

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: DRAMATIC CHANGE IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *With the aim of involving the reader in the development of the magisterium's teaching concerning religious freedom and religious pluralism, this article will focus on the teaching of the Holy See from different historical periods. The author will describe basic opinions of roman Pontiffs from Gregory XVI to Benedict XVI with analyses of several philosophers and theologians concerning the dramatic change of Catholic Church's view concerning the questions of religious freedom and interreligious dialogue.*

Keywords: interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism, Catholic Church, magisterium, liberalism, communitarianism.

One important terminological aspect must first be clarified. Terms such as „Catholic teaching”, „tradition” or „thought” cannot always be used interchangeably. The terms *magisterium/magisterial* or *official* Catholic teaching ought to refer the reader to the positions or documents issued by the teaching office of the Catholic Church. In other words, this terminology does not represent the arguments of any particular scholars unless those are mentioned in official documents of the Holy See. National Bishops' Conferences positions of particular theologians or other thinkers concerning social issues from a Christian perspective are all integrated under the term Christian social *thought* or *tradition*. Acknowledging this distinction is important, because in most cases the arguments of particular Christian activists or local bishops' conferences do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Holy See, as set forth in its public documents.¹ According to Belgian ethicist Johan Verstraeten, the notion of Catholic social thought/tradition does not exclude the magisterium. What seems different is that the official teaching is restricted only to the teaching office of the Church, where Catholic social thought shapes the general context and debates at different levels.² Clarifying this distinction is necessary because in this article the author will refer to both official

¹ Cf. Johan Verstraeten, „Rethinking Catholic Social Thought as Tradition”, in *Catholic Social Thought Twilight or Renaissance?*, ed. J. S. Boswell, F. P. McHugh and J. Verstraeten, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2000, pp. 59-77.

² Cf. *Ibidem*.

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teaching of the Catholic Church and documents of local bishops' conferences.

Catholicism and religious pluralism

In order to grasp the complexity of Catholic teaching on religious pluralism, an overview of at least two perspectives on Catholic teaching is deemed necessary. These concern first of all the Catholicism-liberalism debate, which should allow for an evaluation of the magisterium's view on religion's presence in the public sphere, and the second is interreligious dialogue. The link between these two ought to be taken into account, because the very notion of pluralism cannot be scrutinised without reference to liberal thinking.

Perhaps the most expressive way to demonstrate the Catholicism-liberalism debate, especially religious plurality in light of Catholic social teaching, is to consider the official teaching of the Catholic Church prior, during, and after Vatican II. Careful analysis shows some revolutionary developments.

A clear anti-liberal view is represented by Pope Gregory XVI's *Mirari Vos* which stressed that the concord between the Church and the state was of great importance to both parties. In this context, the pope speaks against supporters of separation between the two: „*They preach liberty of every sort; they stir up disturbances in sacred and civil affairs, and pluck authority to pieces*”.³ Continuing his condemnation of all things liberal, Gregory XVI rejects all freedoms and liberties: liberty of conscience, freedoms of speech and publication. All these aspects, according to the encyclical, lead to the „*freedom of error*”, which manifests itself in the „*transformation of minds, corruption of youths, contempt of sacred things and holy laws*”.⁴ These statements represent the official position of the magisterium in the first half of the nineteenth century, which simply considered the striving for liberty as clearly damnable.

Likewise, the teaching on religious liberty became an object of condemnation. Gregory XVI calls any attempt to speak of the salvatory mission of each religion as indifferentism: „*Now We consider another abundant source of the evils with which the Church is afflicted at present: indifferentism. This perverse opinion is spread on all sides by the fraud of the wicked who claim that it is possible to obtain the eternal salvation of the soul by the profession of any kind of religion, as long as morality is maintained. [...] With the admonition*

³Gregory XVI. *Mirari Vos*: *Encyclical*, 21.

⁴*MV*, 14.

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of the apostle that „there is one God, one faith, one baptism” may those fear who contrive the notion that the safe harbour of salvation is open to persons of any religion whatever. They should consider the testimony of Christ Himself that “those who are not with Christ are against Him”.⁵

The language of Pope Gregory XVI is achingly radical. However, as D’Costa emphasises, this is a typical expression inherent to Roman Catholic Church teaching at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was the early stage of secularisation.⁶ This term shaped the meaning of different religions’ equal claim on God. However, the most important, according to D’Costa, is the connection between indifferentism and the emerging secularisation. He recognises this link as a logical one, because „as the secular state granted equal civic status and rights to all religions, it offended against the rule that error has no rights”.⁷ Generally speaking, indifferentism seems to promote equal rights to all religions, a tendency radically condemned by Gregory XVI.

This situation did not undergo any major changes in the second half of the nineteenth century. The language of Gregory XVI’s successor, Pope Pius IX, was the same if not with even stronger excommunication. At the beginning of *Quanta Cura*, the new Roman Pontiff voiced his own condemnation of such „heresies and errors” such as promoting liberty and freedoms already criticised by his predecessor, because such strivings „raze the foundations of the Catholic religion and of civil society, remove from among men all virtue and justice, [and] lead it into the snares of error”.⁸ This statement merely continued Gregory XVI’s language of accusation.

However, if one looks at *Quanta Cura* more attentively and/or critically, one may come to the conclusion that this document was written with the aim of condemning contemporary liberal thinking ‘at any price.’ The following passage is a clear example of it: „For you well know, venerable brethren, that at this time men are found not a few who [...] dare to teach that “the best constitution of public society and (also) civil progress altogether require that human society be conducted and governed without regard being had to religion any more than if it did not exist; or, at least, without any distinction being made between the true religion and false ones”.”⁹

⁵ *MV*, 13.

⁶ Gavin D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*, West Sussex, John Wiley and Sons, 2007, p. 128.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Pius IX. *Quanta Cura: Encyclical Letter*, 1.

⁹ *QC*, 3.

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Here, the pope definitely condemns the separation of religion from the state and the equality of religions without differentiation between the true one and the false ones. This objection appeared not as extraordinary at the time and its circumstances. What is most enthralling is that the document contains several passages with marked quotations, but without reference to their author(s).¹⁰ In the same way, the author of this encyclical accuses those who defend the separation of Church's law from the life of the state. This very negative reaction is evoked by the next reference that the Church's law needs to be approved by the state.¹¹ This fact conjures up the preliminary conclusion that the aforesaid references might not have been the true ones but artificially made for the accusation of the latter (state). Certainly, this suggestion makes no pretence to being irrefutable, but it appears possible.

Staying at the side of his predecessor, Pius IX reprehends liberties of conscience and worship as „*each man's personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society*”.¹² Open and public manifestation of these rights as well as personal convictions were also brought under prohibition.¹³ The latter statement was mentioned uncompromisingly in the *Syllabus of Errors*, issued on the same day as *Quanta Cura*. This document clearly condemns a public role for any other religion in states defined as Catholic for it propagates indifferentism.¹⁴ In this context, the official teaching of the Catholic Church promoted rather a policy of intolerance towards other religions except Christianity. Even Protestantism was considered as not a true Christian religion whose worship of God was no equal of the Catholic Church's.¹⁵ The teaching office strongly condemned the new liberal ideas as hostile to true Catholic teaching, and further condemned civil liberty as a source of indifferentism.¹⁶

Pope Leo XIII continued the teaching of his ancestors vis-à-vis liberalism. In *Immortale Dei*, he described the negative consequence of liberal thinking, which is removing (true) religion from the public sphere: „*The liberty of thinking, and of publishing, whatsoever each one likes, without any hindrance, is not in itself an advantage over which society can wisely rejoice. On the contrary, it is the fountain-head and origin of many evils. [...] To*

¹⁰ ASS does not contain the reference after the quotation mark. See ASS 3,162.

¹¹ *QC*, 5.

¹² *QC*, 3.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Pius IX., *Syllabus of Errors*, 78-79.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 79.

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exclude the Church, founded by God Himself, from life, from laws, from the education of youth, from domestic society is a grave and fatal error. A State from which religion is banished can never be well regulated".¹⁷

This thesis is proof that the Catholic Church neither intended nor wished to forfeit its influence on public decision making.

However, Leo XIII is not as uncompromising towards other religions as his predecessors. In the same document, he tolerates other religious cults and their place in the state but with one crucial warning: „*The Church deems it unlawful to place the various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion*".¹⁸ In other words, the Catholic Church cannot prohibit the existence of any religious form; otherwise, it would be in violation of the human will. In this context, the pope affirmed that all religions cannot be recognized as true ones or at least not on the same level. Accordingly, only the Church founded by Christ himself is the true one. Such lenient attitude towards other religions continued in the teaching of Pius XII. In his remarks addressed to the National Convention of Italian Catholic Jurists, the pope that the human person does not have any mandate from God to repress particular religious or moral practices, even if they are erroneous. Of significance in this context is the parable of the cockle and good seed, where Jesus said: „*Let both of them grow together until the harvest*".¹⁹ This analogy motivates Pope Pius XII to claim with regard to other religions that God permitted them to exist and that the „*duty of repressing moral and religious error cannot therefore be an ultimate norm or action*".²⁰ In other words, this is the description of a toleration policy. In another encyclical letter, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, on the nature of human liberty, he describes the strict limits of this tolerance, stressing that striving for unconditional freedom of thought is unpermitted: „*Freedom in these things may be tolerated wherever there is just cause, [...] for liberty is to be regarded as legitimate in so far only as it affords greater facility for doing good, but no farther*".²¹ This means that other religious convictions may be tolerated as long as their strivings are similar to those of the Catholic Church.

In making a general assessment of the pre-Vatican II vision of religious tolerance, the main conclusion is that the Catholic Church hierarchy considered coexistence with other religions as challenging and

¹⁷ Leo XIII. *Immortale Dei: Encyclical Letter*, 32.

¹⁸ *ID*, 36.

¹⁹ Math 13,24-30.

²⁰ Pius XII. *Ci Riesce*, v.

²¹ Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum: Encyclical Letter*, 42.

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dangerous to Catholicism itself. Even from the content of the few documents analyzed above, this concern is fairly obvious. Church officials accused other religious convictions without any discussion or going into details, let alone looking for common points of moral character. Such view could be considered prejudicial. However, this radical line of condemnation of new liberal trends and interreligious dialogue had been broken by the Vatican II Council, which came to be known as a breath of fresh air within the Catholic Church.

At the very beginning, the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* confirms that the Vatican II fathers had paid attention to the demands of freedom in suggesting „*new things that are in harmony with the things that are old*”.²² What is completely new in Catholic teaching is declaring each person’s right to religious freedom: „*This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right*”.²³

In contrast to the previously discussed documents, this declaration contradicts the teaching of Gregory XVI and Pius IX in claiming equal right to religious freedom, which is a part of the civil law, and which is also recognized here but on a much higher level. Contrary to Pius IX’s teaching that any public worship was prohibited, the Vatican II Declaration affirms that each believer possesses a right to act in the private and public sphere, privately or commonly without coercion or accusation. Generally speaking, *Dignitatis Humanae*’s proclamations are in fact „*not in full harmony*” with previous official teaching (and its underling arguments) on religious freedom.

The Declaration also puts a strong emphasis on the rights of religious communities. The fathers of the council affirmed the rights of such communities „*not to be hindered*” by civil authorities and public teaching. In this context, governments are to „*create conditions favourable to the fostering of religious life*”.²⁴ Taking these statements into consideration, A very Cardinal Dulles further suggested that the Catholic Church has

²² Vatican II Council. *Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Freedom)*, p. 1.

²³ *DH*, 2

²⁴ *DH*, 4, 6.

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renounced its insistence on a special recognition and place for the Catholic faith in the state. While it previously regarded itself as the one true Church, today it promotes equality with other religious forms.²⁵ Moreover, this document at the end that all humanity should be considered as one family, which observes the right to religious freedom.²⁶

One of the most crucial statements of Vatican II, which brought to life interreligious dialogue and ecumenical relationships, is one concerning relations with non-Christian religions. In the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the Council's fathers proclaimed that all peoples in their different, even non-Christian, beliefs „*may reach salvation*”.²⁷ This crucial statement has clearly undermined the principle *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* and its negative connotation. Affirming this, the Catholic Church opened the doors to interreligious dialogue and searching for a common morality.

Later teaching of the Catholic Church on religious freedom also remained in line with Vatican II. In his *Message on the Value and Content of Freedom of Conscience and of Religion*, addressed to heads of states that signed the *Helsinki Final Act*, John Paul II in reference to the Council's teaching endorsed unequivocally the freedom to join a confessional community, religious education and catechetical instructions, freedom to receive religious care in different social institutions, as well as freedom from any form of coercion. At the level of community, each religious denomination possesses the freedom to have its own hierarchal structure, constitutions and institutions, the freedom of publishing and using the media, and freedom for public activities.²⁸ The Pontiff also emphasised that religion is not separated from culture, because the

²⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, „Dignitatis Humanae and the Development of Catholic Doctrine”, in *Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty*, edited by Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006, p. 53. Further in this article author provides his arguments concerning condemned tone of the documents issued by Pius IX and Leo XIII, stressing on contextual situation which required such strong reaction. Therefore, Dulles does not consider teaching of Vatican II as a condemnation of the previous Church's position.

²⁶ *DH*, 15.

²⁷ Vatican II Council, *Nostra Aetate (Declaration of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*, p. 4.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Message on the Value and Content of Freedom of Conscience and of Religion*, (Vatican, September 1, 1980), 4; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/pont_messages/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19800901_helsinki-act_en.html [accessed March 17, 2014].

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mystery of God is the basis for cultural development and personal existence.²⁹ This statement could also be interpreted as a defensive argument for the toleration of religious plurality, because each culture cannot be viewed separately from its religious convictions. For his striving for the protection of religious freedom, John Paul II is often called a „*great champion of freedom*”.³⁰

One of the latest official documents of the Catholic Church, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, reaffirms John Paul II’s teaching that the right to religious freedom is „*the source and synthesis*” of all other human rights.³¹ In this context, the document thus accentuates the duty to respect others’ right to religious freedom.³² Further, the *Compendium* emphasises that religious freedom is „*willed by God and inscribed in human nature*”. Therefore, no one can be oppressed for his/her religious convictions.³³ This statement is significant in the context of religion-politics debates. In light of recent *magisterial* teaching, the Church and the political community „*are mutually independent and self-governing*” and they both have full competence in their particular fields. However, this distinction does not mean total separation, because both the Church and the State serve the same individuals. This is the reason for striving towards harmonious relations.³⁴

Both the former and present Roman Pontiffs converge when it comes to their views on religious freedom. Benedict XVI, in his *Message for the World Day of Peace*, affirmed thus: „*The right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person whose transcendent nature must not be ignored or overlooked. [...] Without the acknowledgement of his spiritual being, without openness to the transcendent, the human person withdraws within himself, [...] and even fails to experience authentic freedom and to build a just society*”.³⁵

The realisation of a just society, for Benedict XVI, is not the Church’s achievement but the state’s. The Church should only play its part in the promotion of justice,³⁶ leading one to conclude that Vatican II’s teaching concerning relationships between religious and political

²⁹ CA, 24.

³⁰ Bradley, Gerard V., „Pope John Paul II and religious liberty”, in *Ave Maria Law Review*, Fall, 2007, vol.6(1), p. 33.

³¹ *Pontificia Commissio a Justitia et Pax. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Città del Vaticano Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2005*, p. 155.

³² CSDC, 156.

³³ CSDC, 421.

³⁴ CSDC, 424-427.

³⁵ Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace* (Vatican, December 8, 2010), p. 2.

³⁶ DCE, 28.

communities is well implemented in the post-Vatican teaching on the issue. Nowadays, the Catholic Church tends not to be represented as the one unique true religion closely connected with the political community. On the contrary, it is a religious confession, which realises its right to be present in public sphere. In this context, Pope Francis argues that if one wishes to analyse the effect of religion in the public sphere, one must consider the ways in which it is being represented. According to the present pope, very often journalists, intellectuals and politicians describe particular religions with much contempt.³⁷ For this reason, the Roman Pontiff advocates a sense of „*healthy religious pluralism*”: „*A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques*”.³⁸ On the one hand, such statement demonstrates the weightiness of problems related to religious pluralism. On the other hand, recent Catholic teaching promotes dialogical relationships between all denominations, even with fundamentalist ones.

Despite all the positive changes that have been made, the openness of the Catholic Church towards religious freedom does not solve all problems of interreligious and religion-civil dialogue around the world. The general position of the magisterium represents the position of the Holy See, but often without considering the peculiarities of these issues in the local contexts. Analysing the reception of Vatican II's teaching, Jeffrey Gros emphasises that relationships between religion and society cannot be considered generally, because each society has its own model(s), built on cultural, historical or demographical factors. For instance, Eastern European countries such as Catholic Poland or Slovakia, or Orthodox Russia or Romania have not experienced any saturated multi-religious environment. Israel is one living example of much tension between Christians, Jews and Muslims. Therefore, according to Gros, a universal Catholic implementation ought to have a certain level of continuation in the local contexts.³⁹ For instance, referring to local bishops' conferences in official documents of the *magisterium* would be a significant contribution to Catholic social teaching.

³⁷ Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation*, 256.

³⁸ *EG*, 255.

³⁹ Stephen B. Bevans and Jeffrey Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2009, p. 197.

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Another aspect that demonstrates the necessity for the official teaching to keep improving and developing is internal contradictions. At first, the radical change in the evaluation of liberalism should be explained and clarified. Vatican II's teaching on religious freedom contradicts not only the thoughts of previous Roman Pontiffs, but also the regulations of the Council of Trent as well as the Inquisition. Therefore, this transformation should be scrutinised and carefully analysed. At second, some misunderstandings between different fields of theology have become noticeable. One such example is the juxtaposition of teaching on religious freedom and Canon Law. On the one hand, the Catholic Church defends the full freedom on religious convictions. On the other hand, it contradicts canon 1366, which emphasises that „*parents or those who take the place of parents who hand over their children to be baptized or educated in a non-Catholic religion are to be punished with a censure or other just penalty*”.⁴⁰ These examples demonstrate the need for improvement in the official teaching of the Catholic Church, especially with regard to these dilemmas, which should also be solved to avoid discrepancies.⁴¹

**Promising perspectives for the future: Hollenbach's
assessments of Catholic social doctrine**

The pre-conciliar Roman Pontiffs uncompromisingly defended the radical communitarian position while accentuating the unique truth of religion understood as Christianity (excluding Protestantism), outside of which there is no hope for salvation. The general tendency was to strive for the establishment of the Catholic Church in the public sphere while treating the other religions not as equals. The main contra-liberal arguments were accusation of too many rights and freedoms such as religious freedom, freedom of consciousness, freedom of publishing, and others. Generally speaking, pre-Vatican II Catholicism rejected any such liberal tendencies.

What happened during the Vatican II Council is regarded as a „*dramatic reversal*” in the history of the Catholic Church. American Theologian David Hollenbach emphasises thus: „*The Catholic Church moved from being a staunch opponent of liberal rights and freedoms to activist engagement in the struggle for human rights from Poland to the Philippines, from*

⁴⁰ CIC, 1366.

⁴¹ Cf. Mary Ann Collins, *Unmasking Catholicism: What Hides Behind The Modern Public Image?*, Lincoln, IUniverse, Inc., 2004, pp. 43-44.

Central America to South Africa".⁴² This renewal in Catholic thinking could be explained by the presence of bishops from different parts of the world, where different philosophical and religious convictions as well as moral principles can play a significant role in social life. In this context, Hollenbach emphasises Vatican II as a clear example that „*the cultural and religious pluralism of the world has an effect on what people see as reasonable interpretations of the human good*”, a fact that made a significant impact on the social teaching of the Catholic Church.⁴³

In analysing both communitarian and liberal perspectives in Catholic teaching, the following question arises: which of the above perspectives is the most promising in the prospective development of the social teaching on religious pluralism?

Focussing on the hostile attitude of the pre-Vatican II teaching office of the Catholic Church towards liberalism, we can refer to Michael Novak's efforts to highlight this antipathy. In his book entitled *Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, Novak argues that such anti-liberal positions can be explained by the association of liberalism with Protestantism or even Puritanism. The main characteristic of such similarity was the stress on a radical individualism. Novak explains it this way: „*From the Catholic point of view, if each man is to be his own pope, what is to protect the true faith from mere personal opinion?*”.⁴⁴ On this note, Novak defines three main perspectives in the accusation against liberalism as either a moral, political, or an economic doctrine.

Liberalism as a moral doctrine was blamed for overemphasising individuality, which leads to paying less attention to any kind of authority or religious tradition. In the Catholic mind, it also leads to narcissism and neglecting of the other. Such liberal political doctrine foresees democracy, where the state and religion are separated as the best form of state order. However, Roman Pontiffs before Vatican II rejected this American form of separation, arguing that promoting of freedoms, especially religious liberty, will bring damage to public morality. And finally, as an economic doctrine, liberalism was blamed for treating

⁴² David Hollenbach, „A Communitarian Reconstruction of Human Rights: Contributions from Catholic Tradition”, in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contribution to American Public Philosophy*, edited by R. Bruce Douglas and David Hollenbach, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 127.

⁴³ Idem, *The Global Face of Public Faith: Politics, Human Rights, and Christian Ethics*, Washington D. C., Georgetown University Press, 2003, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Michael Novak, *Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1st 1984, 2nd 2000, 23.

human beings from mere economic criteria.⁴⁵ Hollenbach fully accepts Novak's clarification and in this perspective evaluates Catholic pre-conciliar response to the liberal perspective as „*insufficiently attentive*”.⁴⁶ In other words, before the full-scale condemnation of liberal democracy, a more profound and comprehensive analysis was needed.

Hollenbach might be right in such cases. As has been described, the majority of the anti-liberal accusations amounted to a radical critique of the teaching system⁴⁷ without the necessary comparative analysis of its positive and negative impacts on social life. Vatican II, instead, opened up the space for dialogue and reconciliation between Catholicism and liberalism. In this context, Hollenbach agrees with Novak that „*Catholic social thought has slowly but steadily come to embrace the institutions of liberal society*”.⁴⁸ This achievement of Vatican II did not solve the problem though, but set up the issue for debates between adherents and adversaries of the Council. Josef Komonchak speaks of two groups: those who consider the Council as a „*naive capitulation to modernity*” and those who „*celebrate the Council as a long-overdue accommodation to modernity*”. While the first group, as he explains it, demonises modernity and liberalism, the second one deifies it.⁴⁹ This problem of interpreting the Catholicism-liberalism debates is a crucial one in the context of religious tolerance, which could be interpreted as a challenge on the one hand and as a perspective for achieving the common good on the other. David Hollenbach does not accept any of these extremes. His position concerning the question of which way for social teaching development is more appropriate would be the same as that described in *Economic Justice for All*. As one of its main drafters, he has thus made his contribution to

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁶ Idem, „Liberalism, communitarianism, and the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy”, in *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1987, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Cf. Josef A. Komonchak, „Vatican II and the Encounter Between Catholicism and Liberalism”, in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contribution to American Public Philosophy*, edited by R. Bruce Douglas and David Hollenbach, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 76. Here Komonchak says: „*Liberalism, in the mind of this typical Catholicism, was the theoretical and practical system which denies religion significance for the public sphere. This liberalism was, therefore, rejected as „sin”, as „the rendez-vous of all heresies”, and, because it denied the need for Christ the Redeemer and the role of the church, apostasy*”.

⁴⁸ Michael Novak, *Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1st 1984, 2nd 2000, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Cf. Komonchak, Josef A., „Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism”, in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contribution to American Public Philosophy*, edited by R. Bruce Douglas and David Hollenbach, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 95.

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Catholic social thought, especially to the notion of the common good, which is the core element in his reasoning on religious plurality in terms of a community of freedom.

For Hollenbach, the concept of the common good is the central one in the letter of the American bishops. Being aware of the liberal context of modern (American) society, he recognises this concept as one of greater importance than the so-called „*live-and-let-live tolerance*”. Concerning the latter notion, Hollenbach concurs that tolerance in its liberal meaning is necessary but it is, however, not enough within the context of racial, class, religious and other divisions. Such divisions for Hollenbach constitute nothing other than the „*common bad*”, which should be overcome by striving for the „*common good*”, which is being community as such.⁵⁰

The common good concept is indeed at the heart of *Economic Justice for All*. The document mentions it only ninety-nine times and is found in each chapter. The bishops' letter refers to the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* which provides a possible definition of the common good: „*The common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family*”.⁵¹

In contrast with the pre-Vatican II approaches to this notion, the Pastoral Constitution defines it more clearly but not casually.⁵² The common good is described here as „*conditions of social life*” which enable

⁵⁰ David Hollenbach, „Economic Justice for All Twenty Years Later, Keynote Address at Symposium on Catholic Social Teaching on the Market, the State, and the Law at Villanova University School of Law, September 21, 2007”, in *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, 5:2, 2008, p. 317.

⁵¹ Vatican II Council, *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, p. 26.

⁵² Pope Leo XII used this notion casually and indifferently. In *Libertas* he speaks of this concept as a goal, which everyone has to pursue. On the other hand, in *Rerum Novarum*, the Pope puts common good in economic dimension. Pius XI used this notion synonymously to the redistribution of created goods. (QA, 58). John XXIII uses the concept of the common good in broad context. In one case he connects it with economic strategy of efficient production of material goods, which is the common good of the state (MM, 20). In other case he stresses the universal dimension of this notion. (PT, 100) For more detailed analysis see McCann Dennis P., „The Common Good in a Catholic Social Teaching: a Case Study in Modernization”, in *In Search for the Common Good*.

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self-realisation, protecting human rights, and respecting differences. This definition clearly highlights the notion from a communitarian perspective. Hollenbach is more concrete when he urges that the common good be considered as a community and a unique reality where all rights and freedoms could be realised. This is why he refers to the bishops' letter on economy, which accentuates community as a space for the realisation of human rights and the protection of human dignity.⁵³

However, it would be wrong to say that *Economic Justice for All* is written in a communitarian language. In characterising this pastoral letter of the American bishops, Hollenbach emphasises that it can be interpreted from both liberal and communitarian perspectives, meaning that the common good has more than mere communitarian characteristics. In his article entitled *Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy*, he emphasizes that the letter simultaneously promotes human dignity, equality of all individuals, and the communitarian dimension of the human person. The letter also stresses the necessity of protecting human rights and the notion of the common good.⁵⁴ What is significant here is that the protection of human rights and dignity is also the main claims of the liberal social model. However, in light of Rawlsian liberalism, all of these notions cannot be viewed in one and the same plane, as presented in the bishops' letter: „*In Catholic social thought, therefore, respect for human rights and a strong sense of both personal and community responsibility are linked, not opposed*”.⁵⁵ In another place, the American bishops also claim that „*the common good demands justice for all, the protection of the human rights for all*”.⁵⁶ These statements clearly represent the use of both liberal and communitarian terminology in the context of the common good.

Hollenbach does not want to reject Rawlsian political liberalism as one that is totally hostile to Catholic social thought, which seems to have flowed from Hollenbach's understanding of the distinction between the state and society. He accepts John Courtney Murray's position on this issue, which is also accepted and presented by the American bishops in their pastoral letter on the economy. Accordingly, society would become a „*more inclusive reality*” when it includes many non-political

⁵³ United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U. S. Economy*, Washington D.C., United States Catholic Conference, 1986, p.79.

⁵⁴ David Hollenbach, *Liberalism, communitarianism, and the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy*, 25.

⁵⁵ *Economic Justice for All*, 79.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 85.

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institutions or groups such as families, work places, business corporations, religious and any such communities. The state, in its turn, is a political entity, which is an important part of society. Following Murray, this distinction should lead to another distinction between the common good and public order.⁵⁷ Under this notion, *Dignitatis Humanae* underlines the importance of such moral goods as justice, public peace, preventing conflicts, and protecting freedom of religion. In general, public order includes all components pertinent to the common welfare.⁵⁸ It allows Hollenbach to suggest that the Rawlsian political institution, which presupposes a free and equal citizenship, resembles Murray's concept of public order.⁵⁹ However, this parallel does not mean a wholesale acceptance of the Rawlsian liberal reasoning, because the idea of political good is not really a common good. Moreover, Rawls rejects the idea of community.

Nevertheless, the Rawls-Murray comparison demonstrates the possibility and even necessity of using both languages-liberal, which accentuates human freedom, and communitarian, which stresses the communal character of the human person and his/her need for interdependence. In line with liberalists, Hollenbach deals with the pluralism of religious, philosophical and moral doctrines. His vision of protecting everyone's freedom is fully compatible with the liberal social model. However, in contrast to liberalism, he affirms the cultivation of virtues with the aim of pursuing the common good, which guarantees that „religious, political, economic, familial, technological, and other kinds of relationships that bind us together or drive us apart in advanced industrial societies can be brought into an imperfect but tolerable harmony with each other”.⁶⁰

In this context, religious pluralism is seen not as an obstacle towards building a community of freedom. Since each religion can contribute to the common good of society, the unilateral view of Christianity as being a unique source of true morality is not acceptable. This is the achievement of Vatican II. Hollenbach thus affirms: „Placing conditions only on Christians or only on non-Christians will not lead to a community of mutual freedom and solidarity”.⁶¹ Therefore, each person with his/her

⁵⁷ David Hollenbach, „*Liberalism, communitarianism, and the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy*,” p. 31.

⁵⁸ *DH*, 7.

⁵⁹ David Hollenbach, „*Liberalism, communitarianism, and the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy*,” p. 31.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁶¹ David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 113.

religious convictions must be equally treated because of his/her rights and freedoms. This position of Hollenbach is fully compatible with that of Yale University professor of Political Science and Philosophy, Seyla Benhabib. She speaks of „*participationist communitarianism*”, which defends the value and importance of multiple discourses. The opposite to the aforesaid is „*integrationist communitarianism*” which defends total loyalty to each system of values.⁶²

Hollenbach’s teaching forces one to conclude that Vatican II’s achievement in proclaiming freedom of religions is a great accomplishment within the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Recognition of those belonging to other religious communities, even minor ones, does not lead to exclusion but respect for one’s dignity. This change in the Catholic mind is indicative of mutual influence between liberalism and communitarian Catholicism. Indeed, liberalism has transformed Catholicism by its strong accent on individuality and personal freedom and looking for neutrality in a pluralistic world. Catholicism, in its turn, can contribute to the liberal doctrine with its principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which do not violate personal freedom.⁶³ For the Catholic Church, it prevents any hint of fundamentalism in its teaching, because of this new openness to interreligious dialogue. Nor can it lead to relativism, because the Catholic Church remains a traditional religion with its dogmas, virtues and moral principles. That is why Hollenbach claims that Catholic social teaching should be developed in a way that reflects a „*synthesis of the values of both liberalism and communitarianism, a synthesis that can help address some of the urgent moral problems of society*”.⁶⁴

Still, interreligious dialogue, a necessary element in this synthesis, is no easy task due to potential clashes of different perspectives. Different approaches to the understanding of the self-constitute another challenge. On this, Hollenbach appeals to the need for „*more imagination about how to be authentically human than instrumental rationality [...] We need a broader and deeper vision of the good*”.⁶⁵ This is the starting point of any consideration of positive tolerance and active solidarity, because it is directly opposite to any kind of religious prejudice. Consequently, it has

⁶² Seyla Benhabib, „Autonomy, Modernity and Community”, in *Situating the Self*, New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 77-78.

⁶³ David Hollenbach, „A community of Freedom”, in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contribution to American Public Philosophy*, edited by R. Bruce Douglas and David Hollenbach. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 333.

⁶⁴ Idem, „*Liberalism, communitarianism, and the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy*”, p. 38.

⁶⁵ Idem, „A community of Freedom”, p. 338.

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become a necessary precondition for achieving the common good, that is, a community of freedom.