Dignitatis Humanae:
Shaping Contemporary Interreligious Dialogue

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of St. Michael’s College and the Department of Theology of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael’s College.

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Abstract

The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, Dignitatis humanae, built upon earlier Catholic teaching on religious freedom and further developed these teachings in light of the contemporary context. In addressing issues such as the dignity of the human person, the role of conscience in religious freedom, and the duties and responsibilities of the State pertaining to religious freedom, Dignitatis humanae was a declaration which had a significant impact on how the Church viewed non-Catholics. This document spoke strongly in defense of the universal right to religious freedom. In emphasizing the universality of this right Dignitatis humanae opened the doors to both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. This thesis examines the development of the Catholic teaching on religious freedom as expressed in Dignitatis humanae and considers how this teaching has transformed the relationships between Catholics and non-Catholics, particularly as reflected in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.
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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td><strong>AG</strong></td>
<td><em>Ad gentes</em>, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (1965)</td>
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<td><strong>AAS</strong></td>
<td><em>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</em></td>
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<td><strong>DH</strong></td>
<td><em>Dignitatis humanae</em>, Declaration on Religious Freedom (1965)</td>
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<td><strong>GS</strong></td>
<td><em>Gaudium et spes</em>, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965)</td>
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<td><strong>LG</strong></td>
<td><em>Lumen gentium</em>, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964)</td>
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<td><strong>NA</strong></td>
<td><em>Nostra aetate</em>, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965)</td>
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<td><strong>TC</strong></td>
<td>Theological Commission</td>
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<td><strong>SCU</strong></td>
<td>Secretariat for Christian Unity</td>
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<td><strong>WCC</strong></td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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Introduction

This research will examine the historical development and contemporary application of magisterial teaching on religious freedom particularly in light of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae (DH)*. The thesis will begin by examining the prior teaching and prominent ideas in the Church regarding religious freedom in the century leading up to the Second Vatican Council. To appreciate the place of *DH* in the development of the doctrine of religious freedom it is necessary to situate this declaration against the backdrop of pre-conciliar Church teaching on the subject of religious liberty. Having established this foundation, the thesis will then examine how the Church’s teaching on this topic was developed at the council, how it was initially received and how it has further evolved since Vatican II, particularly in relation to interreligious dialogue. This exploration of the development and expression of *Dignitatis humanae* will help us to better understand how the Declaration’s treatment of religious freedom can be understood more as fleshing out the implications of prior teachings than negating them. In this research there will be particular attention placed on the concept of freedom of conscience in relation to religious freedom since it is the teaching of the Church that these two concepts are intrinsically related.

The first part of *Dignitatis humanae* began by expounding upon the general principle of religious freedom. The second article of the Declaration focused on the subject of conscience by defining religious freedom as consisting in “that all should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or public, whether alone or in
association with others, within due limits.” According to the Council, the right to religious freedom stems thus not from the truth or error of any belief professed but from the dignity of the human person. This dignity requires persons to be free to seek the truth without coercion to act contrary to their beliefs (DH 2). The Council Fathers understood that religious freedom and freedom of conscience are so closely linked that it is difficult at times to distinguish between the two. To speak of freedom of conscience is to speak of religious freedom and vice-versa.

The Council stressed the deeply personal dimension of conscience. According to the Council, conscience should be respected because it is through conscience that all people are enabled to enter into a deeply personal relationship with God and therein find their greatest dignity. The Council Fathers saw that it is freedom of conscience, in its intimate and profoundly personal dimension, which gives rise to civil rights. In its opening article DH recognized the demand “that constitutional limitations should be set to the powers of government, in order that there may be no encroachment on the rightful freedom of persons and of associations.” Since freedom of conscience is an inalienable right of the human person, the Council treated conscience as something which is binding not only upon Christians but upon all who search for the truth. However, since the formation of conscience is dependent upon the use of human reason in the pursuit of truth it is also subject to the weaknesses to which reason is prone.

Vatican II expanded upon the Church’s teaching on conscience in significant, albeit subtle ways. Dignitatis humanae represented a significant doctrinal development on the subject of conscience. However, the opening articles of DH emphasized its continuity with the Church’s traditional doctrine. DH 1 stated that the teaching
pertaining to religious freedom that is put forward in this document “leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of persons and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.” In light of this statement the document’s treatment of religious freedom ought to be understood as fleshing out the implications of prior teachings rather than negating them. The authors intended this text to be read in continuity with the prior doctrine of the Church. This document took its place in continuity with the development of doctrine as the Council intended “to develop the doctrine of recent popes” (DH 1). Thus, in condemning any form of religious coercion, DH articulated a development of doctrine that was faithful to relevant magisterial teachings in their historical context while also challenging the Church to re-evaluate its relationship with people of all faiths.

Vatican II built upon the teaching on conscience put forward by earlier magisterial documents and moved towards more clearly defining conscience within the framework of its relationship to religious freedom. In DH the Council emphasized the important connection between religious liberty and immunity from coercion to act contrary to one’s faith. While at times the teachings of Vatican II represent a growth and a maturing of Catholic doctrine, it would be contrary to the Council’s own self-understanding to interpret its teaching as a departure from previous Catholic tradition. The context in which we interpret the Council’s teaching on religious freedom and conscience therefore must include magisterial statements on these topics from both before and after 1965.

As the Church addresses all people of good will with regards to religious freedom the issue of freedom from coercion has been at the forefront of interreligious dialogue in
recent years. With the new openness to interreligious dialogue which emerged from Vatican II there came a recognition of the urgent need for interreligious dialogue to address the issue of coercion. While the subject of religious freedom has historically been the cause of a great deal of tension between various religious groups, the new found fraternal spirit of interreligious dialogue opened the door for the promulgation of common statements including those specifically addressing the issues concerning coercion and conscience. Within the context of this research we will examine more closely several of these documents which will help us to trace the development of the Church’s teaching on coercion in the decades following the Second Vatican Council.

The question I propose to examine in this thesis is: How was Catholic teaching on religious freedom and freedom of conscience developed in *Dignitatis Humanae* and how is this teaching being applied today in interreligious dialogue? This research will help fill the void where to date little has been said in the theological academy with regards to the fruitful application of the Council’s teaching pertaining to freedom of conscience in post-conciliar interreligious dialogue. This exploration of the development and reception of *Dignitatis humanae* will also help us to better see how this document’s treatment of religious freedom must be understood more as a fleshing out of the implications of prior teaching than negating them.

**Methodology and Procedure**

This research will begin with an overview of the development of *Dignitatis humanae* within its historical context. I will use an expository and historical approach to examine the background context leading up to Vatican II, paying particular attention to teachings on religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Having examined the
development of the doctrine of religious freedom as articulated at Vatican II I will explore post-conciliar reactions to this teaching in the fifteen years immediately following the Council. I will then consider some of the implications of this teaching in the context of contemporary interreligious dialogue by using an analytical approach in examining three key statements pertaining to interreligious dialogue. In my conclusion I will adopt a constructive approach which will encourage readers to reflect upon the role conciliar teachings on religious freedom have to play in contemporary interreligious dialogue given the urgent need for the protection of this fundamental right in our world today.

The first chapter of this research will examine the historical background of magisterial teaching on religious freedom and freedom of conscience in the century preceding Vatican II. Identifying the subject of conscience within its historic context in pre-conciliar teachings on religious freedom will support further exploration on the development of this doctrine.

The second will trace the development of *Dignitatis humanae* at the Second Vatican Council, while focusing in on discussions pertaining to freedom of conscience and the implications of these discussions in relation to interreligious dialogue. This study will examine the discussions, schemas, interventions, and reports from Vatican II pertaining to *Dignitatis humanae* with a particular focus on the implications of this doctrine as it pertains to the relationship between some Christian groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, and non-Christians.

The third chapter of this research will focus on the reactions and discussions surrounding the issue of freedom from coercion in the first fifteen years of the immediate
post-conciliar period. This time frame follows in large part the post-conciliar years of the pontificate of Paul VI. I will highlight some of the implications of this teaching in the life of the Church in the post-modern world and how the teaching continued to be developed following the Council. This chapter will seek to explain how the conciliar teaching pertaining to religious freedom cannot be fully understood solely in the isolated context of Christianity but rather defends the freedom of conscience of all people of good will.

The fourth chapter will explore how the doctrine of religious freedom, as taught in DH, has been expressed in contemporary interreligious dialogue. This chapter will look at three statements of contemporary relevance pertaining to interreligious dialogue. These three statements will provide a framework for identifying how this teaching has been applied in the Church’s relationship with non-Christians. The first statement I have chosen to analyze was issued by the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1988, and the second by PCID whereas the third statement was jointly issued by the PCID, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and World Evangelical Alliance. I selected these documents as they were created by a pontifical council rather than a secular organization and thus speak with a certain degree of authority on behalf of the Church. In this way we will see examples of the way in which the Council’s teachings may be reflected in magisterial as

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well as ecumenical statements. The conclusion will then summarize my findings and offer some constructive proposals for the role of this teaching in contemporary society, with a particular focus on interreligious dialogue.

**Implications**

Diverse implications of the Church’s teaching pertaining to religious freedom and freedom of conscience can be identified through a close historical analysis of the development of *DH* as well as a look at the impact of this teaching in subsequent statements on interreligious dialogue pertaining particularly to the subject of religious freedom. A solid understanding of *DH* can provide a strong foundation upon which to build mutual respect in ecumenical and interreligious interactions. We will see how *DH* 2 in particular teaches that this respect must be fundamentally a respect of the conscience of the individual which is at the heart of the human person. Without protection and respect of conscience there is no religious freedom. In better understanding this relationship between conscience and religious freedom we will also be better equipped to identify the key elements of true religious freedom and be able to cultivate these elements in contemporary global and interreligious relations.

By framing their argument for religious freedom in terms of human dignity, the Council Fathers appeal to reason and a sense of human nature, which they hoped would be shared by all people of good will. The Council committed the Church to respecting and defending the religious liberty of all, including non-Catholics. The magisterial teaching on religious freedom and coercion articulates a doctrine which is thus relevant to all people of good will. In foregrounding freedom of conscience in the conciliar discussion of religious freedom the Council provided a breakthrough in the development
of this doctrine. In opening the doors to a defense of the religious freedom and immunity from coercion for all people the Council informed a renewal and development of the Church’s participation in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as well as its relationships with states and the world at large. In emphasizing and articulating the rights of religious freedom and freedom from coercion Vatican II enabled the Church to carry out fruitful interreligious dialogue.
Chapter 1

Religious Freedom Prior to Vatican II

1.1 Introduction

Before examining the issue of religious freedom at Vatican II it is important to have a solid understanding of the teaching of the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council and to reflect upon the key theological discussions that were taking place leading up to the Council. In this chapter I will first provide a brief overview of the theme of religious freedom in the history of the Church with a focus on the teachings that emerged in the 19th century. Next I will look at the teaching of the Church pertaining to religious freedom in the immediate decades preceding Vatican II. Then I will examine some of the key theological discussions of the decades immediately prior to the Council which engaged with the issue of religious freedom and pushed this issue to play a key role in the Council. In my introduction to this thesis I proposed that a study of Dignitatis humanae could help us see how this Declaration built upon prior teachings rather than negating them. We would be unable to recognize this development if we did not first familiarize ourselves with the teachings preceding Vatican II pertaining to religious freedom.

1.2 Magisterial Teaching on Religious Freedom in the 19th Century

Although no prior document addressed the issue of religious freedom as thoroughly or as explicitly as Dignitatis humanae, there were a number of statements pertaining to religious freedom in earlier magisterial teaching, particularly in the century leading up to Vatican II. The discussion of religious freedom that took place at Vatican II and the subsequent articulation of this doctrine in Dignitatis humanae cannot be understood apart from these earlier statements. At the Council itself, however, some
conservative bishops “held that *DH* was contrary to established Catholic teaching and could not be adopted without violence to the Catholic faith.”\(^2\)

Prior to Vatican II many thought that Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* published on December 8\(^{\text{th}}\), 1964, spoke most powerfully on the issue of religious freedom although this document seemed to condemn religious freedom. It is often contended that *Dignitatis humanae* contradicted or abrogated the teachings expressed in Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* and thus this document is frequently used to support the position of those who argue that Vatican II consisted in an “about-face of Catholic teaching on freedom of religion and on Church-State relationships.”\(^3\)

One of the key condemnations contained in the *Syllabus of Errors* that seemed to be contradicted in *DH* is number 15 in this list of errors which condemned the statement that “Every person is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, they shall consider true.” While this condemnation seemed to stand in stark contrast with the position of *DH* it can in fact be argued that *DH* does not negate the denunciation in the *Syllabus of Errors* since *DH* 1 proclaims that “Religious freedom, in turn, which persons demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore, it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of persons and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.” Given the aforementioned passage, if an interpretation of the Declaration is insisted upon that conflicts with Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* then


\(^3\) Ibid.
DH conflicts with itself, for the earlier teaching, far from being changed, is explicitly left intact.

One historical reality which needs to be remembered in approaching Dignitatis humanae is that Pius IX, in issuing the Syllabus of Errors and Quanta cura, was reacting to Continental Liberalism. This movement had raised the banner of religious liberty at the time of the French Revolution and then had consistently worked to undermine the Church in every way possible, according to the Continental Enlightenment conviction that true liberty required the elimination of religion as a social force. In considering whether DH was an authentic development of the teachings of the 19th century popes it is important to remember that these pontiffs addressed the topic of religious freedom in a social, cultural, and political context very different from our own. In publishing the Syllabus of Errors and Quanta cura, for instance, Pius IX was speaking within the relatively narrow horizon of Catholic Europe and Latin America, where traditional religion was under attack from militant secularist liberalism represented by the Jacobinism of the French Revolution and Italian laicism.

Another important 19th century document to consider, particularly with reference to religious freedom, is Leo XIII’s 1885 encyclical Immortale Dei, On the Christian Constitution of the States. No. 26 of this encyclical stated the following:

All questions that concern religion are to be referred to private judgment; that every one is to be free to follow whatever religion he prefers, or none at all if he disapprove of all. From this the following consequences logically flow: that the judgment of each one's conscience is independent of all law; that the most unrestrained opinions may be openly expressed as to the practice or omission of divine worship; and that every one has license to think whatever he chooses and to publish abroad whatever he thinks.4

Taking into consideration this passage it can be argued that the teaching of *DH* can be properly understood as a development of the teaching of Leo XIII in *Immortale Dei*. Both documents explained that the moral faculty of a person’s conscience is not granted by nature, impartially and without distinction, to truth and untruth, to decency and indecency. The influence of *Immortale Dei* on *DH*’s treatment of the conscience can help address the concerns raised by some conservative bishops who argued that *DH* promoted an indifference to truth.

In *Immortale Dei* Leo XII also spoke of the limitations of the State with regards to religious freedom in stating that:

> Since the people is declared to contain within itself the spring-head of all rights and of all power, it follows that the State does not consider itself bound by any kind of duty toward God. Moreover, it believes that it is not obliged to make public profession of any religion; or to inquire which of the very many religions is the only one true; or to prefer one religion to all the rest; or to show to any form of religion special favour; but, on the contrary, is bound to grant equal rights to every creed, so that public order may not be disturbed by any particular form of religious belief.⁵

The separation of Church and State that was put forward in *Immortale Dei* championed a “radical de-divinization of the temporal sphere of power.”⁶ With this separation the Church denied that the State “represents the ultimate milieu of a person’s perfection, the embodiment of the highest values in human life, a moral end in itself, and the sphere for the achievement of salvation.”⁷ Further on in *Immortale Dei* Leo XII also declared that:

> 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. Liberty is a power

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⁵ Ibid., 25.
⁷ Ibid.
perfecting the human person, and hence should have truth and goodness for its object.\textsuperscript{8}

The concept of religious freedom as a legal institution and the question of the authority of the State to regulate religious freedom was a problem that confronted Leo XIII. According to John Courtenay Murray, one of the most influential theologians in the composition of Dignitatis humanae, Leo XIII “like his predecessors, but on the basis of a far more acute analysis of historical and political reality, condemned both the legal institution that sought to regulate religious freedom and the ideology that inspired it.”\textsuperscript{9} Leo XIII accepted an adaptation of the territorial principle of the post-Reformation era, the principle that in one “city” (civitas) only one faith should be publicly professed.\textsuperscript{10} This is a principle that the Council Fathers wrestled with in composing Dignitatis humanae and ultimately needed to clarify and refine in order to ensure the religious freedom of all people. The principle accepted by the Council focused on the teaching “that all people are called by God through Christ to unity of religious faith in the one Church.”\textsuperscript{11} This dogma pointed beyond the State to root the understanding of religious freedom in an eschatological framework. While Leo XIII’s understanding of religious freedom was primarily historical, that is limited to historical time and place and tied to “the traditional unity of faith in the Catholic nations of Europe,” DH addressed the concerns of religious freedom in a universal and eschatological context.\textsuperscript{12}

Following on Immortale Dei, Leo XIII’s 1888 encyclical Libertas praestantissimum addressed the issue of religious freedom within the context of a wider

\textsuperscript{8} Immortale Dei, 32.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 57.
discussion pertaining to the inherent free will of every human person. This shifted the focus from the relationship of Church and State to the individual. In the opening lines of this document Leo XIII declared that “Man, indeed, is free to obey his reason, to seek moral good, and to strive unswervingly after his last end.”\(^\text{13}\) Leo XIII recognized that freedom does not always lead a person to the moral good. He stated that every person “is free to turn aside to all other things; and, in pursuing the empty semblance of good, to disturb rightful order and to fall headlong into the destruction which they have voluntarily chosen.”\(^\text{14}\) Free will, applied in the realm of religion, means that no person can be compelled to accept religious belief. This was to be a key teaching in \textit{DH}. Leo XIII understood that upholding the dignity of the human person meant that every human person must remain free to choose what they believe, even if this belief may lead them astray.

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century magisterial documents we have examined there may seem to exist an understanding of religious freedom which stands in stark contrast to the teaching of Vatican II in \textit{DH}. As previously mentioned it is important to bear in mind that these documents were written in response to the movements of the Enlightenment which opposed the Catholic Church. If they are read out of context the apparent conflict is stark however when read with careful attention to the context in which they were authored, it is possible to resolve some of the apparent differences between the 19\textsuperscript{th} century teaching of the Church and the Declaration of Religious Freedom. Recognizing that the 19\textsuperscript{th} century magisterial documents and \textit{DH} do not necessarily contradict each other we can be open to


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
the proposition that *DH* can be rightly understood as a development of these earlier teachings.

### 1.3 Religious Freedom in the First Half of the 20th Century

Following on the 19th century documents, little was said at the beginning of the 20th century with regards to religious freedom. Since Vatican I (1869-1870), the Church had opposed the liberal reforms of the Enlightenment that had transformed governments throughout Europe. Pius IX had condemned liberalism, the separation of Church and State, and free speech in the *Syllabus of Errors*. It was not until the rise of the Nazi regime in the late 1930s that the topic of religious freedom was again brought to the forefront. One of the key documents of this period pertaining to religious freedom is Pius XII’s 1937 encyclical against the Nazis, *Mit brennender Sorge*. In fact, *DH* 2 cites article 7 of *Mit brennender Sorge* which stated that “Whoever follows that so-called pre-Christian Germanic conception of substituting a dark and impersonal destiny for the personal God, denies thereby the Wisdom and Providence of God who ‘Reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly.’”15 The Council Fathers used this citation to support the Declaration’s position that “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.”16

World War II hastened the Church’s acceptance of democracy. Nonetheless, the victory of the democracies over the totalitarian governments in that war posed difficult

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challenges to Catholics in Europe and the United States. Christians of different denominations began collaborating in the work of social reconstruction in response to the ravages of the war. Such cooperation was important and valuable yet also risky from the perspective of the Catholic magisterium.\(^\text{17}\) The Church taught that Catholicism was the one true religion. Collaboration with non-Catholics might challenge that true faith. Most worrisome was the problem of “indifferentism,” which was condemned by Pope Pius IX in the *Syllabus*.\(^\text{18}\) Indifferentism was the belief that all religions are equal, that is, indifference to the truth that Catholicism is the one true religion. Catholic theologians struggled to formulate an understanding of religious freedom which would support cooperation between Catholics and non-Catholics while at the same time not suggesting that all religions are equal in truth. The new openness to co-operation which emerged following World War II would later become a key element of authentic interreligious dialogue.

There were significant political aspects of the problem of the development of the doctrine of religious freedom in the Catholic Church. Even after the Church accepted democracy, it struggled to accept the separation of Church and State. When John XXIII became Pope in 1958, the dominant account of Catholic Church-State theory was summarized in the thesis/hypothesis distinction whose premise was that Catholicism is the one true religion. This position held that if Catholicism is the one true religion, it should be the established religion of the State. The thesis/hypothesis theology argued that where the Catholic Church is a majority the State must govern in accordance with


Catholic principles and where the Catholic Church is a minority Catholics must have full rights to practice their Faith and the Church must be allowed to operate freely within the State. It was not until the late 1950s that the Church began to accept that Catholicism was not always the established religion, and that it would be difficult to gain or regain established status in some nations. The thesis stated the ideal: Catholicism should be the established religion of the State. This was a position that was held particularly strongly in Spain. A non-Catholic state was the “hypothesis” that had to be tolerated but was certainly not ideal. Catholics could tolerate non-establishment when they could do no better, but should change the hypothesis to thesis when they could do so.

The slogan connected to the thesis/hypothesis distinction was that “error has no rights.” The implications of this phrase were most severe in the realm of public worship. Catholics in the minority have the right to public worship; their religion is true. But error does not have rights to public worship. Thus non-Catholics in the minority should not have the right to public worship. Only true faiths have the right to public worship.

Nowhere was the social and political problem for Catholics more pressing than in the United States. American Catholics had always confronted a tension between their American and Catholic identities. In the nineteenth century, for example, Bishop John Ireland and others “had encouraged American Catholics to accept religious toleration, religious freedom, and separation of Church and State as part of an accommodation to the modern world.” During World War II and in the late 1940s, the American Jesuit

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22 Griffin, 246.
theologian John Courtney Murray defended “intercredal cooperation,” the collaboration of Catholics and non-Catholics in the work of social justice.” Murray offered a rigorous challenge to the thesis/hypothesis distinction. In reference to the American context he demanded, “Are we to suppose that 30,000,000 Catholics must live perpetually in a state of hypothesis?” Murray’s critics however “raised the specter of indifferentism in opposing cooperation and labelled him an Americanist.” Those who challenged Murray warned that cooperation with non-Catholics might leave Catholics indifferent to the truth of their own religion.

Since the 1920s the ecumenical movement had developed among other Christian denominations without Catholic participation; fears of indifferentism kept Catholics from full engagement in ecumenism. For example, the Church refused to send observers to the First Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in August 1948. At this assembly the WCC adopted a Declaration on Religious Liberty that demanded “adequate safeguards for freedom of religion and conscience, including the right of all persons to hold and change their faith, to exercise it in worship and practice, to teach and persuade others, and to decide on the religious education for their children.” Following the proclamation of the WCC Declaration on Religious Liberty, Willem Visser’t Hooft, a Dutch theologian who had become the first secretary general of the WCC, proposed the establishment in Rome of a specialized and permanent agency of the Council that could monitor the ecumenical

25 Griffin, 246.
situation at first hand. He also suggested “immediately raising the problem of the recognition of religious freedom as a preliminary step.”\(^\text{28}\) After the announcement of Vatican II, the WCC “urged the Church to address ecumenism and Christian unity as a central issue of the Council.”\(^\text{29}\)

The same year that the WCC adopted its “Declaration on Religious Liberty” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10\(^{th}\), 1948. This document was drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds and from all regions of the world and it was thus representative of a global cross-section of peoples and nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Article 2 of the Declaration stated that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of, among other things, religion.\(^\text{30}\) Article 18 most explicitly addressed religious freedom in stating that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”\(^\text{31}\)

Both the WCC “Declaration on Religious Liberty” and the UN Declaration of Human Rights revealed the importance of the issue of religious freedom on the world


\(^{29}\) Griffin, 246.


\(^{31}\) Ibid.
stage in the post World War II era. At the time, however, the Catholic Church was not yet ready to formulate its own articulation of religious freedom in the contemporary context. Nonetheless, these non-Catholic declarations brought this issue to the forefront and challenged the Catholic Church to also take a stand on this issue. In the light of these declarations, Catholic Theologians such as John Courtney Murray and Jacques Maritain brought attention within the Church to the concerns of religious freedom. In spite of the support for religious freedom in the UN and by the WCC there were, however, numerous Catholic theologians who were not willing to accept what they saw to be an erroneous defense of religious freedom.

It was not until Pius XII’s December 6th, 1953 allocution Ci riesce that the Catholic Church first spoke on religious freedom in the post-World War II era. This allocution is considered by many to be the primary and definitive pre-Vatican II document on the doctrine of religious freedom. There are two reasons for this. First, Pius XII affirmed the basic systematic concept: “That which does not correspond to the truth and the norm of morality has, objectively, no right either to existence or to propaganda or to action.”32 Second, Pius XII proposed a doctrine of tolerance, not of religious freedom: “Not to inhibit error by means of public laws and coercive methods can nevertheless be justified in the interests of a higher and greater good.”33

Throughout Ci riesce Pius XII frequently employed a vocabulary of tolerance and spoke about “the immunity of the citizen from coercion by the public powers in his religious profession and practice.”34 This teaching took into account a definition of

33 Ibid.
34 Murray, The Problem, 57.
religious freedom that is properly understood in its contemporary context. Thus it provides us with evidence that there was a movement in Church in the years leading up to the Council that acknowledged the concept of religious freedom. This movement began to consider how this freedom must be universally protected. In this allocution Pius XII stated the following teaching which would be later echoed in *Dignitatis humanae*:

> Concerning tolerance in determined circumstances, toleration even in cases in which one could proceed to repression, the Church—out of regard for those who in good conscience (though erroneous, but invincibly so) are of different opinion—has been led to act and has acted with that tolerance, after it became the State Church under Constantine the Great and the other Christian emperors, always for higher and more cogent motives. So it acts today, and also in the future it will be faced with the same necessity.\(^{35}\)

In this excerpt Pius XII promoted tolerance in the Church’s attitude towards non-Catholics. He also indicated that individuals may be in “good conscience” while holding to erroneous beliefs. Pius XII challenged the Church to respect the good conscience of others even when they are in error.

As we have seen, prior to Vatican II the discussions surrounding religious freedom in the Catholic Church centred on the thesis/hypothesis theory which granted Catholics authority over the State where they were the majority and total freedom of religion where they were minorities. In the decades leading up to Vatican II certain Catholic theologians fought to defend an understanding of religious freedom which focused on the proposition that “error has no rights.” However, with Pius XII in *Ci riesce* we see an acknowledgement that even those who may have an “erroneous conscience” still have the right, if not to full religious freedom, to at least toleration. Pius XII taught that the religious practice of non-Catholics ought not be supressed. This first step of

\(^{35}\) *Ci riesce.*
tolerance was an early sign of the mutual respect that would be essential to the development of interreligious dialogue.

1.4 Religious Freedom in the Decade Immediately Preceding Vatican II

In 1960, Murray was praised in Time Magazine for championing religious freedom in the United States, however his efforts were not met with such enthusiasm in the Vatican. Murray’s defense of religious freedom which acknowledged the freedom of non-Catholic religions led to conflict with Cardinal Ottaviani, pro-secretary of the Vatican Holy Office, and the eventual Vatican demand, in 1954, that Murray cease writing on religious freedom and stop publication of his two latest articles on the issue. One of Murray’s key opponents, Joseph Fenton, believed that Murray’s views countered essential Catholic Doctrine. Fenton was a controversial theologian who is best remembered for his aggressive opposition to Murray on matters of religious freedom and on the relationship between Church and State. In the early 1950s Fenton argued that in the event that Fr. Murray’s teaching is true “then it would seem that students of sacred theology and of public ecclesiastical law have been sadly deceived for the past few centuries. They have been told that the State has an obligation to worship God according to the precepts and the rites of the true religion…It is hard to believe that any Catholic

36 Griffin, 246.
37 Ibid.
could be convinced that such an entire section of Catholic teaching about the Church itself could be so imperfect.”

Fenton believed that the State ought not grant freedom to a religion (any non-Catholic religion) which did not worship God according to the teachings of the one true Catholic Church. In 1953 the American Ecclesiastical Review published an English translation of Pope Pius XII’s address to members of the Union of Catholic Jurists, *Ci Riesce*. This publication of the address was accompanied by an article by Fenton that claimed the Pope had vindicated the thesis/hypothesis approach. Calling *Ci Riesce* “one of the most important pontifical statements of recent times,” Fenton pointed out that the Pope had taught that “a ruler does not always have a duty to repress error, which implies, of course, that the same ruler sometimes does have such a right.” Fenton argued that the Pope’s teaching was “founded on the very vocabulary and ideas that Murray had repeatedly rejected.” Pius XII had said that the church cannot approve the complete separation of Church and State “in principle or as a thesis,” thus making explicit reference to the standard thesis-hypothesis distinction, while Murray had denied the validity of structuring the argument in those terms.

In 1958 Rosaire Gagnebet acted as chief author in preparing a document for the Theological Commission (TC) “that would have condemned as erroneous a series of propositions intended to summarize the views of several Catholic authors – among them

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40 Ibid., 685.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 85.
Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray – who were calling for a revision of the classic modern doctrine on Church and State.\(^{46}\) It appears that it was only the death of Pius XII that had prevented the publication of this text. Gagnebet’s position was that “the Church had a right and duty to intervene in the temporal order only when its supernatural goal was at stake.”\(^{47}\) He challenged those who advocated for a separation of Church and State arguing that the civil power could not remain indifferent to religion but must also support it. His position was that “the duty to perform religious obligations fell not only on individual citizens but on the civil authority itself, which was, therefore bound to acknowledge the way in which God wishes to be served and worshiped: within the Catholic Church.”\(^{48}\) Gagnebet’s text restricted religious freedom by arguing that the State “could act in order to help its citizens persevere in the faith by restricting public displays of other religions and the spread of false doctrines.”\(^{49}\) He allowed for “just tolerance” of other religions, even in a Catholic state, however argued that complete religious freedom could only be granted in non-Catholic countries.\(^{50}\)

In this document the TC presented a restatement of the classic doctrine which Murray had been arguing needed to be further developed and clarified in the modern context. Many Catholic theologians challenged the classic doctrine by arguing that the classical thesis/hypothesis position “reflected a stage of political development that had

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\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 297.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.
been surpassed by the rise of modern pluralistic democracies, which require another articulation of the fundamental principles of the Church’s independence and freedom.”

As Gagnebet was preparing his document for the TC the Secretariat for Christian Unity (SCU) began working on producing its own document with Louis Janssen as its chief author. Janssen’s document was presented by Bishop de Smedt and was accepted as a basic expression of the SCU’s position regarding religious freedom. Janssen argued that in a world undergoing rapid unification but also displaying a great pluralism of religions, the Church had to face three great questions: tolerance, cooperation, and Church-State relations. According to Janssen, in the modern world tolerance is a “necessary expression of a charity that acknowledges the fundamental significance of personal freedom both for human dignity and for faith itself.” Janssen recognized that in order to address pressing human needs Catholics must be willing to cooperate with non-Catholics. He also promoted a separation of Church and State arguing that “Church and State must be governed by the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal established by Christ himself, by the transcendence of the spiritual over the temporal, and by the freedom of the Church.” Janssen distanced himself from the classic thesis/hypothesis position which was adopted by the TC and rejected the idea that “the State itself must worship God.”

Theologians such as Janssen, whose positions were adopted by the SCU, argued that “civil society has a duty to grant religious freedom to all religious communities

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 298.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 299.
within the bonds of public order and the common good.”\textsuperscript{55} Advocates of this position proposed that “if civil society has a duty to serve God, it does this best by following divine laws in its legislation and by faithfully fulfilling its own distinctive mission.” In response to the SCU and the theologians it favoured, the TC called for a continuation of the strongly anti-modern position of the Church which emerged in response to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. On the other hand, the SCU sought to support the efforts that had been made by modern theologians, especially since the 1930s, “to find other ways in which the Church might meet its redemptive task in a world irremediably changed.”\textsuperscript{56} The SCU argued that the teaching of the Church regarding religious freedom needed to be further developed to reflect the realities of the modern world.

In the 1960s, the separation of Church and State and religious freedom remained contested issues within Catholicism. One of Murray’s strongest opponents, John A. Ryan, spoke in favour of applying the Spanish Model of thesis/hypothesis to the American context should Catholics be in power in the United States. This was particularly relevant to the American Church with the election of the first Catholic president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in the United States in November 1960. If Catholics were to gain power in America Ryan felt that the laws and bureaucracy of the nation should reflect the theological teaching of the Catholic Church.

Murray’s work \textit{We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition} (1960) addressed the internal reflection of the Catholic community on religious freedom.\textsuperscript{57} This line of thinking surely had greater personal cost for Murray

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 299.
because of the initial response of Church leadership to his thinking. In the end, however, Murray’s theology helped bring about an extraordinary shift in the Catholic Church’s stance toward religious freedom. Murray argued that “attention to the historical contexts of the rejection of religious freedom by nineteenth century popes such as Pius IX and Leo XIII could enable the Church to affirm religious freedom in contexts that were different, such as those prevailing in mid-twentieth century democracies.”\(^{58}\) When Murray proposed this approach, his views were roundly rejected by his traditionalist theological adversaries. These adversaries saw his defense of religious freedom as encouraging a religious relativism (they called it “indifferentism”) that would effectively deny the unique truth of the Catholic faith. Critics such as Francis Connell, made the blunt charge that Murray’s theological advocacy of a positive Catholic stand on religious freedom could not be “harmonized with revealed truth.”\(^{59}\)

One of the theologians who, along with Murray, advocated for an updating of Church teaching to address the context of the modern world was the French lay theologian, Jacques Maritain. Maritain was one of the key theologians grappling with the issue of religious freedom in the decade leading up to the Second Vatican Council. On a foundational level, Maritain’s presentation on “rights” in his book *Man and the State* (1951) is an authentic articulation of the language of “rights” that would later be adopted in *Dignitatis humanae*.\(^{60}\) Although the book, and Maritain’s involvement with the United Nations International Declaration on Rights in 1948, preceded *Dignitatis Humanae* by almost twenty years, Maritain’s thought on the subject of “rights” nevertheless had a

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 73.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 84.

significant influence on the development of the issue of Religious Freedom at the Second Vatican Council.

With Maritain we see a shift away from the 19th and early 20th century understanding of religious freedom which was often placed in the context of the thesis/hypothesis position. Up until the 1950s the Church had been primarily understanding religious freedom on the premise that error has no rights and as such only the Catholic Church, whose doctrine teaches that the Church holds the fullness of truth, can be granted true religious freedom. Maritain moved away from framing religious freedom in terms of truth and non-truth and the focus on “truth has no error” and rather brings the discussion to the level of the human person. With Maritain we see a shift in theological reflection on religious freedom, moving away from a focus on the relationship between the Church and State and who holds the truth, towards a focus on the human person who is both a member of the church and lives in the world (the State).

In *Church and the State* Maritain suggested that there can exist “mutual cooperation between the body politic and the Church.”\(^{61}\) This new relationship proposed by Maritain would mean that the State “must not encroach upon matters of religion” however “that does not imply that as soon as it comes to the moral and religious realm the State should stand aloof and be reduced to sheer impotency.”\(^{62}\) According to Maritain the State “has no authority to impose any faith whatsoever upon, or expel any faith whatsoever from, the inner domain of conscience.”\(^{63}\) This is a particularly striking example of Maritain’s shift of focus to the individual person since it refers to the inner

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 173b.
\(^{62}\) Ibid.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
domain of conscience which resides at the heart of the human person. This passage also reflects a significant shift in Catholic theological thought away from a focus on the truth vs. error or thesis vs. hypothesis and towards a defense of freedom for any faith whatsoever, not only for the Catholic faith.

In shifting the focus to the individual Maritain also challenged the position held by many in the Church prior to Vatican II who believed that the Church was entitled to a privileged position within the operation of the State. Maritain believed that the Church has been entrusted with a spiritual mission which must be safeguarded by the State however the Church has no right “to the political power or the temporal advantages to which certain of its members might lay claim in its name.” 64 Maritain went so far as to state that “in the stage of development and self-awareness which modern societies have reached, a social or political discrimination in favor of the Church, or the granting of juridical privileges to its ministers or to its faithful, would be precisely of a nature to jeopardize, rather than to help, this spiritual mission.” 65 This statement clearly challenged the thesis-hypothesis theory which many bishops were fighting to hold on to.

The issue of religious freedom was somewhat less contentious in Protestant circles. The writings of prominent Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth as well as the WCC Declaration on Religious Liberty are indicative of the Protestant openness to religious freedom. In “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” an essay first published in Against the Stream (1954), Barth suggested that if the Church seeks its own advantage in the political sphere this hinders its proclamation of the Christian gospel which concerns all people. According to Barth Christians must show that “although they

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
go their own special way, they are not in fact against anybody but unconditionally for all, for the common cause of the whole State.”

66 Barth focused on the common good, that is the good of all people, and not simply on the good of the Church. In doing so he indicated that the Christian community and the State must cooperate to bring about the good for Christians and non-Christians alike. Barth argued that the Christian community ought not have any advantage over non-Christians in the political sphere. Barth stated that “in the political sphere the Christian community can draw attention to its gospel only indirectly, as reflected in its political decisions, and these decisions can be made intelligible and brought to victory not because they are based on Christian premises but only because they are politically better and more calculated to preserve and develop the common life.”

67 In focusing on the common good Barth echoed the UN Declaration of Rights, which in 1948 proclaimed that there are human rights which are common to all people.

Having reflected on the theological thought, pertaining to religious freedom, at play in the decade leading up to Vatican II we see two divergent positions at odds with one another. There is on one hand the position of Murray and subsequently the Secretariat for Christian Unity which proposes a shift from the thesis/hypothesis position towards a focus on the rights of the individual person and on the other hand we see opponents to Murray such as Fenton and Gagnebet who reflected the position of the Theological Commission. While this conflict was taking place there was emerging outside of the Catholic Church an understanding of religious freedom which identified this freedom as a universal right of the human person. Organizations such as the UN and

67 Green, 202.
the WCC came forward with declarations which sought to defend and protect religious freedom. Certain Catholic theologians, such as Jacques Maritain, were significantly influenced by these declarations and sought to bring the Church to embrace this new understanding of the rights of the human person. Maritain, as well as Protestant theologians such as Barth, proposed a new relationship of co-operation between the Church and the State to further the common good while guarding the religious freedom of the Church and its members. They suggested, however, that in the modern world the Church can no longer have authority to act in the political sphere apart from acting in co-operation with the State to further the common welfare of all human persons.

1.5 Conclusions

Having considered the theological thought pertaining to religious freedom in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century leading up to Vatican II we have laid the groundwork for a close examination of the development of these ideas at the Council. We have identified the key ideas and debates which were to be highlighted in the speeches, interventions, and modi proposed in the aula as Dignitatis humanae took form. Key ideas such as the thesis/hypothesis position and the rights of the human person would be brought to the forefront in the discussions that were to take place at the Council. Some of the main figures in the discussion of religious freedom immediately prior to the Council, such as John Courtenay Murray and Jacques Maritain, would be significant players in the drafting of the Declaration. The recognition of the need to safeguard and promote the common welfare of all persons which we saw in this period would significantly shape the Church’s proclamation on religious freedom. The understanding we have garnered in this chapter of the context out of which Dignitatis
*humanae* emerged will help us see how the issues at play in this period would be further developed at the Council.
Chapter 2

Religious Freedom at Vatican II

2.1 Introduction

In our previous chapter we explored the underlying context of theological thought regarding religious freedom during the century leading up Vatican II. Examining this context laid the necessary groundwork for us to move forward and consider the development of the topic of religious freedom at the Council. In this next chapter we will see how the ideas and debates of the period leading up to the Council, such as the notion of thesis/hypothesis as well as human rights, were highlighted and often the center of important debates and discussions at the Council. We will examine how these ideas were developed and at times transformed through the conciliar process.

In this next chapter we will consider what advancements the Second Vatican Council made on the question of religious freedom. We will begin by reflecting on these advancements in relation to three key topics pertaining to religious freedom which were discussed at the Council: human dignity, conscience and freedom from coercion, and the limits and duties of the State. This chapter will then explore how advancements made at the Council in these areas differ from the teaching of the Church on religious freedom prior to Vatican II which we examined in the previous chapter. Finally, we will also consider in this chapter the reasons behind these developments given the contemporary context of the Council, both within the Church and globally.

In order to better understand the teaching of DH we can focus our attention on article 2, which, as Cardinal Pietro Pavan stated in his commentary on the document “is
undoubtedly the most important article of this Declaration.” 68 This article provides insight into the main content of the whole document. In reading article 2 several key points of the Declaration can be identified. Pavan listed these key points as follows:69

1. Every human person has a right to religious freedom because they are a person.
2. The object or content of this right is freedom from coercion on the part of individuals or of the social groups or any human power.
3. This freedom from coercion has a double meaning: “in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs”; within due limits no one is “to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others.”
4. This right has its foundation in the dignity of the human person, such as it is known in the light of revelation and by reason.
5. It is a right of the person which is to be recognized as a civil right in the constitutional law of the political society.

DH 2 emphasized that the right to religious freedom must be regarded as a fundamental right grounded in the very nature of the human person. The Council then emphasized this link between religious freedom and human nature in stating that “the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in its very nature.” The Declaration went on to repeat itself on this point several times. For instance, in article 14 the same understanding of religious freedom in relationship to human nature was upheld with the statement that it is the duty of the Church “to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by its authority those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself.”

69 Ibid., 64-65.
2.2 The Beginning of Vatican II

On January 25th, 1959 John XXIII announced his intention of convoking an ecumenical council. In his announcement he revealed his intention for the Council to open the doors to ecumenical dialogue and work to heal the divisions existing among Christians by imploring the intercession of the saints “for a good beginning, continuation, and happy outcome of these proposals for a great work, enlightenment, edification and happiness of all Christian people, for a renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated communities that they also may follow us amiably in this search for unity and grace, to which so many souls aspire in all parts of the earth.” As Congar later pointed out in Report from Rome: The First Session, “previous Councils had been concerned to exclude heretics: Arius and Nestorius were condemned or exiled; Luther was excommunicated. But this time heretics have been invited to the Council.” According to Leslie Griffin, in her Commentary on Dignitatis humanae, it is not surprising that Pope John XXIII would desire to open the door to ecumenism with this Council since “ecumenism was a topic dear to the Pope’s heart.”

On December 25th, 1961, with the promulgation of the apostolic constitution, Humanae salutis, John XXIII solemnly convoked the Second Vatican Council to begin in the fall of 1962 calling the Church to bring “the perennial life-giving energies of the Gospel to the modern world, a world that boasts of its technical and scientific conquests but also bears the effects of a temporal order that some have wanted to reorganize by

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70 Ibid.  
72 Griffin, 247.
excluding God.”

While emphasizing the relevance of the Council to the modern world, John XXIII also reflected on the place of the Church in the contemporary context in stating that the Church “has not remained a lifeless spectator in the face of [modern] events but has followed step by step the evolution of peoples, scientific progress, and social revolution” while at the same time “decisively opposed the materialistic ideologies that deny the faith.”

On the Feast of Pentecost, June 10th, 1962 John XXIII set the tone for the upcoming Council in declaring that “The Church, which is about to hold a Council, rejects nothing that is of value and beauty in the world today…it wants to help and love all persons of our time.” On September 11th, 1962 John XXIII spoke of the upcoming Council in a radio address to the whole world. In this address John XXIII defined the Council as “a special, worldwide manifestation by the Church of its teaching office, exercised in taking account of the errors, needs and opportunities of our day.” He also specifically spoke of religious liberty in stating that “one of the fundamental rights which the Church can never renounce is that of religious liberty, which is not merely freedom of

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73 John XXIII. *Humanae Salutis*. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): 6. “Siquidem id ab Ecclesia nunc requiritur, ut virtutem perennem, vitalem, divinam Evangelii in venas iniciat eius, quae hodie est, humanae communitatis; quae gloriatur quidem de rebus a se recens in artium doctrinarumque provincias invectis, sed eius patitur socialis disciplinae damna, quam quidam, posthabito Deo, restituere conati sunt.”

74 *Humanae salutis*, 7. “Ad Ecclesiam autem quod attinet, popolorum vicissitudinibus, doctrinarum artiumque progressionibus, mutatis humanae societatis conditionibus nequaquam eadem iners affuit, sed haec omnia perviligis cura prosecuta est; totis viribus eorum doctrinis obstitit, qui omnia ad materiam referrent aut catholicae fidei fundamenta subvertere conarentur.”


worship.” He went on to say “the Church vindicates and teaches this liberty,” and cannot renounce it “because it is inseparable from the service [the Church] is bound to fulfil.”

The first session of Vatican II met from October 11th to December 8th, 1962. Although no final decrees were produced, it was, in many respects, the most interesting and revealing session of the entire council. Prior to the opening of the Council more than 70 Schemas had been drawn up by the preparatory Commissions. During the first session of the Council “a whole month was spent in examining a single one of these Schemas” and it became evident that the number of schemas being considered had to be significantly reduced. By the end of the first session, on December 5th, 1962, the number of schemas had been reduced from 73 to 20.

Unlike any previous council, Vatican II took upon itself a unique responsibility and mission for promoting unity not only within the Church itself but also among Christians and indeed within the whole human family. In the Opening Address of the Council we are reminded that “the Church’s anxiety to promote and defend truth springs from its conviction that without the assistance of the whole of revealed doctrine the humanity is quite incapable of attaining to that complete and steadfast unanimity which is associated with genuine peace and salvation.” In this address John XXIII laments that “the entire Christian family has not as yet fully and perfectly attained to this visible unity in the truth.”

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78 Ibid.
79 Congar, 51.
80 John XXIII. “Opening Address to the Council.”
81 Ibid.
The Council spoke not only to Catholics but indeed to the whole world, however, the Council Fathers also needed to wrestle with the tension that although “the Church exists in itself, but it does not exist for itself; it exists for persons, for persons to be led to Jesus Christ. In this way the Church exists both in itself and in the world.”82 With the beginning of the Council the Fathers were challenged to identify and address problems both ad intra and ad extra, problems relating to both the intrinsic character of the Church and to its relationship with the whole human family. The Council Fathers intended “to give an important place to all those earthly problems which concern the dignity of the human person and an authentic community of nations.”83 In carefully considering the problems of all humankind John XXIII hoped that the Council would “blaze a trail that leads toward that unity of human race, which is so necessary if this realm of ours is to conform to the realm of heaven.”84 Thus the ecumenical movement that emerged from Vatican II “cannot be defined merely in terms of the desire to gather all Christians together but in terms of preaching the Gospel to the whole world.”85

2.3 The Development of Dignitatis humanae

The development of Dignitatis humanae was a complex process beginning with the preparatory phase leading up to the Council and ending with its final promulgation on December 7th, 1965. Two competing texts which would lead to the writing of DH had been presented during the preparatory phase, one by the Theological Commission (TC) and the other by the Secretariat for Christian Unity (SCU). The TC promoted “the classical doctrine of thesis (the State has an obligation to support only the Catholic

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82 Congar, 83.
83 Ibid., 108.
84 John XXIII, “Opening Address to the Council.”
85 Congar, 22.
religion and to prohibit others) and hypothesis (tolerance when circumstances make Catholic the minority).”  

The SCU on the other hand drew up a schema specifically addressing issues concerning tolerance and religious freedom. The SCU was seeking to respond to the WCC which was urging the Catholic Church to take a clear stance on religious freedom as a condition for serious ecumenical dialogue. According to the Italian Cardinal Pietro Pavan, in his contribution to the *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (1969), edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, many Protestants felt that a declaration on religious freedom “was essential, not only on behalf of the cause of freedom in the world, but also for the progress of the ecumenical movement itself.”

On October 22nd, 1962, John XXIII raised the SCU to the same rank as the Council Commissions, “empowering it to submit the drafts it had drawn up to the Council and hence the Secretariat continued its examination of religious freedom.” The perspective adopted by the SCU included the following points: “freedom of conscience based on the dignity of the human person; religious intolerance is unacceptable; a religious assent cannot be won by coercion; an individual with an erroneous conscience has a right to respect; he has a right to honor God according to his conscience and to profess his religion.”

The first version of the document on religious freedom was handed to the Fathers on November 19th, 1963. This draft was presented as chapter five of the schema of the

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88 Soetens, 276.
89 James Manz, *Vatican II: Reform or Renewal?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 78.
90 Pavan, 51.
91 Soetens, 277-278.
Decree on Ecumenism. In a *relatio* attached to this document, Bishop de Smedt of Bruges explained why the SCU saw it as essential that the Catholic Church make a clear and unequivocal declaration on religious freedom. In his speech de Smedt “clearly stated that truth must not be imposed by human force and that the Church, when it is in difficulty, should avoid seeking refuge in civil powers.” De Smedt’s speech led the Council Fathers away from a notion of religious liberty that was based on a person’s divine vocation, as presented in the schema prepared by the TC, towards an understanding of religious freedom rooted in the dignity of the human person.

During the second and third sessions the Council Fathers were able to examine the schema on religious freedom in detail. Many of the Council Fathers asserted that the issue of religious freedom could not be relegated to the limits of ecumenism but rather was an issue which the church must address in relation to all people and not only Christians; the Fathers understood that religious freedom was essential for the relations between the church and all of humanity. On April 2nd, 1964, during the second inter-session, a second schema was distributed containing five pages of annotations, a *relatio* and a short summary. In this second schema religious liberty was no longer based on a person’s divine vocation but rather on the dignity of the human person. At the beginning of the third session there was increasing consensus among the Fathers that the

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92 Pavan, 51.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 283.
Council needed to produce a document that would speak directly to the complex issue of religious freedom.\textsuperscript{97}

The third Schema was presented on November 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, however voting on the schema, which was to take place November 19\textsuperscript{th} was postponed. From November 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1964 to February 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1965 the general secretariat for the Council received 218 suggestions for the document on religious freedom and all of these were passed on to the Secretariat for Christian Unity which had been entrusted with taking these recommendations into account and drawing up a fourth schema.\textsuperscript{98} On May 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1965 this fourth schema was distributed to all the Council Fathers. Discussion of this fourth schema took place in the aula September 15\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} and September 20\textsuperscript{th}—22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1965. Based on recommendations made during these discussions the SCU drew up a fifth schema which emphasized religious freedom in the context of the whole world and not only within the Church itself. According to this document there is an obligation for every person to seek for truth and to accept it according to one’s own conscience.

Voting on this fifth schema took place on October 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1965, however the schema was not approved by this vote and subsequently the Secretariat of the Council passed on more than six hundred modi to the SCU to be considered in refining the Textus recognitus. Taking these modi into consideration the Secretariat drafted the sixth schema which was given the title Textus denuo recognitus. In a final vote on December 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1965, the Textus denuo recognitus, received 2308 positive and 70 negative votes, 8 votes being invalid, and with this vote Dignitatis humae was promulgated.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{98} Pavan, 53.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 62
2.4 The Dignity of the Human Person

In the very first lines of *Dignitatis humanae* we see an emphasis on the dignity of the human person with the following statement: “A sense of dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary persons.”100 Within the Declaration there are nine explicit references to human dignity.101 The first part of *Dignitatis humanae* (nos. 2-8) went on to treat religious liberty according to the general principle of human dignity, a position which is developed in terms of natural law. *DH* 2 taught that religious freedom means that all persons “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 or her own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” The inherent human dignity of each person endows them also with freedom to hold and profess personal religious beliefs. The Council declared that “the right to

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100 *Dignitatis humanae,* 1
101 “A sense of dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary persons.” (*DH* 1); “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.” (*DH* 2); “It is in accordance with their dignity as persons—that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility—that all persons should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth.” (*DH* 2); “Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and its social nature.” (*DH* 3); “The declaration of this Vatican Council on the right of person to religious freedom has its foundation in the dignity of the person, whose exigencies have come to be are fully known to human reason through centuries of experience.” (*DH* 9); “Revelation does not indeed affirm in so many words the right of the human person to immunity from external coercion in matters religious. It does, however, disclose the dignity of the human person in its full dimensions.” (*DH* 9); “God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created and the human person is to be guided by his or her own judgment and they are to enjoy freedom.” (*DH* 11); “In faithfulness therefore to the truth of the Gospel, the Church is following the way of Christ and the apostles when it recognizes and gives support to the principle of religious freedom as befitting the dignity of the human person and as being in accord with divine revelation.” (*DH* 12); “Thus the leaven of the Gospel has long been about its quiet work in the minds of people, and to it is due in great measure the fact that in the course of time persons have come more widely to recognize their dignity as persons, and the conviction has grown stronger that the person in society is to be kept free from all manner of coercion in matters religious.” (*DH* 12)
religions 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; thus it is to become a civil right.” (DH 2)

The reason why every person may claim immunity from coercion in religious matters is precisely his or her inalienable human dignity. According to *Dignitatis humanae*, in religious matters the free human person is required and entitled to act on his or her own judgment and to assume personal responsibility for his or her action or omission. A person’s religious decisions, or his or her decision against religion, are inescapably his or her own. No one else can make them for another, or compel another to make this decision or that, or restrain another from putting his or her decision into practice, privately or publicly, alone or in company with others. If any of these situations were to take place, the dignity of the human person would be diminished because of the denial to the person of that inalienable responsibility for his or her own decisions and actions which is the essential counterpart of his or her freedom.

Although a proper understanding of religious freedom must be rooted in the notion of the dignity of the human person it is important to examine this freedom in the context of the State and broader society since every individual who possesses this freedom necessarily lives within the juridical organization of the State and society. In the development of *DH* the Council sought to clarify the limits of the State in so far as religious freedom is concerned. No person can be the object of coercion on the part of other persons and this freedom is not the State’s right or society’s function. The State
does not have “any business directing or obligating the human person in the domain of religion.” Religious liberty is in fact required by human dignity itself.

*Dignitatis humanae* developed an anthropological view of freedom which was not simply juridical but also theological. This Declaration understood freedom to be founded upon the nature of the human person. It can even be said that after the councils which addressed the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation, the Second Vatican Council spoke most powerfully and explicitly with regards to human nature and the dignity of the human person.

### 2.5 Conscience and Freedom from Coercion

*Dignitatis humanae* emphasizes conscience as the ultimate factor in moral choice. While Christians must take full and serious account of Church teachings and guidance, they must ultimately be guided by the inner law of their conscience. Thus conscience can be understood to be a “pre-eminently interiority word” and finds its place in the intimate interior life of the human person. The conscience is the inner sanctam and holy of holies of the human person.

As Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II) explained in his 1972 study on the implementation of the Second Vatican Council, *Sources of Renewal*, the opening words of *Dignitatis humanae* enable us to “understand the essence of Christian responsibility as conceived by Vatican II.” Wojtyla believed that the Declaration

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102 Fesquet, 541.
revealed a firm awareness of the duty that springs forth from rightly formed conscience and that Christian responsibility is “closely associated with the dignity of the individual, for it expresses the self-determination in which a person makes proper use of his or her freedom by allowing themselves to be guided by genuine values and a law of righteousness.”\textsuperscript{106}

According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), in the \textit{Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II} (1969), edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, \textit{Dignitatis humanae} presents conscience “as the meeting-point and common ground of Christians and non-Christians and consequently as the real hinge on which dialogue turns.”\textsuperscript{107} \textit{DH} championed a fidelity to conscience which would unite Christians and non-Christians and permit them to “work together to solve the moral tasks of humankind, just as it compels them both to humble and open inquiry into truth.”\textsuperscript{108} One of the most significant developments in \textit{DH} was the assurance of religious freedom for all persons, not only Catholics, particularly with regards to the freedom to act according to their conscience. \textit{DH} sought to draw together the entire human family and championed a universal freedom of conscience.

In examining the concept of religious freedom it is essential that we understand what the object of this freedom is. \textit{DH} 2 clearly states that the object of this freedom is the right of freedom from coercion to act contrary to one’s beliefs (conscience) as in the beginning lines of this article is stated:

“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all persons are to be immune from coercion on

\textsuperscript{106} Wojtyla, 291.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
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.”

In carefully reading this statement we see that the object of religious freedom is essentially negative: religious freedom exists where people are not compelled to act contrary to their conscience.

If a right exists, such as the right to religious freedom, this necessarily means that in order to uphold this right all other persons must recognize and respect it. Some Council Fathers had a difficult time accepting this understanding of religious freedom. Those Fathers who based the content of religious freedom on the elements of religious faith were adamant that such a right belongs only to those who profess the Catholic faith. These Fathers could not accept that such a right could be granted to those professing beliefs that contradicted the Catholic faith.

When Dignitatis humanae spoke of conscience it steered clear of addressing the problems of the true or erroneous conscience. The truth or falsity of that which is expressed by a conscience that is free from coercion was not the concern of the Council but rather the Council was focused on proclaiming the freedom of every person to act in accordance with his or her conscience. That being said, the Council did teach that freedom from coercion may be prevented when an abuse of this freedom leads to the overthrow of the public order. In this regard the Council stated: “Society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom of religion” and “it is the special duty of government to provide this protection.”

109 Pavan, 66.
110 Ibid.
111 Dignitatis humanae, 7.
right to freedom from coercion in public would mean “to violate a person’s dignity and to reject the order established by God, who has created all people as free social beings.”¹¹²

The Council Fathers were anxious to ensure that an ethics of conscience would not be transformed into the domination of subjectivism and would not lead to a pseudo-affirmation of limitless situation ethics under the guise of conscience. On the contrary, *DH* argued that obedience to conscience “means an end to subjectivism, a turning aside from blind arbitrariness, and produces conformity with the objective norms of moral action.”¹¹³ In his commentary on *DH*, Ratzinger stated that within the Declaration

> “Conscience is made the principle of objectivity, in the conviction that careful attention to its claim discloses the fundamental common values of human existence. The epistemological optimism which once again finds expression here is only qualified by the final observation that negligence in the search for the values of truth and goodness and the habit of sin can dull and practically blind the conscience.”¹¹⁴

The authors of *DH* understood the right to religious freedom to be situated in something more than a mere faculty of freedom; they saw conscience as the mediation of a discourse between the human person and God. *DH* 3 declared that “It is through his or her conscience that a person sees and recognizes the demands of the divine.” This is the same position argued in *Gaudium et spes* 16, where conscience is said to be a *sacrarium* (a holy place): “For the human person has in his or her heart a law inscribed by God. His or her dignity lies in observing this law, and by it they will be judged. His or her conscience is his or her most secret core and inner sanctuary. There he or she is alone with God whose voice echoes in his or her depths.” In the words of Cardinal Wojtyla in *Sources of Renewal*, “A person’s personal nature is expressed in the act of faith, an act

¹¹² Pavan, 69
¹¹³ Ratzinger, 136.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
springing from the depths of his or her humanity which must be defined as personal.”

The understanding of the dignity of the human person which is put forward in *Dignitatis humanae* is aligned with the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* 17 which declared that “A person’s dignity requires them to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in themselves or by mere external constraint.”

**2.6 The Duty and Responsibilities of the State Regarding Religious Freedom**

One of the difficult issues the Council Fathers had to wrestle with was the duty of the State regarding religious freedom. Religious freedom is not simply an issue within the Church but rather is an affair of the social and civil order; it is an immunity that attaches to the human person within society and in this context the Council understood that the protection of religious freedom must have its guarantee in civil law.

One of the most important insertions in the *Textus denuo recognitus* addressed the nature of the common welfare and the duties of the State to with regards to this welfare. The *Textus denuo recognitus* noted that this issue was previously addressed in no. 59 of the encyclical *Pacem in terris* which states: “Consisting, as he does, of body and immortal soul, the human person cannot in this mortal life satisfy his or her needs or attain perfect happiness. Thus, the measures that are taken to implement the common good must not jeopardize his eternal salvation; indeed, they must even help him to obtain it.” According to Pavan, in pointing to this passage from *Pacem in terris* the authors of

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115 Woytyla, 23.
the *Textus denuo recognitus* intended “to remove the doubts of some of the Fathers who still believed that the neutralistic character of the State was implicitly asserted in the document.”\(^{117}\) The theologians of the Secretariat entrusted with drawing up this sixth schema thus thought it was important to take up the suggestions of the *modi* which urged the Council to emphasize the positive duty of the State with regards to religion. The *Textus denuo recognitus* however explicitly declared that this duty must be exercised within certain limits, that is to say that the State cannot pronounce judgment on the value of a religious faith, but must create the conditions within which the members of a society can exercise their rights and fulfill their religious duties.\(^{118}\)

As various drafts of *Dignitatis humanae* were debated, Bishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow made a crucial intervention when he asked that *DH* 7 make clear that when the State limits liberty, it do *ordini morali objective conformes*—“in conformity with the objective moral order.”\(^{119}\) Wotyla believed that the qualification of conformity to natural law was necessary for two reasons. First, the qualification emphasized that “external limits on freedom are not drawn from principles completely alien to those that ground religious liberty itself.”\(^{120}\) Second, the qualification was necessary in order to make clear to the communist states that “public order cannot be a pretext for overriding basic moral principles.”\(^{121}\)

\(^{117}\) Pavan, 61.

\(^{118}\) Ibid. The *Textus denuo recognitus* states that “Government is also to help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties.” (*Dignitatis humanae*, 6.)


\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.
As Bishop de Smedt stated in his *relatio* given on November 20\(^{th}\), 1964, the Council needed to affirm that “no person can be the object of coercion on the part of other persons.” According to de Smedt “this is not the State’s right or society’s function. Neither has the State any business directing or obligating the human person in the domain of religion. Religious liberty is in fact required by human dignity itself.”\(^{122}\) This same report, given by de Smedt, also stated that “man, in the external exercise of his liberty, does not have the right to violate the rights of others or to dispense with his duties toward other people.” According to De Smedt’s report, “today when it is said that the human person must enjoy religious liberty, the Church agrees. It is a sign of progress.”\(^{123}\)

While states must not interfere with a person’s religious beliefs the State has a duty to provide all its citizens with protection from coercion to act contrary to one’s conscience. Furthermore, governments and their legal systems also have the duty to provide protection from being prevented to act according to one’s conscience.\(^{124}\) In examining the juridical notion of religious freedom it is important to consider a general division between “freedom of conscience” and “the free exercise of religion”; while the two are related they are not interchangeable. As Murray explained in *The Problem of Religious Freedom*, “in its juridical sense, freedom of conscience is the human and civil right of the human person to immunity from all external coercion in his search for God, in the investigation of religious truth, in the acceptance or rejection of religious faith, in the living of his interior or nonreligious life.”\(^{125}\) Fundamentally freedom of conscience consists in the freedom to make personal decisions regarding religious belief. According

\(^{122}\) Fesquet, 541.

\(^{123}\) Ibid.

\(^{124}\) Bousquet, 9.

to Murray this freedom is always social in so far as an individual’s religious decisions, however personal, are made in the social context of his or her existence. This social aspect of freedom from coercion means that every human person is to be free from coercion by any human forces or powers of the State within the social milieu.

Murray provided a helpful definition of coercion in our contemporary context stating that

By coercion is meant all manner of compulsion, constraint, and restraint, whether legal or extralegal. It includes such things as social discrimination, economic disadvantage, and civil disabilities imposed on grounds of religion. Today it importantly includes coercive forms of psychological pressure, such as massive propaganda, brainwashing techniques, etc.\(^{126}\)

Given this definition freedom from coercion means that no external force may coerce the conscience of a person to any form of belief or unbelief. It does not matter whether the conscience is true or erroneous. The Council’s teaching on conscience reflected a belief that “it is not within the competence of society or State to judge whether conscience be true or erroneous.”\(^{127}\)

Only with this proper understanding of coercion can we consider the secondary freedom of expression of religious belief and worship. Since civil law has no power to coerce the religious conscience it also has no power to coerce the expressions of religious belief. To grant freedom from coercion is also to grant freedom from restraining and interfering with religious expression regardless of the form of that expression. There are however limitations to the free expression of religious belief; this expression cannot cause damage to the common good. Where the common good is threatened by a particular expression of religious belief the State does indeed have the right, and in fact


\(^{127}\) Ibid., 34-35.
responsibility, to set limits on this expression. The Council made this exception in stating that government ought indeed “to see to it that equality of citizens before the law, which is itself an element of the common good, is never violated, whether openly or covertly, for religious reasons.”\textsuperscript{128}

2.7 Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined some of the key topics that were highlighted in the development of \textit{Dignitatis humanae} such as the dignity of the human person, the relationship between conscience and religious freedom and the duties and responsibilities of the State pertaining to religious freedom. In reflecting on the discourse at and surrounding the Council on these subjects we can see that certain developments and advancements were made in how the Catholic Church understood each of these dimensions of religious freedom.

\textit{Dignitatis humanae} placed a new emphasis on the dignity of the human person. The Council emphatically taught that religious freedom was fundamentally an issue of protecting the dignity of each human person. As Griffin explains “the basis for the right to religious freedom became the objective dignity of each human person.”\textsuperscript{129} The development of a declaration which highlighted in its very opening words the dignity of the human person required a shift in theological discourse away from understanding religious freedom primarily in the context of the institutions of the Church and State and towards a more anthropological view which considered religious freedom in relation to the nature of the human person. With this shift the discussions surrounding religious freedom

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Dignitatis humanae}, 6.
\textsuperscript{129} Griffin, 252.
freedom became primarily focused on the principle that the human person has rights rather than that the Church has rights. There was a movement away from the establishment and towards the individual.

Shifting the focus of discussions on religious freedom to the rights of the individual human person reflected the contemporary context in which there was internationally growing attention being placed on human rights in the post-World War II period. The world had reacted to the grave violations of human rights it had witnessed during the war and responded to these offences with the promulgation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which was adopted by the United Nations in December 1948. Earlier in August of this same year the WCC had published a Declaration on Religious Freedom. When the Second Vatican Council opened in October 1962 there was pressure from outside the Church for the Catholic Church to issue a declaration which would reflect the same values that had already been expressed, more than a decade earlier, in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the WCC Declaration on Religious Freedom.

As the Council drew attention to the dignity of the human person it was also necessary to articulate Church teaching on religious freedom in relation to the individual conscience for the rights of a human person cannot be separated from his or her right to freedom of conscience, to freely choose what they believe and profess. In the course of the Council it became increasingly evident that a declaration concerning respecting the dignity of the human person also required a statement on respecting every person’s conscience. While issues of conscience had previously been dealt with in relation to the Church the Council came to recognize that conscience is not an issue for Catholics alone
but rather it is a universal concern and indeed the protection of conscience ought to be a universal right, for every person has a conscience and every person must be free to act according to his or her conscience including non-Catholics as well as non-Christians and even atheists. The attention given to questions of conscience promoted ecumenism as it addressed “the question of how Catholics relate to people who don’t share their faith.”\textsuperscript{130} As Griffin explains freedom of conscience “offered an ecumenically sound principle” moving the Church towards a new ecumenism.\textsuperscript{131}

In addition to advancements pertaining to human dignity and conscience, \textit{Dignitatis humanae} also presented significant advancements with regards to the duties and responsibilities of the State pertaining to religious freedom as well as the relationship between the Church and State with regards to religious freedom. These advancements emerged in a world in which the era of the Catholic State was coming to an end. As Leslie Griffin points out it was an era of disestablishmentism.\textsuperscript{132} The issues of the role of the State was at the heart of the tensions between the TC, which emphasized the importance of the relationship between the Catholic Church and State in its discussions on religious freedom, and the SCU which saw religious freedom as an ecumenical, and indeed interreligious, concern. At the Council the discussions on religious freedom shifted from an emphasis on protecting the Church and maintaining a privileged relationship between the Church and State, towards protecting the religious freedom of the individual person regardless of whether they belonged to the Church or not. Griffin draws our attention to the thought of theologians such as Jacques Maritain, who had a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{130} Griffin, 252.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 259.
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significant influence on the final schema of *Dignitatis humanae* and asserted that “the sacral state was a thing of the past.”\(^{133}\)

A significant advancement presented in *Dignitatis humanae* was a movement away from the position that there ought to exist a symbiotic relationship between Church and State towards a view of the relationship between the Church and State which saw each establishment as autonomous. In the words of Jacques Maritain, as quoted in Griffin’s commentary, “The State is no longer entitled to intervene in matters of conscience.” and thus the State ought not intervene in matters of conscience unless for the sake of the common good.\(^{134}\) The State’s right to intervene was limited because, in Maritain’s view, “human beings, directed as they are to God, transcend by their nature the terrestrial and temporal order of things.”\(^{135}\)

As we have seen in this chapter the development of *Dignitatis humanae* was a complex process which led to a new articulation Church teaching on religious freedom. In many ways this Declaration reflected an advancement and development of earlier teaching, moving away from an understanding of religious freedom focused on the relationship between Church and State and focusing rather on the right to religious freedom of the individual human person. Protecting the religious freedom of the individual person required a protection of the individual conscience which is at the heart of the dignity of the human person. In the third chapter of this thesis we will explore how these developments were received in the Church in the period immediately following the Second Vatican Council and how these developments transformed the theological

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\(^{133}\) Ibid.  
\(^{134}\) Ibid. [Translation my own.]  
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
discourse within the Church on issues of religious freedom as well as influenced the Church’s ecumenical as well as interreligious relations in the modern world.
Chapter 3

The Early Reception of *Dignitatis humanae*

3.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis we set out to understand the context and theological discourse pertaining to religious freedom at play leading up to Vatican II. We saw a movement towards separation of Church and State as well as a developing understanding of religious freedom as a human right. In chapter 2 we traced the development of *Dignitatis humanae* at the Council and highlighted some of the key themes which arose in the discourse surrounding the Declaration such as religious freedom being rooted in the dignity of the human person, the role of conscience as well as the implications of freedom from coercion to act contrary to one’s conscience, and the duties and responsibilities of the State pertaining to religious freedom.

In this present chapter we will look at some key issues which emerged during the initial reception of *Dignitatis humanae* from 1966-1978 in order to better understand the impact of this document on the statements we will examine in chapter 4.\textsuperscript{136} This chapter will look primarily at articles from Catholic periodicals published during this period.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{136} The time span of 1966-1978 covers the period immediately following Vatican II through to the beginning of the pontificate of John Paul II in 1978. *Dignitatis humanae* was promulgated by the Council at the beginning of the pontificate of Paul VI and in this chapter we will consider how this document was received during the remaining twelve years of Paul VI’s pontificate tracing the early reception of the Declaration in the context of the pontificate of Paul VI.

\textsuperscript{137} It is worth noting that in looking to the Catholic Periodical Index volumes covering this time span there are a number of articles published immediately after the Council in 1966-1968 and then again even more articles published a decade after the Council in 1976-1979, however there are significantly fewer articles published in the period of 1969-1975. This reveals that while there was an immediate response to the promulgation of *Dignitatis humanae* it was not until around the time of the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Declaration that theologians seriously reflected upon the significance and implications of this document and we begin to see a clearer picture of its reception in the Church.
The topics which came to the forefront during this period built upon the earlier discourse prior to and during the Council. One topic that persisted before, during and after the Council, is the issue of Church-State relations. Other topics continued to evolve during the initial reception period. For instance, while prior to the Council religious freedom was primarily understood in relation to a community of believers and at the Council the focus shifted to religious freedom in relation to the dignity of the human person, after the Council the discourse tended to focus on the universality of the right to religious freedom. In the early reception of DH there were also new issues which emerged. Catholic theologians struggled to discern and reach consensus on whether religious freedom, as it was presented in DH, was primarily of a juridical or a moral character. The juridical position favored viewing religious freedom primarily in the context of the law whereas those who championed a focus on the moral character of religious freedom believed that this freedom could only be properly understood with an emphasis placed on the role of conscience. After the Council there was also a period of seeking to clarify the duties and responsibilities of the State regarding religious freedom.

It is worth noting that while DH was received warmly by some Catholics and non-Catholics, others raised some concerns or desired further clarification of some aspects of the teaching of the Declaration. In speaking of the early reception of DH we cannot omit to mention the resistance, particularly among traditionalist groups, to the Second Vatican Council which was crystalized in the refusal to accept the religious freedom which was proclaimed by the Declaration.138

138 Benoît Bourgine. “La déclaration Dignitatis humanae et la liberté religieuse en 2014.” Revue théologique de Louvain 45 (2014): 539. The most notable group to reject Dignitatis humanae was the Society of Pius X under the direction of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. In this thesis I will not be directly
This chapter will focus on some of the key topics raised by Catholic theologians as they published articles in response to *DH* during the period of 1966-1978. In examining these issues we will better understand how the Declaration informed a new understanding of these topics. In this chapter we will explore in particular the following subjects: how Church-State relations were transformed in light of *DH*, the implications of religious freedom as a universal right, whether the religious freedom championed by *DH* is of a moral or juridical nature, and the duties of the State regarding religious freedom.

### 3.2 Church-State Relations

One topic which merits being explored regarding the reception of *Dignitatis humanae* is the diplomatic action of the Church following the promulgation of the Declaration. This topic reveals how during the early reception period the Church as an institution redefined its relationship with non-Catholics within the context of its dealings with foreign governments. Examining these changing dynamics between the Church and states will in turn help us better understand how these changes impacted the individual members of the Catholic Church and the citizens of these states. In *DH* 6 the Church taught that “the protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of persons ranks among the essential duties of government” and “government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens.”\(^{139}\) In light of this teaching the Church needed to redefine how it interacted with foreign governments in order to ensure the protection of the right to religious freedom of all individuals.

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\(^{139}\) *Dignitatis humanae*, 6.

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*treating the objections of the Society of Pius X however for further reading on this matter see: Massimo Faggioli. *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).*
As Bénoît Bourgine explained in his article “The Declaration of Dignitatis Humanae and Religious Freedom in 2014,” after Vatican II the Church’s interactions with governments became focused on the dignity of the human person and gained credibility by being founded on the principle of religious freedom for all persons, regardless of religious beliefs. The Church’s new recognition that even non-Catholics have a right to religious practice and belief radically transformed how the Church saw itself in the modern context. No other conciliar text had a greater impact on the role of the Holy See in the global political sphere. According to Bourgine,

The defense of the right to religious freedom, which flows from the dignity of the human person and the primacy of its spiritual dimension, now constitutes one of the main foundations for diplomatic action on the part of the Holy See. In order for this action to grow in credibility, it was necessary to put an end to the biased treatment in public ecclesiastical law between the Catholic Church and other cults, which consisted in the thesis-hypothesis position that had still been favoured by the Holy See in recent concordats.

In reflecting on the reception of Dignitatis humanae some theologians, such as Bourgine, have recognized that the thesis-hypothesis position which was at the heart of the discussions surrounding religious freedom prior to the Council and still remained prominent during the Council was seen after the Council to be inconsistent with DH’s understanding of religious freedom with its focus on the dignity of the human person.

As the Church shifted the focus of its political interactions away from the traditional position of thesis-hypothesis and towards a focus on religious freedom the international political life of the Church was being redefined. This shift transformed the relationship that existed between the Church and confessional states such as Spain, Portugal and Colombia. The situation in Spain in the first decade following the

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140 Bourgine, 539.
141 Ibid.
promulgation of *Dignitatis humanae* provides us with insight into this transformation. In 1967 a referendum was held in Spain which ratified the protection of religious freedom in a country in which, up to that point, non-Catholic religions were at best tolerated.  

According to Bourgine,

> for that which pertains to the juridical status of the Church, the end of the regime of the confessional state in Spain was brought about in consultation with the Spanish episcopacy with reference to *Dignitatis humanae* through agreements with the Holy See reached in 1976 and 1979, notably with regards to the renunciation of the practice of the State appointing bishops and the privilege of the Church through which clerics benefitted from being dispensed of legal proceedings.

As previously confessional states redefined their relationship with the Holy See the Church had to deal with the troublesome historical fact that in some of these countries the Church had enjoyed the favor of the government. As Martin Carter pointed out in 1976 “embarrassingly to the Fathers, these governments (the confessional states) had in many circumstances denied non-Catholics the human right to the free exercise of religion.”

For some theologians it was difficult to have confidence in the Church’s new defense of universal religious freedom in light of the Church’s record of persecuting non-Catholics particularly in countries where Catholics were a majority. If the defense of religious freedom contained in the Declaration was to be taken seriously it was essential that the Church hold itself to the highest standard of protecting the religious freedom of non-Catholics.

During the reception period of 1966-1978 many theologians struggled with the inconsistencies between the history of the Church and the new stance on religious

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142 Ibid., 540.
143 Ibid. [Translation my own.]
freedom it had taken in *DH*. In his 1968 article “Religious Freedom and Roman Catholicism: A Critique of *Dignitatis Humanae*,” Thomas Love argued that there was an omission on the part of Catholic Church to acknowledge in the Declaration its historic failure to uphold religious freedom. Love stated that the Declaration “minimizes the Catholic Church’s resistance to people’s freedom and it fails adequately to confess Catholicism’s guilt in oppression, in persecution, and in denial of freedom to non-Catholics where the Catholic Church has enjoyed patronage, prestige, and power.”145 In his 1970 article “Natural Law Theory and the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council” Charles Kindregan also recognized the apparent discrepancy between the record of Church history and the position being taken in *Dignitatis Humanae*. Kindregan suggested that the ideas regarding religious freedom put forward in *Dignitatis humanae* are particularly significant “in that Roman Catholicism as an institution has a long history of promoting intolerance of other religious groups.”146 Kindregan proposed, however, that since the Holy See had made a firm doctrinal commitment to religious freedom “Catholic states will find it difficult to deny religious freedom without placing themselves outside the Church.”147 Kindregan understood that if this declaration were to be fully embraced it would turn upside down the way Catholic states treat non-Catholics.

Love argued that in *Dignitatis humanae* the Catholic Church also failed “to recognize that religious freedom has been the concern of disinherited and despised

147 Kindregan, 46.
According to Love there was no excuse for the Church to omit taking responsibility for the many occasions when it had failed to protect, and for some had even rejected, religious freedom.

Many non-Catholics had been persecuted in countries in which Catholicism was the professed state religion. In spite of the historical persecution of non-Catholics the Council Fathers continued to take the stance that official religion is not incompatible with freedom of religion, however they did not argue that state religion is a preferable condition. In his analysis of DH, Carter explained that “the Council resolved this sensitive situation by considering it from a historical point of view rather than a theological one and by placing the statement in conditional terms.” Considering religious freedom primarily from a theological standpoint would have required addressing more explicitly the Church’s conviction that the Catholic Faith uniquely expresses the fullness of truth. Although this dimension was not worked out in great detail in DH there was, at the time of the Council and in its early reception period, a fear that if the Church were to practice unequivocal tolerance of all religions this would pose a threat of indifference to the truth.

Despite the Church’s failure to acknowledge its guilt for denying others their right to religious freedom at various points in its history, DH was seen as bringing an end to a double standard which favoured the Church. As Love explained in his 1968 critique of DH,

On principle, no longer may one accuse the Catholic Church of maintaining a double standard in relation to religious freedom, favoring freedom for itself and repression of non-Catholics. When Catholics are in a minority and when Catholics are in a

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149 Carter, 347.
150 Ibid.
majority, they must, if they are faithful to the Council, seek to secure freedom from coercion for all persons in their private and public practices of religion—in beliefs, persuasions, judgments, expressions and associations—to the extent that these practices do not seriously endanger the equal rights of others or the very fabric of societal existence.\footnote{Love, 170.}

According to Love, in light of \textit{DH}, the Church was not simply held accountable to refraining from persecuting non-Catholic individuals and faith communities but was now also held to a higher standard of being accountable to in fact secure and defend religious freedom for all people. If the Church was to be a champion for religious freedom it would have to be beyond reproach in its protection of religious freedom and ensure that all its dealings with foreign governments were directed towards ensuring the right to religious freedom of \textit{all} people. Following the promulgation of \textit{DH} there was sober reflection within the Church on how it could live out the teaching of the Declaration that religious freedom was truly a universal right.

\textbf{3.3 Freedom for All}

\textit{Dignitatis humanae} proclaimed that individuals or communities who do not belong to the Catholic Church have the same right to religious freedom as Catholics. The Declaration taught that religious freedom is not reserved for those who have been baptized but rather extends to all people equally for the very dignity of every human person demands religious freedom. During the initial reception period there was a notable shift away from viewing religious freedom in the context of institutions, governments and religious groups to a new emphasis on understanding religious freedom in relation to the individual person.
As Catholic theologians responded to *DH* they began to recognize the impact that its teaching on the universal right to religious freedom would have on the Church’s relationship with non-believers and non-Catholic Christians. In the Declaration the Catholic Church echoed and further clarified that which had already been proclaimed outside the Church by the United Nations Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, adopted in 1948, and the WCC Declaration on Religious Freedom issued at Amsterdam in 1948. Both these declarations “proclaimed the individual person’s human and civil right to form his or her own conscience according to his or her religious convictions and to determine his or her relationship to other churches.”

Catching up with these earlier statements the promulgation of *DH* had significant implications for how the Church was to relate to non-Catholics. It was indeed an opening of the doors to ecumenism. The document provided a foundation for redefining communication among Christians and with other religions. Carter suggested that in upholding religious freedom for the all people, not only Catholics, this document was relevant to “all who care about improving the quality of human life.” According to Carter, in this document “the Church speaks to the non-Catholic, who, should sincerely reflect on the Church’s message of freedom.” *DH* thus provided a framework conducive to both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

As Carter pointed out, the Declaration provided a new common ground with non-Catholics by placing an emphasis on “the centrality of the need for conviction, rather than coercion.” Religious belief could not be coerced but rather was to be freely given in

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153 Carter, 349.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., 350.
accord with the conscience of individual believers. Bourgine explained that in the early reception of *Dignitatis humanae* this document enabled the whole of the Catholic Church to see the world from a new vantage point and to become pioneers in the dialogue between religions and in this promote and foster mutual understanding and peace among all peoples.\(^{156}\) In his 1968 critique of *DH*, Love stated that with the promulgation of this document “Catholicism now claims the civil right to public association and practices not only for itself but for all religious groups and churches.”\(^{157}\)

As the Church moved towards a recognition of the right to religious freedom for all people the doors to ecumenism were opened. Reflecting on the Declaration eight years following its promulgation Carter commented that “the first significance of the Declaration on Religious Freedom for ecumenism is that it is addressed to the whole world.”\(^{158}\) Whereas society had previously been divided on the lines of religion *DH* supported a new dialogue between religions which would foster communion among human beings on the basis of religious freedom. Non-Catholic Christian communities recognized that the Catholic Church’s relationship with them was being redefined in light of *DH* and in turn responded with a new openness towards the Catholic Church.

Immediately following the closing of the Second Vatican Council, the Central Committee of the WCC at its meeting held in Geneva in February, 1966, made the following statement:

> We welcome with satisfaction the Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom with its clear statements proclaiming full civil religious freedom, both individual and collective, for everybody, everywhere…We are encouraged by the fact that there is now a large measure of agreement among all the churches in these matters…we hope that on the basis of their statements on Religious

\(^{156}\) Bourgine, 538.  
\(^{157}\) Love, 192.  
\(^{158}\) Martin, 349.
Freedom, from now on all the Churches will be able to take a common stand for
the full application of the principle of religious liberty in all parts of the world and
in all possible action to ensure the observance of this principle.\textsuperscript{159}

Recognizing the common ground between all Christians which now existed with the
promulgation of \textit{DH} the Secretariat on Religious Liberty of the WCC tried to put together
the fundamental agreements between the Vatican Declaration and the WCC’s official
statements. On the basis of these agreements they drafted a project “of common Christian
insights concerning religious liberty.”\textsuperscript{160} The ensuing document entitled “Fundamental
Agreements Between the Vatican Declaration and WCC Official Statements of Religious
Liberty” placed side by side statements made by the WCC with corresponding statements
made by the Catholic Church in \textit{DH}, revealing the extent to which a new common ground
was created with the promulgation of the Declaration on Religious Freedom.\textsuperscript{161} In
addition to highlighting the parallels between \textit{DH} and earlier statements by the WCC in
1966 the WCC drafted a document with the title “Common Christian Insights Concerning
Religious Liberty.”\textsuperscript{162} Although this document was not signed by the Catholic
magisterium and did not draw much attention it reveals a movement towards the
development of ecumenical statements.

It should be noted that not all Christians eagerly accepted the Declaration on
Religious Freedom. While many non-Catholic churches, such as those represented by the
WCC, responded positively to \textit{DH} there were “many Protestants who concluded that
Catholics were late in the conversation and criticized \textit{Dignitatis Humanae}'s style of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Carrillo de Albornoz. “Ecumenical Perspectives of the Vatican Declaration on Religious Liberty.” \textit{A Journal of Church and State}, 8.3 (Fall 1966): 445.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 446.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 453.
\end{itemize}
argument.”163 While parallels were drawn between the WCC statements on religious freedom and *DH* there were Protestant theologians who “decided that some scriptural and theological arguments were underdeveloped” in *DH*.164 As Carter explained, some non-Catholics were not willing to accept “the strong assertion in the document that the Church, in a special way, is sent by God.” Responding to this hesitation to embrace *DH* in 1966 Carter suggested that this reluctance may be overcome when non-Catholics “realize this statement of the Church’s self-understanding strengthens the opportunity for dialogue.”165 According to Carter there are in fact key elements of the document, for instance the injustice of coercion and the need for free response to religion, which Protestants feel very comfortable with and which can serve as a starting point for authentic ecumenical dialogue and consensus.166

One of the revolutionary aspects of the teaching of *DH* was the instruction that all citizens are equal before the law. The Declaration proclaimed that “government is to see to it that the equality of citizens before the law, which is itself an element of the common welfare, is never violated for religious reasons whether openly or covertly” (*DH* 6). According to Carter, this is the first time such a statement had been made in magisterial teaching.167 In his early critique of *DH* Love spoke of the universality of the right to religious freedom in explaining that in the Declaration “all persons—whatever ‘belief’ (theist, non-theist, atheist—*all persons*) are declared equally to have the right to immunity from coercion in matters of belief, and ‘belief’ is understood to involve public

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163 Griffin, 260.
164 Ibid.
165 Carter, 349.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
practices, communication, and association.” Carter and Love both understood that the freedom of religious belief and practice was to be played out in the public sphere and thus must be protected in society by civil law. Recognizing that there is an important legal aspect to ensuring religious freedom we are led to consider whether religious freedom is primarily of a moral or of a juridical nature.

3.4 Freedom: Moral or Juridical?

One of the key issues that arose throughout the reception period of 1966-1978 was the distinction between the moral and juridical character of religious freedom. A question that arose was whether it ought to be considered primarily from the vantage point of moral theology or from that of the legal system. Many theologians had strong opinions with regards to which aspect should be promoted and how these two aspects could be brought together. With the shift in focus towards the right to religious freedom of the individual there was a recognition that persons must be free to act according to his or her conscience, which caused an intersection between reflecting on the legal guarantee of religious freedom and the theological reflection on this same freedom.

In his 1967 article, immediately following the promulgation of DH, John Kleinz stated that “some commentators on the Declaration are unhappy with the emphasis on the juridical and political aspects of religious freedom in the document.” Kleinz went on to explain that their objections were not to the idea of religious liberty as such “but to the method of presenting it.” Kleinz recognized that the concerns raised regarding how the

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168 Love, 189.
169 Kleinz, 191.
170 Ibid.
principle of religious liberty was presented in the Declaration had sparked a dialogue between theologians which he saw in 1967 not as having ended “but hardly begun.”\footnote{171}

In 1978 Carter suggested that in the years immediately following the Council the Church had continued to proclaim “its unique Gospel mission, thus dispelling the fears of those conciliar Fathers who thought this document would imply indifferentism.” Among those who were primarily concerned with the moral character of religious freedom there was concern that the juridical guarantee of religious freedom would lead to an indifference towards the truth proclaimed by the Church. In other words, they were afraid that a proclamation of religious freedom could be misconstrued as a proclamation that all religions are equal. Those theologians who fully embraced \DH\ sought, however, to appease the fears of those who were concerned about indifferentism by pointing out the distinction that the Declaration dealt with the juridical, not the moral.\footnote{172}

Those who were concerned that the juridical dimension was overshadowing the moral and theological dimensions of religious freedom argued that these latter dimensions could not be dismissed since God is identified with the truth and the juridical aspect must protect the freedom to pursue truth according to one’s conscience. Those who favoured a moral understanding of religious freedom saw this freedom as always being directed towards belief in God and as such naturally associated with truth. This moral perspective could still be applied even with regards to atheists since atheists also try to live in accordance with the truth of their conscience. The moral position placed an emphasis on the role of conscience. \DH\ addressed the role of conscience in stating that every person has the right “to seek the truth in matters religious in order that he may with

\footnote{171} Ibid. \footnote{172} Carter, 345.
prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience.” In Gaudium et spes, 16, the Council described conscience as the human person’s “most secret core and inner sanctuary” where a person “is alone with God whose voice echoes in his or her depths.” A Catholic moral understanding of religious freedom thus recognizes that if atheists are following their conscience in truth then they are in fact acting in accordance with God, even if they would deny his existence, since God is truth. According to Love Catholics have traditionally argued “from the formal theological notion of the freedom of the act of faith and the correlative formal ethical notion of the freedom of conscience,” however, in DH the argument from the nature of the act of faith “is only a supplementary argument it is in no sense required by the basic affirmation of the text.”

The Declaration’s focus on the juridical character of religious freedom is in agreement with the statements of the WCC and the UN which argued that religious freedom is a civil right. As Kleinz explained all three documents propose “essentially the same juridical principle. This principle is that every person has an inalienable personal right to determine his or her own religious attitudes within the limits of public order without any coercion on the part of civil authorities.” The human person’s inalienable dignity as a human being is the foundation of a fundamental right “in the sense that it is to be recognized and guaranteed in the legal structures of societies, a right that therefore is not granted and cannot properly be denied by government.”

Dignitatis humanae highlighted the juridical nature of religious freedom and did not prove this freedom by Scriptures. While the Declaration taught that this new

173 Love, 171.
174 Ibid., 187.
175 Kleinz, 180.
176 Love, 187.
understanding of religious freedom was harmonious with revelation it did not seek to prove or explain this freedom by looking to revelation or Scripture. In his critique of DH Love suggested that “the Catholic Church now clearly understands that the contemporary and highly technical notion of religious freedom is not to be proved on the basis of Scripture.”

Kindregan suggested that “the Declaration does not employ Christology to reach the conclusion of religious freedom” and stated that “its basis is the “inviolable rights of the human person” (DH 1) rather than redemption.” In their analysis of DH both Love and Kindregan suggested that while the teaching of Jesus may foster a deeper understanding of the dignity of the human person “his salvific act is not the source of natural rights.” Kleinz also argued that DH was not intended to be a full discussion of the theology of religious freedom.

As Love pointed out, by focusing on the juridical aspect of religious freedom the theologians who were reflecting on DH during its early reception had to consider that from a juridical perspective “religious liberty even as an immunity from constraint, is not absolute; societal acts contrary to convictions or beliefs may be justifiably compelled in a civil society, although religious or ideological grounds are never a legitimate basis for constraint.” Love suggested that although he saw the intention behind the text to be an assertion “that no person may be compelled to believe or adhere to certain tenets” he found “the articulation of this principle in the text to be ambiguous.” Love found that while “the text wishes to assert that no person may be compelled to believe or profess

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177 Love, 199.
178 Kindregan, 55.
179 Ibid., 57.
180 Kleinz, 192.
181 Love, 189.
182 Ibid., 190-191.
certain tenets, and this compulsion is resoundingly rejected; the text’s precise point in this instance is inadequately expressed.”

3.5 Duties of the State and Religious Freedom

Recognizing that there is a certain juridical character to religious freedom, while not ignoring the moral dimension, we are led to consider what the role of the government is in relation to ensuring religious freedom since it is the government which determines and enforces laws. The precise issue of religious freedom in relation to governments and the laws they enact to protect religious freedom leads us to ask “Does the human person exist for society or does society exist for the human person?” According to Thomas Love, “the entire society exists for the human person” and thus “the government, which is one of the elements of society therefore exists for the human person and his or her welfare.” Love argued that one important aspect of a person’s welfare is the requirement of conditions which “favour his or her freedoms and rights” and thus “the government must protect and promote the conditions for the human person’s freedoms and rights.”

In his critique of DH Love suggested that the text teaches that the government must maintain conditions favourable to religious freedom in society, and “while never compelling belief or favoring one religion over another” and it must guarantee the “fullest opportunity for the free expression in religious matters by individuals and religious communities.”

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183 Ibid., 191.
184 Ibid., 194.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid., 195
while the government has a serious obligation both to protect and promote religious freedom this cannot be carried out with unlimited power.

As Carter explained in his assessment of *Dignitatis humanae* “it almost goes without saying that even though the right to religious freedom is inalienable, the exercise of this freedom is limited by the public order.”\(^{187}\) The document however failed to provide an adequate explanation or explicit definition of precisely what this requirement of maintaining “public order” consisted. Love explained that the Council Fathers recognized that governments and law enforcement officials may abuse the concept of “public order” and thus “they wisely stated that the “just” requirements of the public order should be observed (as in the moral argument it is said that juridical norms are to be “in conformity with the objective moral order,” the commonplace manner of speaking in Catholic moral philosophy), despite the fact that what is “just” also may be difficult to determine.”\(^{188}\)

If the government has the duty to protect religious freedom while at the same time maintaining public order we need to ask ourselves in what way the intervention of the government must be limited. Carter recognized that persons today “require of a limited government the exercise of the human right to freedom which supports the search for truth and virtue in general and affirms the right to the exercise of freedom of religion in particular.”\(^{189}\)

According to Carter the Declaration can be seen as following upon the political theme of John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* “where it is stated that constitutional limits on government power flow from the dignity of the human person.”\(^{190}\)

\(^{187}\) Carter, 348.
\(^{188}\) Love, 197.
\(^{189}\) Carter, 346.
\(^{190}\) Ibid.
Declaration seems to place less stress on the political arguments for maintaining religious freedom it expounds upon the duties of the government. Carter pointed out that “although it is the responsibility of all individuals and institutions to protect the common good, it is the special responsibility of the government.” He identified the duty of the government, with regards to the realm of religious freedom, to be twofold:

First, government must assert the right to religious freedom, protect the right against violation, and vindicate it when the right has been violated by individuals or institutions in the society. Second, government must facilitate the practice of religion positively. Government must provide conditions which help people exercise religious freedom.

According to Love one of the critical questions which seems to remain unanswered during the initial period of reception of the Declaration is the question of “What are the grounds that justify governmental restraint?” Love suggested that the answer to this question “is supplied by the concept of the public order, a concept which is new in Catholic social philosophy” and that this concept “emphasizes in accord with the basic affirmation, the juridical meaning of religious freedom as an immunity.”

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have seen how some of the issues pertaining to religious freedom in the period preceding Vatican II and during the Council have evolved and continued to be pursued in a new light in the initial reception period following the Council while other new topics have emerged as theologians sought to make sense of the promulgated Declaration on Religious Freedom.

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191 Ibid., 346.
192 Ibid., 346-347.
Some issues such as Church-State relations persisted, however, they evolved. Whereas Church-State relations prior to Vatican II were largely defined in terms of the thesis-hypothesis position, following the promulgation of *DH* this traditional position was largely put aside and the focus shifted away from the institutions of the Church and State towards a focus on the dignity of the human person.

Another topic considered in the early reception period was the implication of religious freedom existing as a universal right. This theme emerged from the Council’s focus on the dignity of the human person. This subject made room for positive interactions between Catholics and other Christians as well as other religions. The Church now recognized that non-Catholics have the same right to religious freedom as Catholics since it now saw this freedom as being rooted in the human dignity of every person. As the Church proclaimed the universal right to religious freedom following Vatican II doors were opened to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Religious freedom became a source of common ground and solidarity between all peoples and facilitated dialogue between people and communities who had previously excluded each other based on differences in religion.

A new issue that came to the forefront in the period of 1966-1978 was the discussion regarding whether religious freedom was primarily of a moral or juridical character. Theologians trying to make sense of *DH* recognized that religious freedom needed to be protected by civil law however there were some who feared that there would be a threat of indifferentism to the truth if too much emphasis was placed on the juridical nature of religious freedom. The moral dimension of religious freedom was largely seen to be played out in the freedom for persons to seek truth according to their conscience.
Theologians who focused on the juridical aspect of this freedom argued that matters of conscience and the nature of the act of faith were only supplementary and not the foundation of the argument for religious freedom.

A final issue that we looked at in this chapter was the duties of the State regarding religious freedom. In the eyes of the Church the role of the State in relation to religious freedom was radically redefined by *DH* and yet as the Church tried to make sense of the Declaration there was a recognition that the exact nature of this new role and how it was to be carried out needed to be clarified. As *DH* was received in the Church it was largely accepted that the role of the State in promoting and protecting religious freedom could not be carried out with unlimited power and must always be carried out with the intention of ensuring the welfare of all persons in society. However, many theologians pointed out that *DH* fails to provide clarity on what are the just requirements of public order.

In our next chapter, having looked at some of the key issues which emerged during the early reception period of 1966-1978, we will explore how these issues played out in ecumenical and interreligious interactions as *DH* began to inform the Catholic Church’s relations with non-Catholics. In chapter 4, by looking at three particular statements on interreligious dialogue we will see how “the final version of the Declaration was more a beginning than an end of the dialogue on religious freedom in which the Church has engaged the world.”

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194 Kleinz, 192.
Chapter 4

Statements on Interreligious Dialogue

4.1 Introduction

Having examined in chapter 3 some of the key issues which came up among Catholic theologians during the initial reception period following Vatican II and the promulgation of *DH*, this next chapter will consider how these issues led to a deeper reflection on dialogue in the Church and how this reflection contributed to the development of genuine dialogue both between the Catholic Church and other Christian bodies and between Christians and people of other religions. Dialogue with non-Christians was an endeavour which was emphasized in a number of Vatican II documents and was the subject of much reflection in the post-Vatican II Church following the initial reception of the Council. This reflection was necessary to set the foundation for the actual exercise of dialogue with non-Christians which would begin to take shape as an important component of the mission of the Church as it sought to live out the teachings of Vatican II. Reflecting on how the Vatican II documents could inform relationships with non-Christians was important because for authentic dialogue to take place it is necessary that the Church not be simply looking inward but rather looking outward with openness to non-Christians.

Following the initial reception period of 1966-1978, which we looked at in our previous chapter, there was a growing recognition that Vatican II had opened the door to dialogue and to reflection on the role of dialogue in the life of the Church. While it would seem that in the initial reception period there was a greater emphasis placed on discerning the significance of *DH* in terms of its impact on Church-State relationships,
once this dimension had been explored at length the focus shifted more prominently to a reflection on interreligious dialogue, that is to say the relationship between Christians and non-Christians. In this present chapter, by examining three documents, which emerged as the Church opened up to dialogue with non-Christians, we will come to see how this reflection took form and how it translated into practical application in the Church and its relationship with non-Christians. Each of these documents reveal that DH planted the seeds for meaningful dialogue among people of all religions by advocating for the universal respect of religious freedom. Through these documents we see how these seeds began to sprout in the life of the Church and later bring about the rich fruits of interreligious dialogue.

The three documents we will look at are the following: The attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission, 1984 [The Attitude of the Church]195; Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, 1991 [Dialogue and Proclamation],196 and Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct, 2011 [Christian Witness].197 Each of these documents reflected a development in the Church’s understanding of its relationship with non-Christians and addressed how Christians ought to approach and interact with people

of other religions. While these documents referred to the attitude different religious bodies ought to have towards each other in their interactions, these texts also focus on the relationships between individuals of different religions and how each Christian ought to carry out dialogue in their daily life as they interact with non-Christians. As Paul Hedges explains, while “Vatican II did not resolve the dialectic between the demands of mission and evangelization and the imperative of interreligious engagement” these documents produced later in the twentieth century continued “to wrestle with this relationship.”

There are a number of common themes which have been influenced by DH and run through each of these three documents. The first is the theme of respect for all persons and all religions. This builds upon DH’s assertion of the dignity of the human person as the foundation for religious freedom. The second is the theme of dialogue as a sharing among people of their search for truth. DH opened the doors to dialogue by drawing attention to the unique search for truth by each individual which is aided by dialogue “in the course of which persons explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.” Each of these documents also explained the nature of dialogue and as we follow this theme through these documents we can see how the Church’s understanding of dialogue has developed and been refined in recent decades. Finally, these documents moved their readers towards a practical application of dialogue in identifying how dialogue can lead to various forms of co-operation and action between Christians and other people of other religions.

199 Dignitatis humanae, 3.
4.2 The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions

From February 27th to March 3rd, 1984, members of the Secretariat for Non-Christians gathered for a Plenary Assembly at which they focused on developing a document which would explore the relationship between dialogue and mission.\(^{200}\) This document set the tone for future reflection by the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which in 1988 became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), on dialogue and mission and interactions between Catholics and non-Christians. While this initial document reflected the stance of the Catholic Church towards other religions, later documents would be ecumenical, speaking on behalf of Christians belonging to a wide range of denominations. *The Attitude of the Church* was a significant document influencing the further development of reflection within the Christian community on the issues it raises. The later documents we will look at refer explicitly back to this 1984 text. While this document was created by the Catholic magisterium, in his address to the plenary assembly which had developed this text, John Paul II opened the door for future ecumenical reflection on these issues by stating that “dialogue with non-Christians can also be a way of realizing unity among Christian Churches which are moved by the same love of Christ.”\(^{201}\)

At the conclusion of the 1984 plenary assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians John Paul II addressed the group explaining the important role and


\(^{201}\) *The Attitude of the Church*, 5.
responsibility of the Secretariat with regards to dialogue and mission. In his address John Paul II began by emphasizing “the importance and the need which interreligious dialogue assumes for all religions and all believers.” 202 He explained that there must be a collaboration between all religions in order to help every person, regardless of his or her religious affiliation “reach his or her transcendent goal and realize his or her authentic growth.”203 John Paul II stressed that this dialogue must at all times be founded on “love for the human person as such” and take place within the context of a “friendly relationship between believers of various religions” which is “born of respect and love.”204 Referencing Redemptor Hominis he asserted that such a relationship can only take place where there is a mutual respect of the “fundamental freedoms to practice one’s own faith.”205

John Paul II went on to explain the Secretariat’s mission reiterating the necessity of respect. He taught that authentic dialogue cannot take place apart from a foundation of respect. John Paul II called upon the local Churches to commit themselves to “helping all the faithful to respect and to esteem the values, traditions and convictions of other believers” and he went on to explain that an apostolate of dialogue must promote respect and acceptance of non-Christians.206 The Attitude of the Church reflected on this apostolate of dialogue and explored the mission in the Church in relation to other religions and considered how this mission ought to be carried out. A common thread woven through all sections of this document is the theme of respect. This is a theme

202 Ibid., 3.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid., 4.
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
which emerged from *DH* and was reiterated and ran continuously through the later documents we will explore in this chapter. *DH* planted the seeds for further exploration of this theme by teaching that all individuals have freedom which “is to be respected as far as possible” (*DH* 7) and Christians are bound to respect the doctrine of the freedom of every human person (*DH* 8). As we saw in our second chapter on the development of *DH* at the Council many of the Council Fathers who most influenced the development of this document thought that it was important to assert that every person “has a right to honor God according to his or her conscience and to profess his or her religion.”

In taking up the theme of respect for the freedom of religion and conscience of all people *The Attitude of the Church* reveals how this theme, which was developed in *DH*, has been applied in the contemporary context of interreligious dialogue.

Throughout *The Attitude of the Church* there was a great emphasis placed on the fundamental role that respect for all people and all religions ought to play in all human interactions, especially in dialogue. Within this document the term “respect” was used on 20 different occasions. This emphasis reflects *DH* 7, which stated that “In the exercise of their rights, individual persons and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all.” In other words, both *DH* and this document underscored that in exercising our own freedom we cannot hinder the freedom of others. Article 2 of *The Attitude of the Church* referenced *Redemptor hominis* 12, when it taught that interreligious relationships must be “born of respect and love for one another” and these relationships must “presume the exercise of fundamental freedoms to practice one’s own

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207 Soetens, 277-278.
faith completely and to compare it with that of others.”  

When DH and *The Attitude of the Church* spoke of respect in relationships they were not simply talking about respect between the larger bodies of believers but also of the respect that must exist at the most fundamental level of relationships between individual believers. According to Stanley Porter *The Attitude of the Church* stressed “that the starting point for inter-faith dialogue is not dogma, but a dialogue for life that has at its heart concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other and which leaves room for the other person’s identity, his or her modes of expression and his or her values.”

Jacques Haers similarly points out that in *The Attitude of the Church* we are taught that “dialogue is in the first instance a manner of acting and living in daily life.”

Both in *DH* and in *The Attitude of the Church* respect is primarily considered in terms of respect of the rights of others, with a focus on the respect of the religious freedom of others. *DH* taught that “the freedom of the human person is to be respected as far as possible and is not to be curtailed except when and insofar as necessary.” In explaining the roles of mission and dialogue *The Attitude of the Church* asserted that both these activities must take place “with full respect” for each and every person’s freedom. Not only ought Christians respect the freedom of others but furthermore this document also called on them to promote the true freedom of the other person. This theme of respect was highlighted in the conclusion of *DH* with an emphasis on the

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208 *The Attitude of the Church*, 12.
211 *Dignitatis humanae*, 7.
212 *The Attitude of the Church*, 18.
213 Ibid.
respect that is to be shown “for the high duty and right of the human person freely to lead his or her religious life in society.” It seems that the authors of The Attitude of the Church were inspired by the conclusion of DH to take on this assertion of the Declaration and explore it further.

Another common theme which can be found in DH and can also be found in The Attitude of the Church is the theme of the search for truth. In its opening article DH proclaimed that “all people are bound to seek the truth” (DH 1). The Attitude of the Church and Dignitatis humanae are closely aligned when it comes to their approach to the human search for truth. In fact, on this matter, The Attitude of the Church provided in full the following quotation from Dignitatis humanae:

Truth, however, is to be sought in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his or her social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication, and dialogue. In the course of these, persons explain to one another the truth they have discovered or claim to have discovered in order to help one another in their search for the truth. Moreover, as truth is discovered, it is by personal assent that persons are to adhere to it. (DH 3)

In referencing this passage it is evident that both The Attitude of the Church and DH understood the freedom of each person to pursue truth as being fundamentally linked to each person’s human dignity. Both these documents taught that human dignity is not dependent upon adherence to particular religious beliefs and thus they saw it as a foundation for religious freedom which ought to remain unshakable regardless of religious differences.

While DH only refers explicitly on one occasion to “dialogue” (DH 3) it laid the groundwork for later statements pertaining to dialogue which would draw from the

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214 Dignitatis humanae, 15.
teaching of *DH* as well as other Vatican II documents such as *Lumen gentium*, *Ad gentes*, and *Nostra aetate*. *The Attitude of the Church* pointed to the influence of these documents by stating in its opening lines that “The Second Vatican Council has marked a new landmark in the relations of the Church with the followers of other religions.” Drawing from these documents *The Attitude of the Church* explained that the Church understands its role in dialogue in light of the fundamental freedom of each person to pursue truth. In dialogue the Church “goes out to meet individuals, peoples, and their cultures, aware that in every human community are found the seeds of goodness and truth.”\(^\text{215}\) While recognizing that through dialogue we can encounter “the seeds of goodness and truth” in every human person, *The Attitude of the Church* clearly stated that this does not equate to an indifferentism with regards to the truth of the Christian faith but rather nourishes in the Christian’s heart “the desire of sharing his experience of Christ with his brother of another religion.”\(^\text{216}\)

*The Attitude of the Church* taught that authentic dialogue often leads to a “fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of the human person.”\(^\text{217}\) According to Edmund Ezegbobelu, in *Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue*, *The Attitude of the Church* was a declaration which can be interpreted as a summons by the Church to build solidarity among religious communities in the world.\(^\text{218}\) While this theme is not further developed in *The Attitude of the Church* it is one which will be expanded upon in the subsequent documents we will be looking at.

\(^{215}\) *The Attitude of the Church*, 41.
\(^{216}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{217}\) Ibid., 35.
The cooperation between human persons and common action that can be taken for the good of humanity is a theme which, while introduced in this document, is highlighted in the other documents we will be looking at.

4.3 Dialogue and Proclamation

The next document we will look at is *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. This document from the PCID addressed dialogue and proclamation as two distinct elements of the evangelizing mission of the Church “both oriented towards the communication of salvific truth.” The text gave further consideration to the mission of the Church which was addressed in the 1984 document *The Attitude of the Church*. The introduction to *Dialogue and Proclamation* referred directly back to this earlier document and further developed the reflection presented in *The Attitude of the Church* which described the evangelizing mission of the Church as a “single but complex and articulated reality.” *Dialogue and Proclamation* looked at the different aspects of both dialogue and proclamation as well as studied their mutual relationship.

Article 9 of *Dialogue and Proclamation* presented three different ways in which dialogue can be understood:

1. reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion
2. an attitude of respect and friendship
3. positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths directed at mutual understanding and enrichment

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221 *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 3.
222 Ibid., 9.
With these definitions of dialogue we can see that the Council Fathers were aware of the development of dialogue between peoples when they declared in DH that persons “of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationships.” However, even as it sought to define dialogue this document recognized that dialogue, as it was presented at the Second Vatican Council, was only now “gradually coming to be understood.”

Article 9 of “Dialogue and Proclamation” went on to define proclamation as “the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.” Proclamation can be understood as “an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church” which leads to “catechesis and a deepening of the faith.” At first glance proclamation may seem to equate to evangelization however this document challenged that understanding by teaching that both dialogue and proclamation are essential components of evangelization.

As with the 1984 document, Dialogue and Proclamation emphasized the necessity for respect of all people and all religions and the fundamental criterion of respect for the religious freedom of every individual and it placed this respect in the context of carrying out dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel. Respect is an essential requirement both of fruitful dialogue and genuine proclamation of the Gospel. Dialogue and Proclamation in fact defined dialogue as “an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the

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223 Dignitatis humanae, 15.
224 Dialogue and Proclamation, 4.
225 Ibid., 9.
226 Ibid., 10.
evangelizing mission of the Church.” Dialogue can therefore, on a most basic level, be understood in terms of positive human relationship between people of differing religious beliefs which fosters mutual understanding and love for one another.

*Dialogue and Proclamation* taught that dialogue must be carried out both in obedience to the truth and with respect for the freedom of the other. This element of respect which was addressed in *The Attitude of the Church* was reinforced and expanded upon in this present document. In these documents the Church revealed its commitment to live out the teaching of *DH* which called on the Church to “respect the rights of others” paying particular attention to the right to religious freedom. *Dialogue and Proclamation* was careful to explain that genuine dialogue requires a “mutual acceptance of differences” and “respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictates of their conscience.” In referring to the freedom to act according to one’s conscience *Dialogue and Proclamation* harkened back to the teaching of *DH* which proclaimed that the human person “is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her conscience.” As Stephen Bevans explains, in *Dialogue and Proclamation* 38 we are reminded that “God offers and works for salvation of the world, and yet God works in dialogue, never forcing, but always persuading.” Likewise, as persons engage in dialogue they must never coerce another to act contrary to his or her conscience in matters of religious belief.

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227 Ibid., 9.
228 Ibid.
229 *Dignitatis humanae*, 4.
230 *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 41.
231 *Dignitatis humanae*, 3.
Referring to *Nostra aetate*, *Dialogue and Proclamation* asserted that other religions “command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers “to those profound mysteries of the human condition” (*NA* 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and they continue to do so today.” In this statement we see that respect is to be paid not only to individuals and their own right to religious freedom but also that the Church ought to have an attitude of respect towards other religions.

In article 39 of *Dialogue and Proclamation* the authors referred directly back to John Paul II’s address at the end of the 1984 plenary assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians quoting the Pope’s declaration that “(Interreligious) dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God’s plan with its methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons.” In this address John Paul II presented dialogue as an essential component of fulfilling God’s plan for the Church. He taught that this dialogue is to be carried out with both respect and love. In his speech John Paul II built upon the teaching of *DH* which proclaimed that Christ urges Christians “to love and have prudence and patience in (their) dealings with those who are in error or in ignorance with regards to the faith.”

*Dialogue and Proclamation* taught that the respect and love which are to characterize dialogue must also carry over into proclamation which takes place when Christians explicitly proclaim the salvific Gospel of Jesus Christ. The document instructed that “the Church’s proclamation must be both progressive and patient, keeping

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234 Ibid., 39.
235 *Dignitatis humanae*, 14.
pace with those who bear the message, respecting their freedom and even their slowness to believe.”236 A lack of love and respect hinders the proclamation of the Gospel and makes it difficult for non-Christians to accept the Gospel. Therefore, according to Dialogue and Proclamation, Christians who lack appreciation and respect for other believers and their religious traditions are ill-prepared to proclaim the Gospel to them.237

While Dialogue and Proclamation focused at greater length on dialogue in comparison to proclamation we are perhaps given a clue as to the reasoning behind this emphasis on dialogue at the end of the document when the authors state that “Whether proclamation be possible or not, the Church pursues its mission in full respect for freedom, through interreligious dialogue, witnessing to and sharing Gospel values. In this way, the partners in dialogue proceed in response to the divine call of which they are.”238 While dialogue and proclamation are both important components of the salvific mission of the Church it would appear that a greater emphasis is placed on dialogue for although it may not be always possible to carry out explicit proclamation of the Gospel there are always opportunities to engage in interreligious dialogue through loving and respectful relationships with non-Christians.

In Dialogue and Proclamation, as in The Attitude of the Church and the documents of Vatican II there was a recognition that all people must be free to pursue the truth and that even in non-Christian religions there is the presence of “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all.”239 Both the documents we have examined thus far in this chapter

236 Dialogue and Proclamation, 69.
237 Ibid., 73.
238 Ibid., 84.
reflected the Council’s teaching that truth and grace exists among all peoples outside of the Church “as a sort of secret presence of God.” These documents advocated that “the Holy Spirit is actively present in the life of the followers of other religions.” These statements recognized that in a person’s free pursuit of truth they may discover some truths in other religions. Furthermore, in so far as they encounter truth this is in fact an implicit encounter with Jesus Christ who is the fullness of truth.

*Dialogue and Proclamation* reminded its readers to bear in mind the teaching of *DH 1* that “All persons are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and to hold on to it as they come to know it.” According to this teaching each individual person must be free to pursue truth and this pursuit ought not be constrained. *Dialogue and Proclamation* instructed its readers that “all, both Christians and the followers of other religious traditions, are invited by God himself to enter into the mystery of his patience, as human beings seek his light and truth.” In other words, every person who seeks truth, regardless of his or her religious beliefs, is in fact responding to an invitation from God to discover His light and truth. This text also pointed out that any constraint to the free pursuit of truth contradicts authentic dialogue and impedes the proclamation of the Gospel. When the freedom to pursue truth is constrained the proclamation of the Gospel does not bear fruit.

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242 *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 84.

243 Ibid., 79.
Dialogue and Proclamation also acknowledged that even Christians have not “grasped that truth fully.” This document thus challenged Christians to approach others with humility and a recognition that their own pursuit of truth must continue. Only in this way can they dialogue with non-Christians as fellow travellers on the journey of pursuing truth. As taught in The Attitude of the Church, in order to carry out dialogue with true love and respect, Christians must also approach dialogue with humility. Building upon this theme of humility Dialogue and Proclamation in turn explained that “while keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions.”

Dialogue and Proclamation built upon the understanding of interreligious dialogue which was presented in the The Attitude of the Church. According to this earlier document one of the important forms of interreligious dialogue is the dialogue of action, “in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.” Such action takes place when persons and organizations belonging to different religions come together to protect human rights and serve the common good for all people. This joint action may take many different forms such as working together to provide humanitarian aid, establishing agencies as safeguards against human rights violations, or developing programs to improve living conditions and access to healthcare or education.

While The Attitude of the Church referred to the dialogue of action it did not go into great detail or expand upon this form of dialogue. The authors of Dialogue and

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244 Ibid., 49.
245 The Attitude of the Church, 35.
246 Dialogue and Proclamation, 49.
247 Ibid., 42.
Proclamation provided further reflection on this dimension of dialogue by stating that the Church “is invited by the spirit to encourage all religious institutions and movements to meet, to enter into collaboration, and to purify themselves in order to promote truth.” This promotion of truth can take place through positive collaboration in which different religious bodies work together to promote the values and beliefs they hold in common, particularly with regard to human rights. Referencing Nostra aetate, Dialogue and Proclamation went on to state that these collaborative actions in which different religious groups cooperate “in promoting human and spiritual values” can also “eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people (cf. Nostra aetate 2).” Dialogue and Proclamation also pointed to a growth in mutual understanding and in active cooperation.

Ultimately Dialogue and Proclamation is a document which was directed towards Catholics to instruct them with regards to carrying out both dialogue and proclamation as components of fulfilling the salvific mission of the Church. This document served to draw the Church out of itself to focus on its relationship with non-Christians. At the same time Dialogue and Proclamation drew attention to the fact that the Catholic Church’s interactions with non-Christians can also provide a reason or motivation for ecumenical dialogue and collaboration between Catholics and other Christians. The next document we will look at is indeed the fruit of new cooperation between Christians as they explore together the relationship between Christians and other religions.

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248 Ibid., 80.  
249 Ibid., 43.  
250 Ibid., 54.
4.4 Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

The third document we will explore in this chapter is the 2011 ecumenical statement *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct.* This document was created through collaboration between the PCID, the WCC and the World Evangelical Alliance. These three Christian bodies participated in an (inter-Christian) consultation which in Bangkok, Thailand, from January 25th to 28th, 2011. At the end of this consultation they finalized this document which built upon many of the themes reflected on in the previous two documents we examined. While this document was shorter than the 1984 and 1991 documents from the PCID it provided concrete guidelines for how Christians ought to carry out mission and dialogue. This document spoke to a wider audience than the earlier documents since it was not simply the work of a pontifical council but rather the fruit of collaboration between the Catholic Church and other important Christian bodies representing a large number of non-Catholic Christians. The text was divided into a preamble and sections on the basis for, principles of, and recommendation for, Christian witness.

In its preamble this document immediately took up the theme of respect which were previously addressed in both the 1984 and 1991 documents. The authors of *Christian Witness* emphasized that the proclamation of the word of God must take place “with full respect and love for all human beings.” In article 1 of this document’s section on the basis for Christian witness the text explained that while it is “a privilege and a joy” for Christians “to give an accounting of the hope that is within them” they must do so “with gentleness and respect.”

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251 *Christian Witness*, Preamble.
interactions with non-Christians was emphasized. As *Dignitatis humanae* built its
declaration on religious freedom on a foundational understanding of human dignity so
too, in this present document, do we see the foundation of human dignity brought to the
forefront again as the text proclaimed that all Christian ministries must be rooted in full
respect of human dignity. In article 9 of the section on principles this text again
declared that “Christians are called to respect all people” and their communication with
non-Christians ought to “be made in a spirit of mutual respect.” Article 2 of the
section on recommendations stated that Christians must “build relationships of respect
and trust with people of all religions.”

Another important theme which was highlighted in *Christian Witness* and which
we saw previously addressed both in the initial reception period of 1966-1978 following
the Council and in the 1984 and 1991 documents of the PCID is the theme of dialogue.
Referencing Acts 17:22-28 this present document declared that “Christian witness in a
pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and
cultures.” This statement suggests that to live out the mission of the Church in the
modern world requires an engagement in interreligious dialogue. As Kevin Ahern
explains the authors of *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* asserted “that
dialogue is a legitimate part of contemporary witness” and thus it “should be understood
as a response to the contemporary context of religious pluralism.”

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252 Ibid., Principles 5.
253 Ibid., Principles 9.
254 Ibid., Recommendations 2.
Christian Witness enriched the reflection of the previous dialogue by placing a new emphasis on the role of dialogue in reconciliation. In article 2 of its recommendations the document stated that “where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing memories, reconciliation and peace-building.”

This statement suggested that authentic engagement in interreligious dialogue could bear the fruit of peace between the Christian communities and other religious bodies who participate in this positive exchange in loving friendship and with an increasing mutual understanding.

One of the themes raised in the 1984 and 1991 documents which becomes a prominent theme in this later document is the theme of cooperation and collaboration among Christian communities and between Christian communities and other religions. This is one of the primary themes highlighted in this later document. Such collaboration is only made possible through a foundation of respect for the religious freedom of every human person as proclaimed in Dignitatis humanae. In article 8 of its section on principles Christian Witness declared that “Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and the common good” and that “interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment.” In article 12 of the same section the text proclaimed that “Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation

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256 Christian Witness, Recommendations 2.
257 Ibid., Principles 8.
for the common good.”

Article 4 of the recommendations challenged Christians to “cooperate with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good and, wherever possible, standing together with people who are in situations of conflict.”

In article 1 of its appendix this document pointed out that “in today’s world there is increasing collaboration among Christians and between Christians and followers of different religions.”

When Christians and members of other religions “adopt the principle of “dialogue of life” in everyday human affairs, this type of dialogue urges dialogue partners to common action against common problems by focusing on life in community.”

While *Christian Witness* addressed many of the key themes raised in the 1984 and 1991 documents it is interesting to note that this later document did not draw attention to the theme of the universal human pursuit of truth which played a prominent role in the earlier documents. This third document does not refer to the freedom of every person to pursue truth in accordance with his or her conscience. While common threads can be identified linking these three documents it is also apparent that they each placed a unique emphasis on different aspects of the relationship between Christians and non-Christians.

### 4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter we have looked at three documents which, building upon the teaching of *Dignitatis humanae* and the early reception of the Declaration, explored the place of interreligious dialogue in the post-Vatican II context. Each of these documents involved the PCID, the first two in terms of authorship and the last being written in

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258 Ibid., Principles 12.
259 Ibid., Recommendations 4.
260 Ibid., Appendix 1.
collaboration with the WCC and the World Evangelical Alliance. While in the initial reception of *Dignitatis humanae* there seemed to be an emphasis on the implications of the Declaration on Church-State relationships these later documents revealed a more global orientation as the Church explored its relationship with non-Christians around the world. In these documents the Church increasingly went out of itself to encounter people of all faiths. In each of the documents we saw movement towards collaboration not only among Christians but also between Christians and non-Christians.

These documents pointed to a transformation of the Church’s understanding of its salvific mission as it recognizes the importance of mutual understanding, respect and love between people of all religions. In these documents we recognized how the Church sees that its call to proclaim the Gospel cannot be fulfilled apart from genuine dialogue which can take place only where there is friendship between people of different faiths. It would seem that in the past the Church sought first to convert persons of differing faiths and then draw them into relationship within the Body of Christ. It is evident in these documents that the Church now understood that what the world demands of it today is relationships of mutual love and respect with non-Christians if it wishes to effectively proclaim the Gospel. The Church now also recognized that love and respect for the dignity and freedom of religion and conscience of others should be shown even when explicit proclamation of the Gospel is not possible.
Conclusion

In this thesis we have closely examined the historical development of the doctrine of religious freedom in the context leading up to the Second Vatican Council, at the Council, and in the decades following the Council. Throughout this research we have carefully examined how the Catholic teaching on religious freedom was developed in \textit{Dignitatis humanae} and have come to appreciate how this teaching is being applied today in interreligious dialogue. We have seen how this doctrine has positively influenced the Catholic Church’s relationships with non-Catholics and opened the Church up to meaningful and fruitful interreligious dialogue. Within the discussions of religious freedom we examined, in the magisterial teaching of the Church, and in statements pertaining to interreligious dialogue we have seen a development in the doctrine of religious freedom while recognizing that this development can only be properly understood in relation to earlier teaching. In this thesis we have come to see how the contemporary Catholic teaching on religious freedom ought not be seen as a departure from earlier magisterial teaching but rather a fleshing out of particular aspects of this teaching which have become especially relevant in our contemporary globalized world.

In this research we have reflected on the intrinsic relationship which exists between religious freedom and freedom of conscience. In examining this aspect of religious freedom we have seen how an appreciation for the role of conscience in the practice of religious freedom naturally has shifted the focus away from Church-State relations towards a respect for the dignity of each human person. This respect recognizes the freedom of every person to act according to his or her conscience. This freedom is
especially relevant with regards to the adherence to particular religious beliefs and the carrying out of religious practices.

In my introduction I said that in the first chapter I would examine the prior teaching and prominent ideas at play pertaining to religious freedom in the century leading up to Vatican II. In this chapter I have demonstrated how religious freedom at the Second Vatican Council cannot be understood apart from earlier magisterial documents pertaining to this doctrine. I have pointed out how apparent differences between the 19th century teaching of the Church and *DH* can be resolved. In considering the pre-Vatican II context I have taken note of how discussions on religious freedom were influenced by the collaboration between Christians and the redefinition of Church-State relations which began to emerge in response to WWII. I have demonstrated that in the decade immediately preceding the Council Catholic theologians such as Jacques Maritain and John Courtenay Murray began to shift the discussion of religious freedom away from the issue of Church-State relations and towards an emphasis on the dignity of the human person.

In my second chapter I set out to study the development of the doctrine of religious freedom in *Dignitatis humanae* at Vatican II. I examined how the ideas and debates of the period leading up to Vatican II were further developed and transformed at the Council. In this chapter I pointed out a development in the doctrine of religious freedom which saw religious freedom no longer being primarily understood as pertaining to Church-State relations. I highlighted how *DH* placed a new emphasis on the dignity of human person which led the Church to recognize that in order to protect human dignity there needed to be a protection of religious freedom.
In the third chapter of this thesis I considered some of the key issues which emerged during the initial reception of Dignitatis humanae from 1966-1978. Examining the discussions pertaining to the Declaration during this period helped link the development of DH and the application of its teaching on religious freedom in the modern world. I studied how Church-State relations were redefined in light of DH and the impact of the new emphasis on the importance of religious freedom being granted to all people, not only Catholics or Christians. I also considered the question raised during this period of whether religious freedom was primarily a moral or juridical issue. Finally, in this chapter I looked at how Church-State relations were being redefined in the post-Vatican II world.

In my final chapter I highlighted the link between DH and the relationship of the Church with non-Christians. I studied three documents which demonstrated an increasing openness in the Church towards interreligious dialogue. I saw how continuing reception of DH has led to a recognition within the Church that it has a duty to engage in interreligious dialogue in order to carry out its salvific mission. In The Attitude of the Church there was an emphasis on mutual respect and love between people of all religions. Dialogue and Proclamation reflected on how dialogue and proclamation are two distinct elements of the mission of the Church. Christian Witness highlighted the role of dialogue in bringing about reconciliation and cooperation between people of differing faiths.

Having traced the development of the doctrine of religious freedom from the pre-Vatican II context through to the contemporary context I have seen a shift of focus in discussions pertaining to religious freedom from viewing religious freedom primarily in
relation to the State towards an emphasis on the human person. Ultimately this marked a movement, in interreligious dialogue, towards relationships of mutual love and respect between persons of differing faiths. The development of the doctrine of religious freedom which I have followed in this thesis is relevant to the daily life of all peoples. First, it helps persons understand their own human dignity and points out for them their right to religious freedom. Recognizing the right to religious freedom every person has a responsibility to practice this freedom in accordance with his or her personal conscience but also protect this freedom for others. Secondly the understanding of religious freedom which emerged from Vatican II and we see expressed in interreligious dialogue calls every person in this world to foster relationships of mutual love and respect with others regardless of his or her religious beliefs. In a world in which love and respect are often destroyed by evils such as war, terrorism, and the unjust distribution of wealth a new emphasis on these traits of positive interreligious dialogue can move our world towards peace and justice. The new openness to interreligious dialogue which emerged with the reception of *DH* has also encouraged cooperation and common action to carry out endeavours which work for the welfare of all people.

In a globalizing world there is an increasing recognition that we are no longer living in geographical enclaves of adherents to particular religious beliefs. Rather there is a daily exchange of ideas and sharing of life between people of all faiths. Even where the vast majority of the population of particular regions belong to a specific religion the constant interactions facilitated by the digital and technological advancements of the modern era mean that there is frequent contact between persons holding differing religious beliefs. The teaching of *Dignitatis humanae* can help us better understand how
to make our experiences as global citizens an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and respect. Although there is this ongoing global exchange and sharing of lives it is evident that tensions and a lack of respect still exist between people of different faiths. It would seem that taking to heart and living out the teaching of *Dignitatis humanae* could bear fruit in creating stability and peace, through a dialogue of mutual respect and love, in the modern context of the globalized world.

Still thinking of the context of our globalized world it is worth reflecting on how an understanding of the key issues at play in the *DH* can inform the contemporary approach of the Church to mission and evangelization. Worthy of particular note in this regard is the teaching of *DH* 2 which states that all persons “are to be immune from coercion.” While in the past the Church has used coercion to carry out evangelization it is evident with the teaching of *DH* that this is a grievous violation of religious freedom. Religious belief cannot be compelled. If the Church is to take seriously this teaching all persons involved in evangelization must carefully reflect and examine their practice to consider whether they are in any way using coercive means to carry out the mission of the Church. Perhaps particularly in light of the historic use of coercion in the Church Catholics must be extra vigilant to refrain from even any semblance of coercion. It would be worth examining further the role the teaching of *Dignitatis humanae* has to play in evangelization, particularly with regards to its teaching on coercion. The work of this thesis may be particularly relevant to those individuals wanting to examine this issue further.

The study of the development of *Dignitatis humanae* and its impact on interreligious dialogue which has been presented in this thesis has laid the groundwork
for a deeper understanding of the implications of the doctrine of religious freedom in the contemporary context. While this thesis examined the doctrine primarily in its historical context a solid understanding of this context is necessary to apply its teaching in the world we are living in today. The study in this thesis of the development of the doctrine of religious freedom can support a practical application of this doctrine both in the global context and in the lives of individuals. Without a solid understanding of what religious freedom entails it is very difficult to actively promote and protect religious freedom. Thus, by providing a clear statement on religious freedom, *Dignitatis humanae* can help all people of good will to work in mutual cooperation for the common welfare of all persons, particularly in so far as the protection of religious freedom is concerned.

The work of this thesis would be of particular relevance to anyone who is actively engaged, or considering becoming involved, in interreligious dialogue. It is worth noting that the thesis is not only relevant to those engaged in formal dialogue but also equally relevant to every person who is engaged in a dialogue of life, in a mutual relationship of love and respect between persons of differing religions. This thesis may also be helpful to persons involved in pastoral care for it can help them better understand the teaching of the Church on issues of religious freedom and in turn guide them in encouraging and supporting the engagement of the faithful in interreligious dialogue, particularly at a personal and local level. Finally, a reading of this work may prove to be beneficial for non-Catholics who are seeking to better understand how the Catholic Church seeks to interact with them. Perhaps this thesis can provide some reassurance to non-Catholics that the Roman Catholic Church desires to engage in a dialogue of mutual love and respect.
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