
*Catholicism and Religious Freedom* is an important collection of “Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty.” The volume contains a very helpful introduction and nine essays, most by well-known, trusted voices. The essays succeed in deepening our understanding of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council’s statement on the right to religious freedom.

*Dignitatis Humanae (DH)* is distinctive, not just because it is brief, but more specifically because it is the only text from Vatican II that contains a development in doctrine. Obviously, the Council as a whole brought many changes; besides the many unintended alterations in Catholic life that occurred after 1965, there were planned changes in the liturgy as well as a new pastoral tone. Overall, the emphasis of Vatican II was not doctrinal. The Council aimed to deepen the conversation between the Church and the modern world on a whole range of topics, including both the Church’s self-understanding and her relation to modernity. In contrast to the pastoral emphasis of the rest of Vatican II, *DH* is an explicitly doctrinal text. *DH* declares, “the council intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and the constitutional order of society.”

In *DH*, the statement of doctrinal development is succinct: “This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom.” While *DH* provides broad outlines to understand the meaning and scope of this right, the Council left plenty of questions unanswered. How are we to understand this declaration as a “development” rather than as a “break” with earlier Catholic teaching? How does the right to religious freedom, as *DH* affirms it, inform the issue of the relation between Church and state? What forms of legal recognition for those who practice religion are consistent with the right to religious freedom? How might the Church’s desire to influence the culture be squared with the notion of the “rightful autonomy” of the secular order? What theory of the state informs *DH*? What intellectual account can we give of a “right” to religious freedom? Can such an account be strictly philosophical in character? To what extent does such an account rest on theological considerations? To what extent can the notion of a “right” as employed by *DH* be squared with modern and contemporary accounts of rights? Does the Church understand rights the same way that modernity talks about rights?
These questions constitute the “unfinished agenda” of DH. It might seem surprising that, over 40 years after the Council, relatively little scholarly work has been done to complete this unfinished agenda. Catholicism and Religious Freedom is a very helpful step in this regard.

Allow me to provide a bit of background to explain my interest in this unfinished agenda. My academic training is in theology and philosophy; I work in a department of philosophy, and I have teaching and research interests in Catholic social thought and the teaching of John Paul II, especially with regard to the place of the person in ethics, and the place of ethics in economics. In 2001, I published a review essay of Samuel Gregg’s book, Challenging the Modern World: John Paul II/Karol Wojtyla and the Development of Catholic Social Teaching. In that review, I wrote that I would like to see Gregg’s argument about John Paul II’s contribution to the development of Catholic social thought extended by examining the connection between freedom, dignity, and “rights talk” in the economic sector and the “right” to religious freedom. I wrote, “After the Council, there has been relatively little serious work on the understanding of the human person and of human dignity that informs Dignitatis Humanae. (The work of Kenneth Grasso is a notable exception.) It strikes me that another way to get at the “development” in Catholic social teaching, in addition to Gregg’s focus, is to work through the argument of Dignitatis Humanae, and show how the relation between human dignity and human freedom found in that text is central to understanding the development found in Centesimus Annus with regard to the market economy.”

Like Samuel Gregg, I have thought it important to understand human dignity and freedom as they relate to the economic sphere, and I suggested then that we might be aided if we could plumb the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on religious freedom.

So, in many ways, Catholicism and Religious Freedom is precisely the sort of book I was seeking, and Kenneth Grasso, who I identified in my earlier essay as an important contributor to this topic, is well-suited for this task. Grasso has been one of the few lone soldiers thinking and writing about these issues for years. In this text, Grasso and his co-editor, Robert P. Hunt, have assembled a fine line-up of scholars known for their work in Catholic ethics and social thought to join them in their work: Robert P. George, William L. Saunders, Jr., Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., Francis Canavan, S. J., John F. Crosby, and David S. Crawford, along with two scholars who approach the topic from a Protestant perspective: Thomas Heilke and David T. Koyzis. The essays address each of the questions I earlier identified as the unfinished agenda of DH.
The nine essays divide into three pairs and a trilogy. The first two essays each examine ways that the argument of *DH* is apparently similar to—but actually different from—the account of religious freedom typically advanced in Enlightenment liberalism. The next two essays, by Dulles and Canavan, examine development and change. Cardinal Dulles provides a magisterial account of the way in which *DH* is a development rather than a rupture, and Fr. Canavan argues that *DH* involves a change in the Catholic understanding of the state. Then, the volume includes a pair of essays written by Protestants, one from the viewpoint of the radical reformation and another contrasting *DH* with Calvinism’s emphasis on sphere sovereignty. The final three essays reflect on *DH* in light of John Paul II’s personalism and the work of John Courtney Murray.

For my purposes (and my desire to understand the meaning of rights talk in the Catholic tradition, especially in relation to the economic sphere), there is still plenty of work to do in completing the unfinished agenda of *DH*. Much of this volume is driven by the concerns of political philosophers, especially the effort to understand Catholicism’s philosophy of the state. As for me, I am more drawn to understand Catholicism’s understanding of the person; further, I see a need for more work in clarifying the way that the language of human rights, as a modern social practice, has been employed by the Church without endorsing the Enlightenment account of rights. Several of the essays in this volume are quite helpful in this regard.

*Catholicism and Religious Freedom* is important, both for the ways it frames this unfinished agenda and for its contribution to the sustained intellectual work that these questions deserve. Every serious library of Catholic social thought should include this text. Moreover, while the essays focus on *DH*, this book will be helpful for anyone who wants to learn from scholars thinking in serious ways about religion and public order.

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