At this it may be timely to note that some “conservative” Catholic commentators have buttressed Murray’s innovations by setting up a straw man argument centered on the “competency of the State” in matters religious.

George Weigel, for instance, during an appearance on EWTN said, “A State that could say that Christ is King is a State that could say that Charles III or George VII or whatever is king... or Oprah Winfrey is queen.”<sup>8</sup>

He concluded, therefore, “The State is incompetent to make theological judgments,” the implication being that the State ought to remain utterly silent as to Christ’s Kingship, as though it should not have any concern whatsoever for religious truth.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1964e.htm>

<sup>8</sup> The World Over - 5/1/2009

I respect Weigel's intellect, but this line of reasoning is sophomoric at best. It does not logically follow that a State that is able and willing to recognize and proclaim the objective truth of Christ's Kingship is thereby granted license to authoritatively proclaim falsehood. It is likewise foolish to summarily draw the conclusion that the State should therefore concern itself with purely secular matters apart from those properly religious.

It is true that States do at times assume a competency that is not their own by adopting religious falsehood; e.g., the Islamic theocracies of the world, but the remedy for this affront to the Lord is truth; it's certainly not religious indifference.

That is what moved Pope Leo XIII to state, "So, too, is it a sin for the State not to have care for religion as something beyond its scope."<sup>9</sup>

In any event, the important thing to recognize before we move on is that "scope" as Leo XIII invokes it does not hint at ceding competency at all. Indeed, the Church has always maintained the She is the uniquely competent custodian of religious truth.

Returning now to Murray's arguments, we cannot help but discern what looks like a subtle attempt to make of "freedom" an absolute that somehow exists apart from its Divine source and the obligations thereto.

"Freedom is the first property of the Church; and freedom is the first claim that the Church makes in the face of society and state" Murray writes. He then goes on to quote (out of context) Pope Leo XIII, "This freedom is so much the property of the Church, as a perfect and divine work, that those who act against this freedom likewise act against God and against their duty."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Immortale Dei* - 4

<sup>10</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1964e.htm>



Again, Murray is making some remarkable claims that demand a closer look.

The very proposition that the Church is best comprehended as a hierarchy of “properties” such that one is first, and presumably another second, and so on, is far less than compelling ecclesiology, but confining ourselves to Murray’s idiom just the same, the “first property” of the Church is not “freedom,” it is the eternal Son of God in the flesh; the Person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the “first claim that the Church makes” wherever She goes is not freedom, as Murray supposes, it is that She is the “Body of Christ” and that Jesus who is Lord established Her as the unique, universal sacrament of salvation.

*It is only by virtue of this objective truth that She can reasonably claim to be eminently free.* This, my friends, is Catholicism 101 and it speaks directly to the very mission of the Church.

The freedom to which Murray refers can only be properly understood as that which fully belongs to the Church alone simply because it is the property of the Lord; He who is the truth in all its fullness. It is, in other words, a freedom that is uniquely absolute; one that transcends all human attempts to constrain it. This is a singular privilege to which the Catholic Church alone can lay claim, and more than that – She must assert this privilege in Her teaching in order to carry out the Great Commission given to Her.<sup>11</sup>

In any event, Murray attempts to legitimize his elevation of religious freedom to an absolute that persists apart from the Church’s unique divine institution by quoting paragraph 13 of the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Church in Bavaria, *Officio Sanctissimo*, and there are several problems that must be noted, not the least of which is his faulty translation.

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<sup>11</sup> See Matthew 28: 19-20

The Encyclical was originally written in Italian, wherein the operative phrase states with regard to the liberty (or freedom) in discussion that it is “*essenziale alla Chiesa, all’opera perfetta e divina;*” that is, “essential to the Church, to that institution (“opera”) perfect and divine.” Indeed, this is exactly how the Holy See renders this phrase in English.<sup>12 13</sup>

Again, we are dealing with subtly, but make no mistake; it is noteworthy. In Murray’s version (“This freedom is so much the property of the Church, as a perfect and divine work...”) it appears that the adjectives “perfect and divine” apply to “freedom,” whereas the Italian original text, just as the Holy See’s English translation, much more clearly indicates that “perfect and divine” refers to *the Church*.

Remember – Murray is attempting to make the case that Pope Leo XIII was not primarily interested in singling out the Catholic Church and that unique claim to freedom that stems from Her divine institution; rather, he wants us to believe that Leo XIII would ultimately be content to assert a more broad-based notion of freedom in which the Church might share, as a mere equal, with other, necessarily false, religions.

Let us assume in charity that Fr. Murray’s mistranslation was unintentional, but let us not overlook the central error evident here and elsewhere in his reasoning; namely, he elevates “freedom” to the status of the absolute, as though in matters religious it exists apart from that divine perfection that dwells in the Catholic Church *alone*.

In any event, Murray fails to address the fact that just two sentences later in *Officio Sanctissimo*, Pope Leo writes of the Church that She “is a society eminently independent, and above

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_22121887\\_officio-sanctissimo\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_22121887_officio-sanctissimo_it.html)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_22121887\\_officio-sanctissimo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_22121887_officio-sanctissimo_en.html)

all others, because of the excellence of the heavenly and immortal blessings towards which it tends.”<sup>14</sup>

This solitary sentence alone renders Murray's argument unsustainable, and further reading reveals no hint whatsoever that this doctrine is subject to change based upon historical circumstances.

Clearly, at least at this point in Murray's treatise, it cannot be said that Tradition contains the seeds of a doctrine that would ask no more of society than the kind of broad-based religious freedom that would do no more than guarantee that the Church would be allowed to compete in the marketplace of hearts and minds alongside the false religions of the world.

Murray goes on to quote the *Syllabus of Errors*<sup>15</sup> of Pope Leo XIII, pointing to the historic circumstances in which he wrote as “the decisive proof” that the Holy Father was less concerned with the prospect of the Church being “dethroned from its historic status of legal privilege;” but rather was concerned with assuring a political and juridical system that assured the freedom of the Church in a more generic sense.

“The basic line of battle was drawn by Proposition 39 of the *Syllabus*” Murray writes. This Proposition condemns the error that maintains that “The state, inasmuch as it is the origin and source of all rights, possesses a power of jurisdiction that knows no limits.”<sup>16</sup>

Murray maintains, “Proposition 39 of the *Syllabus* was also [concerned with] the destruction of the essential dignity of man, which resides in his freedom. Leo XIII did not greatly attend to this aspect of the matter; it did not lie within his historical problematic. However, by his central emphasis on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_21041878\\_inscrutabili-dei-consilio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_21041878_inscrutabili-dei-consilio_en.html)

<sup>16</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1964e.htm>

freedom of the Church he... opened the way to a widening of the question, thus stated, to include the issue of the freedom of the human person and the issue of religious freedom as a legal institution within a system of constitutional government, correspondent to the legitimate exigencies of the personal and political consciousness.”<sup>17</sup>

A close examination reveals yet another flaw in Murray’s approach; namely, he elevates human dignity to an absolute status independent of the Divine source in whom all dignity rests.

The “essential dignity of man;” i.e., the very *essence* of man’s dignity, does not lie in his freedom as Murray insists; rather, it lies in the call to communion with God in whose image and likeness he is created.<sup>18</sup>

Having already labored to elevate “freedom” to the status of the absolute, human dignity as Murray presents it is a static, unchanging condition that does not exist in degree. This, however, is not the case. Human dignity can indeed be perfected as one’s union with God is perfected.<sup>19</sup>

I won’t belabor the point any further than to call your attention to Baptism. Clearly, the unbaptized person has the inherent dignity of having been created in God’s image, but the person in whom the likeness of God is restored by sanctifying grace, through Baptism, possesses a degree of dignity that is infinitely greater by virtue of the indwelling of the Trinitarian life.

Moving on, Murray falsely identifies freedom as something of a primary resident characteristic of man apart from God when in fact it is a property that flows from the Divine. Freedom, like

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, *Gaudium et Spes* – 19: “The root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God.”

<sup>19</sup> See *Gaudium et Spes* – 21: “This dignity is rooted and perfected in God.”

human dignity, is likewise possessed in degree according to the relative perfection of our communion with God. That is why the Church alone can lay claim, in the words of Leo XIII, to being “a society eminently independent, and above all others,” for She is the very Body of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Murray’s fundamental error is one that the world at large has readily adopted. He, like those libertine humanists who came both before and after him, has presumed to release freedom from the shackles of obligation to its Divine origins.

To further his claim that historical circumstances alone are enough to justify altering the traditional teaching, Murray turns his attention to Pope Pius XII, whom he claims “read the signs of the times and discerned two that gave direction to his doctrine and pastoral solicitude. The first was totalitarian tyranny on the Communist model. Now the threat was not simply to the freedom of the Church in the traditionally Catholic nations of Europe; the new threat was to the freedom of the people everywhere. An ideology and a system of rule were abroad, ‘which in the end rejected and denied the rights, the dignity, and the freedom of the human person.’”<sup>21</sup>

Here, Murray gives the appearance of quoting Pope Pius XII, however, the footnote in his article calls the reader’s attention to the Encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, which was in fact promulgated by his predecessor, Pope Pius XI.<sup>22</sup>

Substantively, this is of little matter with regard to the point that Murray is attempting to make – a proposition summed up by the claim, “Pius XII abandons completely the Leonine notion of government as paternal.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_22121887\\_officio-sanctissimo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_22121887_officio-sanctissimo_en.html)

<sup>21</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1964e.htm>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19031937\\_divini-redemptoris\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19031937_divini-redemptoris_en.html)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Murray's purposes are very clear – to establish a sort of dichotomy between Leo XIII and Pius XII as it concerns the constitution of States, their rights and their duties, so as to substantiate the claim that the traditional teaching is part of an ever-evolving proposition based not upon absolute truths but upon circumstances.

It must be noted that Murray bases his assertion, at least in part, on the rather facile generalization that the Leonine view of government is essentially “parental.” This, however, is so incomplete a picture as to represent but a caricature.

It is more accurate to say that the Leonine teaching, which is biblically founded and abundantly clear, is that the rights and duties of the State are similar to those of the individual citizen in that they derive from, and are ordered toward, the One Parent of all who is God Almighty. Provided this fundamental truth is duly acknowledged in the way the affairs of the State are conducted, the Church traditionally allows for the existence of many different forms of government (monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, etc.); some of which may arguably be more “parental” in nature than others.

As Leo XIII wrote, “The right to rule is not necessarily, however, bound up with any special mode of government. It may take this or that form, provided only that it be of a nature of the government, rulers must ever bear in mind that God is the paramount ruler of the world, and must set Him before themselves as their exemplar and law in the administration of the State.”<sup>24</sup>

Murray continues, “The freedom of the Church as the community of the faithful is not the sole object of the Church's concern. The freedom of the human person in his belief in God is also to be recognized and protected against unjust

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<sup>24</sup> *Immortale Dei* - 4

encroachments by legal or social forces. Pius XII accepts this wider problematic of religious freedom. Among the 'fundamental rights of the person,' which are to be recognized and promoted by the juridical order of society, he includes the 'right to private and public worship of God, including also religious action of a charitable kind.'" <sup>25</sup>

By "this wider problematic," Murray is implying that the freedom that the Church has traditionally asserted for Herself is now rightly asserted on behalf of even the false religions. To make his point, Murray is quoting, and rather selectively so, from the 1942 Christmas Message of Pope Pius XII. <sup>26</sup>

The Holy Father's comments therein do not in any way reflect tension between his own thoughts and those of his predecessors. In fact, even though the historical circumstances have indeed changed in their details over time (as they always do), the "problematic" itself, as Murray calls it, has not changed (or "widened") in its essence at all.

Pius XII elucidates the perennial problem thusly:

"Today, as never before, the hour has come for reparation, for rousing the conscience of the world from the heavy torpor into which the drugs of false ideas, widely diffused, have sunk it."<sup>27</sup>

One clearly sees that among the fundamental concerns common to both Leo XIII and Pius XII are the "false ideas" that the latter decried as having been "widely diffused" to the detriment of mankind in his day, the same which his predecessor had determined subject to State restriction (or toleration) as the demands of the common good may so dictate, in contrast with the doctrines of the Church that are always and everywhere freely proclaimed.

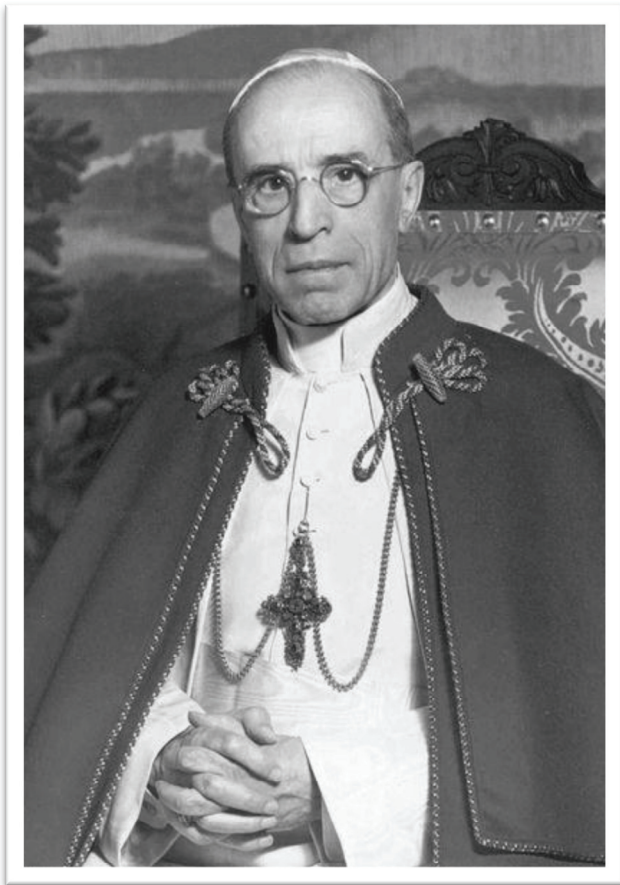
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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/p12ch42.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Murray would have us believe that the Holy Father, Pius XII, is at once decrying the regrettable results of those “false ideas, widely diffused” while simultaneously suggesting that their diffusion is a “fundamental personal right.” Indeed, no such contradiction is evident in the text.



Pope Pius XII – Pontiff of the Holy Roman Catholic Church from March 2, 1939 until his death on Oct. 9, 1958



## CHAPTER SIX | A FOUNDATION OF SAND

The writings of John Courtney Murray that we have examined thus far are by no means all that he had to say on the topic of religious liberty. We have, however, availed ourselves of the foundation upon which his arguments are constructed.

In essence, as the Second Vatican Council largely adopted Murray's propositions, this critically important examination concerns, therefore, the very text of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, and the ultimate question: can it withstand scrutiny by the light of Tradition or not?

I do realize that many readers may feel a bit uneasy at the very prospect of questioning whether or not the conciliar text itself can withstand such an examination, and to you I would simply offer the following:

The Holy See has made it clear that an "examination and theological explanation of individual expressions and formulations contained in the documents of Vatican Council II and later Magisterium is open to legitimate discussion." (See Vatican Information Service Communique Concerning Society of St. Pius X – September 14, 2011.)<sup>28</sup>

Make no mistake, *Dignitatis Humanae* is one of the primary documents of the Council that not only deserves, but demands such scrutiny. Note as well, that the Holy See includes in this examination "later Magisterium," i.e., that which attempted to explain the conciliar decrees to the faithful.

As an indication of just how important this is with regard to the topic of religious liberty, I will conclude by calling your attention to the regrettable situation in which the Catholic Church finds itself in the United States of America as I write.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2011/09/communique-concerning-society-of-st.html>

Here, our bishops – like those the world over - have adopted with vigor the propositions asserted in *Dignitatis Humanae*, and as such they have ceased proclaiming the Social Kingship of Christ, His unique privileges and every man’s duty toward Him.

The result? Rather than condemning out of hand objective evils like abortion on demand and contraception, our shepherds have largely been reduced to begging a godless Administration for “conscience clauses” and a seat at the table beside heathens and heretics as though we must content ourselves with adopting a policy of “Have it your way, but let us have ours as well.”

This, my friends, is perhaps the most pressing issue of our day, both for the Church and for the world at large. For the love of God, don’t shy away from the challenge.

Difficult though they may be to address, ask the hard questions, boldly holding them up to the light of Tradition, praying the Holy Ghost to bestow wisdom and understanding upon you, your loved ones, and those who are charged with leading the Bride of Christ – the Church Militant - on this journey toward Heavenly perfection.



*Veni Creator Spiritus!*

## CHAPTER SEVEN | MURRAY'S POST-CONCILIAR ASSESSMENT

After having vetted the foundational planks of *Dignitatis Humanae* by examining the writing of John Courtney Murray dated the year prior to the Declaration's promulgation, it may be useful to look at Fr. Murray's reflections offered in 1966, the year after the Council closed.

*"Dignitatis Humanae* is a document of very modest scope. [It attempted] to show that a harmony exists between religious freedom in the juridico-social sense, and Christian freedom in the various senses of this latter concept as they emerge from Scripture and from the doctrine of the Church. The Declaration merely suggests that the two kinds of freedom are related; it does not undertake to specify more closely what their precise relationship is."<sup>29</sup>

To his credit, Murray doesn't attempt to exaggerate the Declaration's heft; rather he tells us that it only goes so far as to "suggest" that a harmonious relationship exists between the Council's novel treatment of religious freedom on the one hand, and the well-established papal magisterium of the previous centuries on the other. More noteworthy still is his candid admission that the Council didn't even attempt to substantiate this "suggestion" by addressing "what their precise relationship is."

"The Declaration," Murray continues, "does not undertake to present a full and complete theology of freedom."<sup>30</sup>

Based on these reflections alone it would appear that Murray – the chief architect of *Dignitatis Humanae* - imputes far less doctrinal weight to the document than many of his contemporaries seem eager to do.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1966c.htm>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Murray's statements are a stunning indication that the document's authors – living and working in those heady conciliar days during which all things seemed possible and all things “new” were just assumed to be “improved” – proceeded undaunted in spite of an acute awareness that the theological principals upon which their assertions are presumably founded were not as yet fully developed.

So why did the Council neglect the due diligence of *first* constructing a solid theological foundation?

“This would have been a far more ambitious task,” Murray tells us, even going so far as to admit that establishing harmony between the Council's conclusions and the traditional teaching “would have been a far more satisfactory method of procedure, from the theological point of view.”<sup>31</sup>

According to Murray, the Council deliberately chose not to do so for the following five reasons quoted from the same document.

1. The Declaration is the only conciliar document that is formally addressed to the world at large on a topic of intense secular as well as religious interest. Therefore, it would have been inept for the Declaration to begin with doctrines that can be known only by revelation and accepted only by faith.<sup>32</sup>

This is yet another stunning admission! It suggests that the Council went about drafting *Dignitatis Humanae* under the self-imposed restriction that it dare not present an argument of such great “secular” concern within the framework of the Catholic faith and Divine Revelation.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Is it not, however, the Church's very mission to do precisely this on all matters? Furthermore, is it not the voice of Christ that should resonate in the decrees of *every ecumenical council* in such way as to call out to those wandering in the desert of falsehood, that they may come to be nourished by truth at the bosom of the Church? As such, is not every conciliar decree in some sense addressed to the world at large, even if not explicitly so?

2. What the world at large, as well as the faithful within the Church, wants to know today is the stand of the Church on religious freedom as a human and civil right. It would be idle to deny that the doctrine of the Church, as formulated in the 19th century, is somewhat ambiguous in itself, out of touch with contemporary reality and a cause of confusion among the faithful and of suspicion throughout large sectors of public opinion.<sup>33</sup>

Setting aside the richness (and none-too-subtle arrogance) of the accusation that the traditional teaching is "ambiguous" and causes "confusion," one cannot help but wonder to what extent, if any, Murray and company attempted to reconcile the traditional doctrine with "contemporary reality" before simply setting about replacing it with something new. His reflections on the process of debate leading up to the Declaration (which will be quoted shortly) indicate that it was perhaps very little.

3. The theological structure of the argument, as proposed above, would give rise to historical and theological problems which are still matters of dispute among theologians. There is, for instance, the problem of the exact relationship between Christian freedom and religious freedom. There is, furthermore, the whole

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

problem of the development of doctrine, from *Mirari Vos to Dignitatis Humanae personae*.<sup>34</sup>

Once again, Murray plainly admits that the theology that presumably anchored *Dignitatis Humanae* to the sacred deposit of faith was “a matter of dispute” as the Council met (and so it remains today).

Based upon this, it would seem that the propositions put forth in the Declaration amount to little more than what we might call “credit card theology” as its authors chose to immediately lay hold of the doctrinal innovations they desired, but with no firm intention of settling the theological debt until later.

Evidently, they just assumed that someone would eventually come along to supply the capital necessary to zero-out the balance sheet, but here we are more than 45 years hence and still the debt remains unpaid, and at what cost!

4. Christian freedom, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, is not exclusively the property of the members of the visible Church, any more than the action of the Spirit is confined within the boundaries of the visible Church. This topic is of great ecumenical importance, but the discussion of it would have to be nice in every respect, and therefore impossible in a brief document.<sup>35</sup>

Note well the degree to which a fear of offending non-Catholics held sway in the process of debating *Dignitatis Humanae*. This sense of apprehension (apparently driven by a distorted notion of ecumenism) seems to be what led Murray and his supporters to shy away from explicitly acknowledging the exclusive rights of Christ the King and the hard truth (or “good news” depending

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

on one's outlook) that the fullness of the Spirit's gifts (including freedom) are present in the Catholic Church alone.

5. Christian freedom is indeed asserted over against all earthly powers... It is, however, also asserted within the Church... and it is also the basis of prudent protest when the exercise of [ecclesial] authority goes beyond legitimate bounds... Hence the Declaration is at pains to distinguish sharply the issue of religious freedom in the juridico- social order from the larger issue of Christian freedom. The disastrous thing would be to confuse the two distinct issues. Obviously, the issue of Christian freedom [within the Church itself]—its basis, its meaning, its exercise and its limits—will have to be clarified by free discussion, conducted carefully and patiently in a sustained dialogue between pastors and people over many years. However, this dialogue will be the more successful now that the Declaration has settled the lesser issue of the free exercise of religion in civil society.<sup>36</sup>

Several things stand out here. First, one notices a contradiction as Murray plainly admits in one breath that the theology that presumably forms the foundation for *Dignitatis Humanae* remains undeveloped, yet in the other breath he declares the matter of religious liberty as articulated therein “settled.”

Secondly, Murray states (as if giving a nod to Tradition), “Christian freedom is indeed asserted over against all earthly powers,” but it's important to recognize that this statement is only true provided that by “Christian” he is referring specifically to the Catholic Church and not to every heretical community that calls itself “Christian.”

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Lastly, Murray insinuates that it was necessary for the Council to address the matter of religious liberty in society at large while walking on eggshells, as it were, in order to avoid the risk of inviting discord within the more perfect society that is the Church. This should have served as a red flag to the document's authors.

Is it not true that every authentic service to society (and likewise to human dignity) is by its very nature that which moves all concerned toward a greater degree of unity with the Lord? As such, how could such a service possibly pose a threat to the peace of the Church *ad intra*?

In any event, Murray gives us a very interesting glimpse into the debate that preceded the Declaration's final form saying, "The [traditional] concept of the common good, and—what is much the same—the concept of the purpose of society, had been advanced in the first two conciliar schemata."<sup>37</sup>

(The "schemata" to which Murray refers are the preliminary outlines that dictated the overall scope and direction of the conciliar debate; ultimately giving form to the content of the document itself.)

"Neither of them was acceptable," Murray reflected, "given the notion of society and government adopted in the Declaration from the doctrine of Pius XII. In this doctrine the common good itself and the purpose of society require the fullest possible free exercise of all human and civil rights, and government has the primary duty, not of limiting, but rather of promoting the freedom of the human person as far as possible."<sup>38</sup>

God bless Fr. Murray for his candor! Remarkably, he is telling us that the conciliar process was essentially inverted as the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



schemata were altered, twice no less, to downplay the Tradition in order to “grease the skids” for the outcome desired!

In referencing Pope Pius XII, Murray is referring to DH 13 which footnotes an address that the Holy Father gave to Italian jurists (entitled, *Ci Riesce*) wherein he said of the traditional doctrine, “There never has been, and there is not now, in the Church any vacillation or any compromise, either in theory or in practice... No other norms are valid for the Church except the norms which We have just indicated for the Catholic jurist and statesman.”<sup>39</sup>

It truly is nothing short of breathtaking to discover how soundly the very document to which the authors of *Dignitatis Humanae* claim recourse refutes their propositions! A full reading of *Ci Riesce* (which I encourage you to undertake) makes it crystal clear that Pope Pius XII was determined to remove all doubt as to his intention to reaffirm the enduring nature of his predecessors’ teachings; the same that rendered the first two schemata “unacceptable” in the eyes of Murray and his conciliar supporters.

In conclusion, the most useful reflection Murray left us is this:

"It is not necessary to believe that the conciliar argument is the best one that can be made. It did not pretend, in fact, to be apodictic [i.e., a matter of absolute truth necessary to hold]. The Conciliar intention was simply to indicate certain lines that an argument might validly follow. Moreover, the doctrinal authority of the Declaration falls upon its affirmation of the human right to religious freedom, not on the arguments advanced in support of this affirmation."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “*Ci Riesce*” - <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/p12ciri.htm>

<sup>40</sup> <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/murray/1966c.htm>

Note well that Murray contends that the “doctrinal authority” of *Dignitatis Humanae* rests not upon the deposit of faith that Pope John XIII had enjoined the Council Fathers to protect as their “greatest concern,”<sup>41</sup> but rather upon the document’s own “affirmation of the human right to religious freedom.”

In other words, the validity of the Declaration’s novelties rests squarely upon the document itself! This is not just poor theology; it’s simple tautology.

Many arguments indeed “might validly follow” including, of course, an argument for the enduring validity of the traditional teaching – yes, even today. On that note, if we accept Murray’s premise that the merits of the Church’s approach to religious liberty must ever be reevaluated in the light of present day circumstances, I think few among us would argue that society, and likewise the Church, has been well served by the conciliar approach.

Let’s be honest – we, clergy and laity alike, have largely shrunken away from the duty of calling the world’s attention to the unique grandeur of the Catholic Church for more than four decades now, and this is precisely the glaring shortcoming with religious liberty as it has been invoked post Vatican II; it only seeks to assure that in matters of governance the doctrines and rights of Christ the King and of His Holy Catholic Church are granted the same consideration as the idols and errors of the heathens and heretics.

And yet, when godless rulers find it all too easy to dismiss our calls for “conscience clauses” as though the voice of the Church is just one more opinion among many can we really be surprised? After all, isn’t that pretty much all we’ve mustered up the gumption to say for ourselves lo these past forty years?

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<sup>41</sup> *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* - [www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/v2open.htm](http://www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/v2open.htm)

## CHAPTER EIGHT | NEO-CONSERVATIVE RATIONALIZATION

Even if you don't agree with him, you have to admire George Weigel's moxie.

It can't be easy serving as the spokesperson for a "neo-conservative" Catholic movement that labors so mightily against the preponderance of evidence to reconcile every last scintilla of conciliar innovation with the Faith handed down from the Apostles. Yet, he does it anyway.

Case in point, Weigel's February 2012 column in *National Review* <sup>42</sup> wherein he takes American "liberal Catholics" to task for "betraying their own noblest heritage;" namely, the John Courtney Murray led assault against the Church's traditional teaching on religious freedom.

Painting a quasi-messianic portrait of the late American born Jesuit theologian, Weigel batters Catholic sensibilities right out of the gate when he states, "It took the Church the better part of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to develop a robust Catholic concept of religious freedom;" <sup>43</sup> the unmistakable implication being that the poor dimwitted Roman Pontiffs who had the great misfortune of having to rule without the benefit of Murray's insight (a number of whom are Saints) were simply mistaken.

Weigel praises Murray's "intellectual virtuosity" in convincing the Second Vatican Council to supplant the Church's traditional doctrine with "a new Catholic understanding of the modern state" modeled after the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/291455/catholic-betrayal-religious-freedom-george-weigel>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

According to Weigel, one of the greatest challenges Murray faced in swaying the Council Fathers was addressing their fear that his decidedly American approach "would inevitably lead to religious indifferentism, and perhaps even to hostility to religious conviction."<sup>45</sup>

Hello? Isn't this precisely what happened? With Catholic life in 2012 being what it is, Weigel is forced to point to the century leading up to Vatican II as evidence that the Council Fathers' fears were unfounded.

Back then, in the United States (whose Constitution has a non-establishment clause) the Church was at peace with the government and Catholicism was thriving. By contrast, in more traditional Europe (where the Catholic State either existed or was possible) the Church was often at odds with the ruling authorities and was struggling to hold Her own.

Weigel wants us to join him in assuming (as the Council ultimately did at Murray's urging) that there must be a cause-and-effect relationship between the American version of religious freedom and the Church's ability to carry out Her mission and grow, (a proposition very closely related to the "Americanist" ideal rejected by Pope Leo XIII in the Apostolic Letter, *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* in 1899).<sup>46</sup>

I would like to propose a different explanation; one curiously lurking right beneath Weigel's nose.

In addition to Murray's "exegesis of Leo XIII" (the theological shortcomings of which we've already examined), Weigel tells us that the matter was settled for most of the Council Fathers thanks to the allure of the "European personalist philosophy;" defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/I13teste.htm>

"proposing the human person as the new irreducible key to thought, especially regarding social organization."

It was precisely this over-glorification of man — a plague that had spread through much of Europe but had not yet fully invaded the American culture prior to the 1960's — that accounts for the observable disparity in the Church's relative health in these places during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Church's enduring influence with rulers of State in traditional European nations made that part of the world ground zero for the personalist movement. (NB: The "European personalist movement" is not to be confused with the "Christian personalism" developed most notably by Pope John Paul II.)

So while the sacred Magisterium was preaching Almighty God, through Jesus Christ, as the goal and highest ordering principal of both society and State, the secular humanists in Europe were busy making war on the culture (which by extension also meant directly combatting the Catholic Church). It was in *this environment*, not surprisingly, that the Church struggled.

In the United States, however, where the State is officially disinterested in evaluating religious truth but rather views all expressions of faith as equals under the law, no such direct assault on the Catholic Church was necessary.

Why not? Simply put, goal number one on the modernists' to-do list was constitutionally prearranged; namely, instituting a form of governance that is disinclined to acknowledge the existence and exclusivity of absolute religious truth. In the religiously pluralistic society such as existed in the U.S., the commandants of the liberal regime were pleased to operate more subversively (for a time) than they were in Europe, and this is what allowed the Catholic Church to flourish to a greater degree.

Make no mistake, however, Catholicism wouldn't have fared nearly as well as it did in the century prior to Vatican II in the United States had the sacred hierarchy behaved then as it does today; the majority so paralyzed by ecumenical sensitivity that very few even bother to proclaim the Kingship of Christ and the Holy Roman Catholic Church as the universal sacrament of salvation and the custodian of objective religious truth.

Back then, the Church wasn't afraid to preach Her doctrines; like them or not, everyone with an interest knew what the Church professed, most especially Catholics! Catholic identity was distinct and it was noteworthy. We had our own festivals, our own disciplines, our own rituals and our own language. We even had our own primetime television star in Bishop Fulton Sheen!

And then it happened; the perfect storm.

The Council ratified Murray's version of religious liberty shortly after the liberal culture warriors came blazing out of the shadows to unleash all out Hell on America. In essence, the sacred hierarchy of the Catholic Church had voluntarily adopted the language of mealy-mouthed legislators who speak as though Christ the King has no more rights than Buddha, and this at precisely that moment in history when the world needed Apostolic clarity the most.

In charity, one can perhaps understand how the "signs of the times" were so grossly misinterpreted in the halcyon days during which the Council met. Deficient though they were theologically, Murray's idea's appeared to make practical sense to many of the bishops at that time based on the Church's success in the United States.

That said it's high time to admit that subsequent events have demonstrated the enduring wisdom of the traditional teaching.

Look, I'm as American as anyone, but unlike JFK, I'm proud to say I'm Catholic *first*. As such, I'm not the least bit hesitant to say that the U.S. Constitutional approach to religious liberty is fatally flawed in that it attempts to sustain the unsustainable; namely, by avoiding the existence of absolute religious truth in a world that is ultimately ruled by Truth incarnate.

A couple of days before the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act went to a vote in the U.S. Senate in March 2012, Senator Barbara Mikulski (a liberal Democrat posing as a Catholic) inadvertently drove this point home when she decried what she viewed as the dangers associated with allowing employers the freedom to offer only those health insurance plans that don't violate "their religious beliefs or moral convictions."<sup>47</sup>

With cameras rolling, Mikulski sneered, "What's a moral conviction? Where's a moral conviction come from?"<sup>48</sup>

Sarcasm aside, these are actually important questions, the Catholic answer to which (the only correct one, incidentally) isn't getting very much play these days, neither within the Church nor without.

For European-style personalists, like Mikulski, living in a country where every individual religious belief is as valid as the next irrespective of its relationship to the absolute truth that comes to us from God, it goes without say:

A bona fide "moral conviction" is whatever the Hell the ruling party says it is.

So now here we are, Catholic citizens of a nation that is quickly descending into the abyss of State imposed immorality, looking for leadership from churchmen who have effectively disarmed themselves of the only weapon that can possibly protect us; the

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<sup>47</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_v29fOXBScE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_v29fOXBScE)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

sword of truth wielded in defense of the Sovereign rights of Christ the King. And this, according to George Weigel, is a noble heritage of which to be proud.

Like I said, you have to admire his moxie.



Author and theologian, George Weigel



## CHAPTER NINE | THE SOCIAL KINGSHIP OF CHRIST

In the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent in the Ordinary Form of Holy Mass, Jesus proclaims, "The Kingdom of God is at hand," but what does that mean?

Is this Kingdom still to come such that we might participate in bringing it to fulfillment, or is the reign of Christ the King a present reality that we are duty bound to proclaim? The answer is yes!

Sadly, however, we all-too-often fail to do our part.

The book of Wisdom speaks rather poignantly to the present day situation wherein our political leaders so often presume to exercise their authority, not just beyond that which is granted them in the U.S. Constitution, but over and against the Kingship of Christ.

"For thy judgments, O Lord, are great, and thy words cannot be expressed: therefore undisciplined souls have erred. For while the wicked thought to be able to have dominion over the holy nation, they themselves being fettered with the bonds of darkness, and a long night, shut up in their houses, lay there exiled from the eternal providence" (Wisdom 17:1-2).

We, unlike Solomon, however, are not living in that age during which the Divine words could not be expressed; rather, to us has the fullness of God's Revelation been given in Christ Jesus and entrusted to the Church as custodian and teacher.

The Church and Her members have thus been commissioned by the Lord, not just to revel in His truth privately as if content to dwell in a Catholic ghetto, but to profess to all the world that Jesus is Lord, leading the undisciplined souls into that Kingdom wherein all the nations are destined to be gathered.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to our solemn obligation as follows:

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

By this standard, we must admit that the overwhelming majority of us — clergy and laity alike — have fallen terribly short in recent decades; some by weakness, others by ignorance.

In truth, far too few in the Church today seem willing to risk the ostracization that most certainly will come for making it known that the Catholic faith is the one true religion that all men have a moral duty to embrace. Likewise, even our most prominent voices stop short of proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Sovereign over all creation, behaving instead as though the Lord's Kingship is just a "Catholic thing."

This is especially evident in the way so many of our leaders tend to fence political with those who exercise civil authority rather than upbraiding them as Jesus did Satan saying, "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve" (as we

heard in the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent in the Traditional Mass).

Oh yes, I've heard the argument before, "If we want to have any impact at all we must speak to our politicians about policy initiatives, civil law and the like; not esoteric religious principles they will never accept!"

Entirely logical though this strategy may seem, the fatal flaw lies in the simple fact that it's not what the Lord commissioned us to do. Sure, we should make political arguments when warranted, but let's not forget that we are called first and foremost to proclaim the word of Christ.

Given our reluctance to do so of late, one may ask concerning our wayward politicians the very same questions posed by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14,17).

Some of those believers who first received this exhortation responded by embracing a martyr's death, and though the call itself hasn't changed, we certainly have. Ours is a generation of the timid; a people who take refuge in the "can't we all just get along" attitude formally enshrined in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom.

With so many modern day Catholics wrongly assuming that the Council effectively trumped all of the Magisterium that preceded it, I propose to do a little *ressourcement* of my own (a French term invoked in the conciliar debates meaning a "return to sources") by looking to Sacred Scripture as the basis for our understanding of the temporal dimension of Christ's Kingship.

First, consider carefully the words that Our Lord spoke to Pilate:

My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over; but my kingship is not from the world.  
(John 18:36)

Notice that Jesus does not say that His kingship is not *over* this world – indeed it is – nor does He say that His servants will not fight in this world; indeed they must, but not as the worldly do. Rather, the servants of Christ the King will wage war by wielding weaponry that comes from a share in the Divine power.

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Cor. 10:3-6)

When St. Paul says that our war is not worldly, he does not mean to imply that we have no battlefields here in the present order. Our Lord came to redeem all of creation; therefore, we can fully expect that among the strongholds that will be brought to heel by Christ are those in this world, often through the co-operative actions of His faithful servants.

Rather than suggesting that His Kingship has no dominion over this world, Jesus lets it be known that His kingdom is *greater* than this world. He even tells Pilate that the only reason he has any power whatsoever is that it has been given to him from above, a very clear indication of the duty incumbent upon all earthly rulers to uphold Divine truth.

And where does this power now rest in its fullness today?

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," said the Risen Lord. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."(Mt. 28:18-20)

Jesus does not speak of having authority in heaven alone, but also "on earth," nor does He commission the Church to make disciples simply of "individual people" but rather of "all nations."

Yes, it is indeed individual people who are baptized into Christ, but the mission of the Church is to build the Kingdom of God in the here-and-now; into that Holy Nation once foreshadowed in the people Israel. This Kingdom is indeed a spiritual reality, but it is one that is made manifest in the temporal order as the work of redemption is brought to completion by Christ working through His Body, the Church.

Returning to the Wisdom of Solomon, we who by grace possess the Light of the World in Christ and yet fail to fully shine it in this culture of darkness bear some responsibility for those rulers of State who err by presuming to have dominion over the Lord and His Church.

There has ever been but one faithful response, and that is preaching with neither timidity nor apology the social Kingship of Christ and the singular glory of the Church that He founded — the Catholic Church — the one true religion and universal sacrament of salvation.

And why shouldn't we? This is, after all, the Good News.



## CHAPTER TEN | THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: APOSTOLIC OR POLITICAL?

In a March 2012 article, well-known Catholic author and editor Phil Lawler criticized the bishops of the United States for issuing statements on "too many debatable political issues" rather than sticking to matters that fall more properly within the scope of their teaching authority.<sup>49</sup>

As an example, he pointed to a recently released USCCB statement that "appeared to give the bishops' perspectives on the federal budget, taxation, deficits, welfare, defense spending, housing assistance, foreign aid, job training, tax credits, Pell grants, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program."<sup>50</sup>

Lawler wonders (as do many others) "why the bishops feel obliged to speak on all those subjects."<sup>51</sup>

Well, with no intention of making excuses for this propensity for things political, it seems to me that at least some of the blame rests with the Council Fathers, who in their zeal to ensure that the power of the State would be limited with respect to the activities of the Church, managed to produce a document (*Dignitatis Humanae* — The Declaration on Religious Freedom) that often compels churchmen to behave more like statesmen.

The Council, as we have seen, at the urging of John Courtney Murray, abandoned the dictates of the traditional doctrine on religious freedom (that for centuries had greatly influenced the way in which the Church interacted with the world) for a version of the civil right to religious liberty enshrined in the U.S. Constitution — a charter specifically intended to guide, not the

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<sup>49</sup> [www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otn.cfm?id=896](http://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otn.cfm?id=896)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

activities of a religious institution, but the legal and political culture of a nation.

It can hardly come as a surprise, therefore, that this departure from tradition led to a corresponding shift in behavior wherein Apostolic works all-too-frequently take a backseat to political endeavors.

Based on the experience of the last forty-plus years, one can reasonably argue that *Dignitatis Humanae* has contributed a great deal to what looks like an ecclesial metamorphosis; a reordering of episcopal priorities so profound that the Church in our day is substantially distracted from Her divinely instituted mission.

That regrettable downhill slide looks something like this:

- The Church adopted a guiding principle derived from a charter that is concerned with ordering a State's political affairs.
- Taking its cue therefrom, the Church's hierarchy began preaching less like Apostles while speaking more like politicians.
- Politicians are under tremendous pressure to play by the modern culture's number one rule of engagement; political correctness.
- Political correctness places a very high premium on avoiding such non-inclusive concepts as "absolute truth" lest someone get offended, or worse yet, feel "disenfranchised."

To secular ears, this "evolution" may sound harmless enough, but for Catholics who realize that absolute truth is none other than the person of Jesus Christ, the problem is obvious. The current church-state controversy in the United States — where Catholic bishops speak often about the First Amendment but preach very little (if at all) on *Humanae Vitae* — reveals just how serious the problem is.



The mission that Christ gave to the Apostles and their successors cannot be properly engaged by pussyfooting around in the face of Evil as though all religions — with their conflicting doctrines and manifest errors — are of equal dignity before the Lord. They clearly are not, but in calling on governments to grant a civil right to religious freedom to all, regardless of confession, *Dignitatis Humanae* implies just such an equality, and this untenable suggestion has radically influenced the way in which the pastors of the Church interact with the world.

How radically?

For context, let's begin by reacquainting ourselves with the nature of the mission as Jesus presented it:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Mt. 28:18-20)

With this directive firmly in mind, consider the following statement offered by Bishop William E. Lori, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Religious Liberty:

"When we speak about religious freedom as the first of the freedoms, it's not to aggrandize the Church, but to uphold the first line of defense for the dignity of the human person."

I think most readers realize that the mission that Christ gave us (which is ordered toward the salvation of souls — the ultimate defense for the dignity of the human person) actually *requires* that we "aggrandize" the Roman Catholic Church; i.e., to call man's attention, loudly and clearly, to the universal sacrament of salvation that the Lord has given us.

That said, let me be clear: This example isn't offered to criticize Bishop Lori personally at all. He's simply doing what the vast majority of bishops the world over have been doing for more

than four decades; namely, expounding upon the precepts proposed by the most recent ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church.

In “ordinary” times, this would be a fool proof approach to addressing the people of the world, but only the most naïve among us can fail to recognize that these are not “ordinary” times; rather, a crisis is afoot in our day.

I highlight this quote from the USCCB’s “point man” in the current dust-up with the U.S. government as it relates to religious liberty simply to illustrate how effective the “gravitational pull” of *Dignitatis Humanae* is at compelling prelates to speak in ways that stand in conflict with the mission of the Church as Jesus presented it.

This certainly isn't the case in the United States alone, however; it's a reality throughout the Catholic world. In fact, even the Bishop of Rome isn't immune. Consider, for example, the first general audience of 2011 given by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

After the Angelus that day, the Holy Father announced his intention to “go as a pilgrim to the town of St. Francis” to host the “World Day of Prayer for Peace” — the third such ecumenical gathering of its kind now commonly referred to as “Assisi III.”<sup>52</sup>

The “aim” of the event, according to the Holy Father, was to invite peoples of many different faiths (including pagans and atheists) to gather with him “to solemnly renew the commitment of believers of every religion to live their own religious faith as a service to the cause of peace.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/angelus/2011](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/angelus/2011)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

For most of the last two millennia (save for the most recent four decades or so), it would have been absolutely unthinkable for a Roman Pontiff to suggest that non-Catholics do well by persisting in "their own religious faith" for *any reason*, much less with the implication being that doing so could possibly render "a service to the cause of peace."

Even so, this particular papal pronouncement undoubtedly struck most Catholics as entirely unremarkable, not because the Church now views false religions as pathways to peace (it does not, and they are not); rather, it only seems like Catholic business-as-usual thanks to *Dignitatis Humanae* and the undeniably strong influence it has had on the Church's evangelical tone.

In summary, Phil Lawler's concerns about the American episcopate are well founded; unfortunately, however, they're really just a symptom of a much larger problem:

Like a computer virus disguised as a necessary update to an important program, the "Americanized" version of religious liberty espoused at Vatican II is increasingly revealing itself as a particularly insidious strain of indifferentism; one that threatens to claim nearly as many victims as the post-conciliar liturgical crisis.

The biggest difference between the two, of course, is that many laity and churchmen (including the Holy Father) plainly recognize the need for a "reform of the reform" of the liturgy; whereas one can only hope to see the day when the same can be said about the Council's treatment of religious liberty.

## CONCLUSION

So there you have it; a “side-by-side” look at both the traditional doctrine of the Church as it relates to religious freedom and the changes that came with the promulgation of *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Having examined by the light of sacred Tradition the foundational planks upon which these two disparate approaches to religious freedom are constructed, it is now up to you to prayerfully answer for yourself the question that is posed in the title of this book:

*Was John Courtney Murray right?*

Regardless of whatever conclusions you may or may not draw; one thing upon which all can agree is that the attacks endured by the Catholic Church today are not entirely new; She has always been, and will continue to be, attacked until the end of time. This is the work of the Evil One, and our battle is spiritual.

Let us turn then to the Blessed Virgin Mary – Mother of the Church and Mother of all who call her Son, Lord. For just as surely as Christ is King, Our Blessed Lady is truly our Holy Queen.

**Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary : Pray for us O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Louie Verrecchio is an author, columnist and speaker living and working in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, MD.

He is the founder of Salve Regina Publications and the author of the internationally acclaimed *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II Faith Formation Series*. One of the only resources of its kind to bear an *Imprimatur*, the *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II* materials have been used by parish based study groups and individuals on four continents to explore the documents of the Second Vatican Council since 2004.

In addition to being a columnist for Catholic News Agency since 2009, Mr. Verrecchio has appeared in a wide variety of print publications and electronic media including Our Sunday Visitor; This Rock Magazine; The Catholic Weekly of Sydney, Australia; The Catholic Review of Baltimore, MD; The Baltimore Jewish Times; The Baltimore Sun; The Baltimore Examiner, Renew America, Catholic Exchange, LifeSite News and others.

Mr. Verrecchio's numerous media appearances include EWTN, RealCatholic TV, Relevant Radio and the Ave Maria Radio network.

His speaking engagements have included both parish-based gatherings and large diocesan conferences, including the annual *Living the Catholic Faith Conference* hosted by the Archdiocese of Denver, the *Call to Holiness Conference*, the annual *Deacon Congress* hosted by the Diocese of Phoenix, the Catholic Evidence League of Baltimore, MD., and others.

For information regarding Mr. Verrecchio's speaking schedule, syndicated weekly column, books, audio CD's or faith formation materials you may contact him directly:

Louie Verrecchio  
3210 Eves Way  
Hampstead, MD USA 21074  
Email: [info@HarvestingTheFruit.com](mailto:info@HarvestingTheFruit.com)



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◆ Endorsements (partial listing)

- George Cardinal Pell - Archbishop of Sydney, Australia
- Most Reverend R. Walker Nickless – Bishop of Sioux City
- Fr. Peter F. Ryan, S.J., S.T.D. – Kenrick Seminary – St. Louis
- Fr. Peter Stravinskis, S.T.D., Ph.D.
- Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio, Ph.D. – Author and theologian
- Mr. James Cavanagh - Dir. of Evangelization, Arch. of Denver
- Russell Shaw - Syndicated Columnist



# Was John Courtney Murray Right?

## An examination of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom

By: Louie Verrecchio

On December 7, 1965, Pope Paul VI officially promulgated *Dignitatis Humanae* - the Second Vatican Council's "Americanized" treatment of religious freedom: It was as though an American flag had been raised atop the cupola of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, supplanting the Cross of Christ the King; the same that had long since adorned not just the pinnacle of this most famous of all sacred buildings, but the very heart of Christendom itself...

In this brief but impactful book, Louie Verrecchio compares and contrasts the traditional doctrine of the Church with the novelties that were enshrined in the Declaration on Religious Freedom of Vatican II.

Rather than focusing on minutia, Verrecchio shines the light of Tradition on the foundational planks upon which these two disparate approaches to religious freedom must either stand or fall, providing readers with the insight necessary to decide for themselves:

***Was John Courtney Murray right?***



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