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Kathleen A. Brady

Senior Fellow and McDonald Distinguished Fellow, Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Emory University.

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CATHOLIC LIBERALISM AND THE LIBERAL TRADITION

*Kathleen A. Brady**

INTRODUCTION

Criticisms of liberalism are nothing new. All political traditions have their detractors, and as in the past, today's critics of liberalism include those on the left and right as well as religious believers and those without religious affiliations.¹ However, in very recent years, far-reaching and deepening critiques have been emerging from an unlikely source. Throughout American history, the nation's religious communities have been among the strongest defenders of religious freedom as well as other fundamental liberal values such as limited government, democratic institutions, civic equality, and other civil freedoms. Conservative Christians have been no exception.² With other Americans, they have disagreed about how to understand fundamental liberal commitments and how far to take liberal rights and principles.³ They have also voiced concerns about tendencies within

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1 For a recent discussion of contemporary critiques of liberalism and their evolution, see FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *LIBERALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS* (2022).

2 For example, the role of evangelical Christian groups in shaping America's commitment to religious freedom in the Founding era and early American republic has been well-documented. For a short summary, see JOHN WITTE, JR., JOEL A. NICHOLS & RICHARD W. GARNETT, *RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERIMENT* 36–37, 42–46 (5th ed. 2022).

3 For example, in recent decades, religious believers with traditional understandings of marriage, family, and human sexuality have sparred with proponents of LGBTQ rights over the scope of religious exemptions from rules prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Similar fights have also arisen over exemptions

liberalism that have troubled others as well, including narrowly individualistic understandings of human freedom.⁴ However, until recently, most of the debates about liberalism within America's conservative Christian communities have been internal to liberalism broadly understood. They have been about how to understand widely shared liberal values and realize their demands and promise rather than abandon them.⁵

In very recent years, however, this landscape has changed quickly and dramatically as new strains of deeper criticism have emerged and gained traction within many of America's conservative Christian communities. These new strains have moved from internal critiques to challenges to liberalism itself, with some of liberalism's strongest detractors abandoning liberalism in favor of postliberal or antiliberal visions of the state that reject and even invert liberal values. For example, among liberalism's most radical Catholic critics, complaints about insufficient protections for religious freedom and the exclusion of traditional believers from public life have morphed into the advocacy of a confessional state that favors and promotes a specific understanding of religious truth.⁶ Liberalism's Christian critics, especially the most radical, remain few in number, but their influence inside and outside the academy has grown as discontents with liberalism have accelerated and spilled over into the rough and tumble of American politics. Regardless of whether one believes that their influence is dangerous or

from expanding policies to facilitate reproductive choice. I have discussed both of these conflicts in previous work. See, e.g., Kathleen A. Brady, *The Disappearance of Religion from Debates About Religious Accommodation*, 20 LEWIS & CLARK L. REV. 1093 (2017); Kathleen A. Brady, *Religious Accommodations and Third-Party Harms: Constitutional Values and Limits*, 106 KY. L.J. 717 (2017–18).

4 For example, beginning several decades ago, legal scholars from a variety of religious traditions have voiced concern that narrowly individualistic understandings of religious faith overlook the essential role of religious communities in supporting and expressing religious belief and practice. See, e.g., Carl H. Esbeck, *Establishment Clause Limits on Governmental Interference with Religious Organizations*, 41 WASH. & LEE L. REV. 347, 350–71, 374 (1984); Frederick Mark Gedicks, *Toward a Constitutional Jurisprudence of Religious Group Rights*, 1989 WIS. L. REV. 99, 100, 106–07; Richard W. Garnett, *Do Churches Matter? Towards an Institutional Understanding of the Religion Clauses*, 53 VILL. L. REV. 273, 273–74 (2008). Related defenses of robust institutional religious freedom have drawn on insights that also began to appear in broader communitarian critiques of liberalism during the 1980s. See generally STEPHEN MULHALL & ADAM SWIFT, *LIBERALS AND COMMUNITARIANS* (2d ed. 1996).

5 Sudden interest in postliberal political visions has surprised even their advocates. See PATRICK J. DENEEN, *WHY LIBERALISM FAILED* xi, xxiii (2019) (describing surprise at the widespread interest in ideas that he had been developing for over a decade). The title of the manifesto *Against the Dead Consensus*, published in *First Things* in 2019, captures this dramatic shift. *Against the Dead Consensus*, FIRST THINGS (Mar. 21, 2019), <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/03/against-the-dead-consensus> [https://perma.cc/DNC8-35PZ].

6 See discussion *infra* Part III.

beneficial or somewhere in between, it is important to engage these critics, and this paper does that. I begin with an overview of the most common criticisms of liberalism followed by an examination of the merits of these assessments. I argue that most of these criticisms attack a caricatured version of liberalism or at least versions that not all of liberalism's defenders share. However, underlying many Christian critiques of liberalism is a natural longing for the integration of religious and political values. But integration can be understood in many different ways, and it matters very much what integration looks like. At this point, I will turn my focus to Catholic integralism, which includes some of liberalism's strongest critics and most developed visions for a postliberal state. Where Catholic integralism goes most deeply wrong is in its understanding of the religious authority it purports to rely upon. However, these flaws invite consideration of what the Catholic Church does say about the relationship between human freedom, truth and political power. What one encounters in the Church's social doctrine is a version of liberalism, though one with a much richer and more nuanced understanding of liberal values than more familiar conventional versions. Indeed, Catholic social teaching also contains insights that can point the way to the renewal and revitalization of the liberal tradition.

I. CHRISTIAN CRITIQUES OF LIBERALISM

While today's Christian critics of liberalism each emphasize different concerns, a consistent set of complaints has emerged. One type of argument zeros in on liberalism's elevation of the value of autonomy. Because liberalism envisions human flourishing in terms of autonomy, liberal regimes work to undermine the communities, social groups and religious institutions in which individuals grow and develop, and they strip human beings of constitutive social, moral, and spiritual norms.⁷ They also subject their members to depersonalized market forces that operate without ethical meaning and direction and replace networks of meaning and support with the inequalities and shallowness of a consumerist culture.⁸ In the place of withering social ties and relationships, a powerful state acting as an "agent of individualism"⁹ protects an ever-expanding space for self-creation and self-gratification.¹⁰ Thus,

7 DENEEN, *supra* note 5, at 17, 34, 40–41, 58, 76, 82; *see also* Adrian Vermeule, *All Human Conflict Is Ultimately Theological*, CHURCH LIFE J. (July 26, 2019), <https://church-lifejournal.nd.edu/articles/all-human-conflict-is-ultimately-theological> [<https://perma.cc/XNB8-ELPU>].

8 *See* DENEEN, *supra* note 5, at 9–10, 52–53, 58.

9 *Id.* at 59.

10 *See id.* at 47, 49, 53, 58, 62–63; *see also* Vermeule, *supra* note 7.

liberty takes the shape of license, and the state becomes a destructive force that mows down culture, tradition, and adherence to unchosen human ends.¹¹ The result, critics argue, is discontent and instability as politics frustrates the desire for human meaning and destroys inherited belief systems and institutions.¹² This type of critique takes aim at a version of liberalism known as “comprehensive liberalism.” Comprehensive liberalism understands human autonomy as a central—if not the central—element of human flourishing.¹³ Liberalism’s Christian critics argue that this form of liberalism fundamentally misunderstands the true character of human flourishing and ties politics to a debased understanding of human nature and ends.

A different critique has been leveled at what is known as “political liberalism.” Named by its first and most prominent proponent, John Rawls, political liberalism rejects the idea that politics should be guided by any comprehensive moral, religious, or philosophical understandings of the good.¹⁴ Rather, political liberalism calls for a political society of free and equal citizens who possess different understandings about human flourishing but agree to live together according to political principles and rules that can be accepted by all of them.¹⁵ Central to political liberalism is the idea of public reason, a moral requirement that political discourse and decisionmaking be governed by shared liberal principles and generally accepted forms of reasoning and common sense.¹⁶ Political liberals believe that only political principles that can be justified to all those who are subject to them are legitimate.¹⁷ The problem with political liberalism, critics argue, is not that it erroneously equates human flourishing with autonomy but that it eschews comprehensive moral questions altogether.¹⁸ It proposes an empty

11 See Vermeule, *supra* note 7; see also Adrian Vermeule, *A Christian Strategy*, FIRST THINGS (Nov. 2017), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/11/a-christian-strategy> [<https://perma.cc/222Y-TF9D>].

12 See DENEEN, *supra* note 5, at xxv–vi, 180–81; Adrian Vermeule, “According to Truth,” THE JOSIAS (July 19, 2018), <https://thejosias.com/2018/07/19/according-to-truth/> [<https://perma.cc/U9FS-R8L5>]; Vermeule, *supra* note 7.

13 For a concise discussion of comprehensive liberalism, see JONATHAN QUONG, LIBERALISM WITHOUT PERFECTION 16 (2011).

14 See JOHN RAWLS, POLITICAL LIBERALISM 38 (1993); QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 38–39.

15 RAWLS, *supra* note 14, at 3–4, 9–11, 139–40; see Micah Schwartzman & Jocelyn Wilson, *The Unreasonableness of Catholic Integralism*, 56 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 1039, 1058 (2019).

16 See RAWLS, *supra* note 14, at 217, 223–25; QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 41–43; John Rawls, *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, 64 U. CHI. L. REV. 765, 770–71, 773–76, 786 (1997).

17 See RAWLS, *supra* note 14, at 137; QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 38–39.

18 STEVEN D. SMITH, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE CITY: CULTURE WARS FROM THE TIBER TO THE POTOMAC 353–54 (2018) [hereinafter SMITH, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS]; STEVEN D. SMITH, THE DISENCHANTMENT OF SECULAR DISCOURSE 211–13 (2010) [hereinafter SMITH, DISENCHANTMENT].

and shallow politics where controversial normative claims must “sneak in”¹⁹ in “muffled”²⁰ or “smuggled”²¹ forms if they come in at all. Political liberalism, like comprehensive liberalism, is destructive. It labels those who will not play by the rules of public reason as unreasonable, and it curtails their participation in public life, even sanctioning their suppression when necessary to preserve liberal values.²² As with comprehensive liberalism, the result is civic division and instability.²³

To these critiques are added others. For example, liberalism claims to be neutral, but it is not.²⁴ Comprehensive liberalism is plainly not neutral; it elevates human autonomy over other understandings of human flourishing, and it switches out a politics based on virtue and the common good for a politics oriented to self-creation and self-authorship.²⁵ It also abandons older religious visions that see human flourishing as integrally bound up with a relationship with God and conformity to divine direction for human life.²⁶ Political liberalism is not neutral either. It claims to describe a fair system of social cooperation for free and equal citizens, but it marginalizes those it labels as unreasonable. Only those who agree to leave their deepest normative commitments in the private sphere are welcome in public political discourse,²⁷ and even the exit rights of those who dissent from liberal commitments may need to be curtailed to preserve liberal values.²⁸

Complaints about liberalism’s destructiveness go further to the erosion of religious freedom. Liberalism’s demands override religious claims when they come into conflict, and religious believers with traditional views about marriage, family, and human sexuality increasingly face threats from expanding understandings of the liberal commitment to equality.²⁹ For example, political liberals and others have construed the principle of equal respect and citizenship to curtail religious

19 SMITH, *DISENCHANTMENT*, *supra* note 18, at 212.

20 Vermeule, *supra* note 12.

21 SMITH, *DISENCHANTMENT*, *supra* note 18, at 26–27, 39, 212, 215.

22 See SMITH, *PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS*, *supra* note 18, at 350–52, 363. Political liberals include those who have not been shy about these consequences. See, e.g., QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 290–314.

23 SMITH, *PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS*, *supra* note 18, at 353–54.

24 DENEEN, *supra* note 5, at 5, 34, 188; see ADRIAN VERMEULE, *COMMON GOOD CONSTITUTIONALISM: RECOVERING THE CLASSICAL LEGAL TRADITION* 37 (2022).

25 See DENEEN, *supra* note 5, at 22–27; VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 36–38, 184; Vermeule, *supra* note 12.

26 See Edmund Waldstein, *Integralism and the Logic of the Cross*, CHURCH LIFE J. (Mar. 19, 2019), <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/integralism-and-the-logic-of-the-cross/> [<https://perma.cc/2BCJ-8S95>].

27 See SMITH, *PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS*, *supra* note 18, at 350, 363.

28 *Id.* at 351–52.

29 STEVEN D. SMITH, *THE RISE AND DECLINE OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM* 149–56 (2014).

exemptions from antidiscrimination laws outside of private religious settings.³⁰ Public-facing religious exercise must submit to the demands of equality, effectively marginalizing religious believers and entities with traditional beliefs.³¹ Thus, for example, even where other providers exist, religious bakers or wedding photographers who refuse to facilitate or endorse same-sex marriages are cut off from full participation in the nation's economic life.³² Those who resist are labeled bigots.³³ Liberalism's relentless drive to secure the conditions for an ever-expanding individual autonomy also demands compliance from religious traditionalists who would stand in the way.³⁴ In the most extreme version of this critique, religion becomes a target and enemy of liberalism.³⁵

Additionally, critics argue that the logic of liberalism undermines the theoretical foundations of religious freedom. On the one hand, the requirement of secular public discourse renders traditional religious justifications inadmissible, leaving only weak replacements.³⁶ Because liberalism cannot recognize the existence of transcendent obligations superior to the demands of the state, religious freedom also becomes vulnerable to countervailing claims and interests.³⁷ Moreover, the requirements of equality have been construed to undermine distinctive safeguards for religious exercise, turning historical protections into impermissible religious favoritism.³⁸

II. THE MERITS OF CHRISTIAN CRITIQUES

In many respects, Christian critiques of liberalism attack caricatured versions of liberalism or at least versions of liberalism that do not represent the only ways of understanding either the comprehensive or political strands of liberal thought. For example, comprehensive forms of liberalism may view human autonomy as a central human value, but they do not exclude other values.³⁹ Humans exercising

30 See *id.* at 152–56; SMITH, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS, *supra* note 18, at 359–63.

31 See SMITH, *supra* note 29, at 152–56; SMITH, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS, *supra* note 18, at 359–63.

32 See SMITH, PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS, *supra* note 18, at 359, 361.

33 See *id.* at 359.

34 VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 118–20; Sohrab Ahmari, *Against David French-ism*, FIRST THINGS (May 29, 2019), <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/05/against-david-french-ism> [<https://perma.cc/3YVS-GVRA>].

35 See Vermeule, *supra* note 11.

36 See SMITH, *supra* note 29, at 11, 142–47, 150–51, 168; SMITH, *DISENCHANTMENT*, *supra* note 18, at 136.

37 See Thomas Pink, *In Defence of Catholic Integralism*, PUB. DISCOURSE (Aug. 12, 2018), <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/08/39362/> [<https://perma.cc/N7QH-LGFU>].

38 SMITH, *supra* note 29, at 11.

39 For a discussion of comprehensive liberalism, see QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 16.

freedom may choose to embrace religious ways of life or a variety of other visions of human flourishing, and liberalism protects them when they do so. To be sure, there will be limits on the choices that individuals can make when their decisions interfere with the freedom of others to choose different paths. Determining where and how to draw these limits can be difficult, and liberal promises will mean little if these limits are drawn either too restrictively or not restrictively enough. However, in theory as well as practice, liberalism can protect a lot of ways of life, including traditional religious ones.

Liberalism's critics argue that liberalism has a built-in dynamic that relentlessly works to squeeze out any views of human flourishing that are inconsistent with the idea of a perfectly liberated individual who is the author of their own life. However, not all liberals understand complete self-authorship to be the goal, and in practice, probably few do. Instead, many liberals view autonomy as a necessary but not sufficient element of human flourishing. For example, comprehensive liberalism comes in perfectionist forms that envision a role for the state in promoting specific ideas of good or worthwhile lives as long as there is no coercion.⁴⁰

Moreover, comprehensive liberalism also does not exclude the possibility that communities and institutions play a role in facilitating the exercise of human freedom, and there is room in it for their protection. As one of the great liberal Justices of the twentieth century wrote in a case upholding distinctive statutory protections for religious groups, "[f]or many individuals, religious activity derives meaning in large measure from participation in a larger religious community" that "represents an ongoing tradition of shared beliefs, an organic entity not reducible to a mere aggregation of individuals."⁴¹ Thus, he concluded, "furtherance of the autonomy of religious organizations often furthers individual religious freedom as well."⁴²

For its part, political liberalism does not envision an empty politics. For political liberals, the shared political values that inform public reason represent an overlapping consensus that is supported by citizens for many different reasons, and religious citizens will naturally ground these commitments in their comprehensive religious understandings of the good.⁴³ In this way, religious ideas and other comprehensive belief systems are not absent from liberal politics, but they come in indirectly to the extent that they help to support shared political commitments.

40 See *id.* at 19–20.

41 Corp. of the Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. Amos, 483 U.S. 327, 342 (1987) (Brennan, J., concurring in the judgment).

42 *Id.*

43 See RAWLS, *supra* note 14, at 38, 44, 140, 144–45, 147–48.

Moreover, the requirements of public reason do not need to be construed in a way that excludes religious reasoning or other appeals to comprehensive beliefs from political debate and decisionmaking altogether, or even often. For example, for Rawls, the rules of public reason only apply to discourse and decisions about constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice,⁴⁴ and even in these contexts, appeals to religious and other comprehensive moral doctrines can be made so long as public reasons are offered in due course.⁴⁵ In practice, it is rare for religious believers in liberal democracies to offer religious reasons for public policies without also offering related appeals to public reasons, such as concerns about social stability, economic prosperity, and general public welfare. After all, religious believers adopt or retain their religious views because they make sense of their lives and experiences, and religious ethics naturally integrates reasoning about temporal and religious goods. Thus, for example, even the most conservative Christians are unlikely to justify their political positions solely by reference to the Bible without also articulating, both to themselves and others, why and how Biblical texts make sense as solutions to shared public concerns and challenges.

Still more capacious understandings of public reason have also been offered. For instance, some political liberals have argued that the requirements of public reason do not apply to ordinary citizens at all but only to government officials.⁴⁶ Others have argued that the demands of political liberalism are satisfied as long as every citizen has reasons to support political rules even if they do not agree on those reasons.⁴⁷ In this Symposium, Paul Billingham has argued that political liberals should even welcome nonpublic religious reasons in public political debate because these reasons have the potential to stimulate exchanges that can generate and shape ideas that do meet the standards of public reason.⁴⁸

Additionally, the categories of comprehensive and political liberalism do not exhaust all understandings of liberalism. While these are dominant theories in the academy, in practice American constitutional law selects some rights and equality demands to prioritize and then leaves plenty of room for citizens to debate and pursue the good in

44 *Id.* at 214.

45 Rawls, *supra* note 16, at 776.

46 See, e.g., Cécile Laborde, *Can Religious Establishment Be Liberal Enough?*, 33 STUD. CHRISTIAN ETHICS 215, 216 (2020).

47 For a discussion of this “convergence view,” see Jonathan Quong, *Public Reason*, STAN. ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHIL. (Apr. 20, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/public-reason/> [<https://perma.cc/ZTP6-GEJ5>].

48 Paul Billingham, *Religious Political Arguments, Accessibility, and Democratic Deliberation*, 98 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1595, 1597 (2023).

politics and to settle impasses by vote. Indeed, many of our constitutional rights themselves reflect substantive understandings of what is necessary for human flourishing because they correlate with specific human goods like religion,⁴⁹ marriage,⁵⁰ parental care,⁵¹ and freedom of thought and association.⁵²

Complaints about the erosion of religious freedom also identify problems that are not essential to liberalism. It is true that expansive understandings of the demands of equal citizenship can push religious traditionalists out of public-facing activities where their religious convictions conflict with laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Scholars and advocates frequently argue that religious exemptions would undermine the equal citizenship of LGBTQ Americans even where exemptions are narrow and plenty of alternative providers exist.⁵³ Thus, religious bakers or adoption agencies that refuse to work with same-sex couples can comply or close down; equal citizenship trumps religious freedom. However, religious freedom and equality are both liberal values, and they can be better balanced. Liberalism's defenders have included those who have called for such balances and proposed compromises that would enable both sides in these conflicts to live in accordance with their beliefs and basic identities and to participate in public life with as few restrictions as possible.⁵⁴

Liberalism's critics are also correct that some liberal scholars have turned the concept of equality against distinctive protections for religious exercise,⁵⁵ and these and others have rejected religious rationales

49 See U.S. CONST. amend. I.

50 See *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015); *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967); see also *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 485–86 (1965) (marital privacy).

51 See *Pierce v. Soc'y of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925); *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390 (1923).

52 See U.S. CONST. amend. I (free speech); *Boy Scouts of Am. v. Dale*, 530 U.S. 640 (2000) (freedom of association).

53 See, e.g., Jennifer C. Pizer, *It's Not About the Cake: Against "Altering" the Public Marketplace*, in *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, LGBT RIGHTS, AND THE PROSPECTS FOR COMMON GROUND* 385, 385–87 (William N. Eskridge, Jr. & Robin Fretwell Wilson eds., 2019); Richard Schragger & Micah Schwartzman, *Religious Antiliberalism and the First Amendment*, 104 MINN. L. REV. 1341, 1420 (2020); Nelson Tebbe, *Religion and Marriage Equality Statutes*, 9 HARV. L. & POL'Y REV. 25, 38–39 (2015).

54 See, e.g., Alan Brownstein, *Gay, Jews, and Other Strangers in a Strange Land: The Case for Reciprocal Accommodation of Religious Liberty and the Right of Same-Sex Couples to Marry*, 45 U.S.F. L. REV. 389 (2010); Douglas Laycock & Thomas C. Berg, Essay, *Protecting Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty*, 99 VA. L. REV. ONLINE 1 (2013); see also ANDREW KOPPELMAN, *GAY RIGHTS VS. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY? THE UNNECESSARY CONFLICT* (2020).

55 For examples drawing on the framework of political liberalism, see CHRISTOPHER L. EISGRUBER & LAWRENCE G. SAGER, *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE CONSTITUTION* 4–6 (2007); Micah Schwartzman, *Religion as a Legal Proxy*, 51 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 1085, 1085–88

for religious freedom, including those with a historical pedigree from the Founding era.⁵⁶ However, here again, countervailing arguments can be made from within liberalism, including from within versions of political liberalism that emphasize the values of equality and fairness. For example, regardless of whether one has religious beliefs of one's own, one might agree that religious belief and practice are unique phenomena with a distinctive focus and set of concerns that carry a special ultimacy in the lives of believers. As Protestant theologian Paul Tillich famously wrote in the last century, religion is not just a matter of ultimate concern, but ultimate concern about the Ultimate, the ground or source of all being.⁵⁷ If religion is a distinctive phenomenon of this sort and also one that plays an important role in most human cultures and the lives of many individuals, distinctive protections for religion arguably follow. Without robust protections for religious conscience that account for the unique character of religious convictions and the demands they place on believers, liberal societies will be unstable, and the liberal commitment to human freedom will fail to capture the fullness of human experience. One also need not agree with the theological premises of religious rationales for religious freedom to see the relevancy of these arguments for liberal theory. For example, if religious believers view their religious duties as "precedent . . . to the claims of [c]ivil [s]ociety" as James Madison did,⁵⁸ this fact has implications for respecting human dignity and maintaining civic peace. Neither end will be well-served without strong protections for religious exercise.

Liberal societies also do not need to degenerate into a shallow consumerism that debases human beings by replacing relationships and meaning with self-gratification and material accumulation. Free market economies generate many different kinds of goods and services, and these products reflect the varied interests and values of their members. Today's liberal democracies also routinely intervene in markets to promote and supply public benefits and goods and to ameliorate inequalities. Thus, the market economies of liberal societies can,

(2014); Micah Schwartzman, *What if Religion Is Not Special?*, 79 U. CHI. L. REV. 1351, 1352–55 (2012).

56 Douglas Laycock, himself a strong defender of religious liberty, has put it bluntly. Defenses of religious freedom "based on beliefs about religion cannot possibly persuade persons who do not hold the same religious beliefs," and explanations of the religion clauses in theological terms "forfeit their credibility." Douglas Laycock, *Religious Liberty as Liberty*, 7 J. CONTEMP. LEGAL ISSUES 313, 316 (1996).

57 PAUL TILlich, DYNAMICS OF FAITH 9, 12 (1957); see 1 PAUL TILlich, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 14 (1951).

58 James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (June 20, 1785), in 8 THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON 295, 299 (Robert A. Rutland, William M.E. Rachal, Barbara D. Ripel & Fredrika J. Teute eds., 1973).

and do, reflect ethical values; their members express and advance these values when they exercise market freedoms and when they join together to regulate markets in the public interest.

III. THE INTEGRATION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS: CATHOLIC INTEGRALISTS AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

Thus, it appears that today's Christian critiques of liberalism raise some valid concerns, but they are not fatal in the way that liberalism's detractors think. Not all liberal thinkers fall into the errors that liberalism's critics identify, and while liberalism may need some corrections, it has within all its major strands the resources for these cures. Moreover, American liberalism in practice escapes the bleakest of its critics' assessments. American law does, in fact, protect beliefs and lifestyles with which conservative Christians disagree, but it also protects their own, even if not perfectly or well enough. Indeed, the Supreme Court is expanding its construction of constitutional protections for religious exercise,⁵⁹ and conservative Christians have had important victories in the courts in the contexts that most worry liberalism's critics.⁶⁰ The Supreme Court is especially solicitous of institutional religious freedom, and the Court's emerging doctrine of church autonomy gives religious groups substantial space to define, preserve, and transmit their values.⁶¹ Thus, it seems like the way forward is greater liberty, not less.

However, many of today's Christian critics have an additional concern, and tweaks to existing theories of liberalism are unlikely to be

59 For example, in *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 140 S. Ct. 2049 (2020), the Court articulated a "broad" and "general principle of church autonomy" that protects the right of religious groups to define their own faith and doctrine and gives them related "autonomy with respect to internal management decisions that are essential to [their] central mission." *Id.* at 2060–61. In *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 141 S. Ct. 1868 (2021), the Court ruled in favor of a Catholic foster care agency with religious objections to certifying same-sex couples as foster parents. *See id.* at 1882. While the Court decided *Fulton* under existing precedent curtailing most protections under the Free Exercise Clause to instances of religious discrimination, the Court read its precedent broadly, and a majority of Justices expressed dissatisfaction with its limitations. *See id.* at 1883 (Alito, J., with Thomas & Gorsuch, JJ., concurring in the judgment) (arguing that existing precedent should be overruled); *id.* at 1926 (Gorsuch, J., with Thomas & Alito, JJ., concurring in the judgment) (same); *id.* at 1882 (Barrett, J., with Breyer & Kavanaugh, JJ., concurring) (expressing discomfort with the Court's existing precedent but also uncertainty about what should replace it).

60 *See, e.g., Fulton*, 141 S. Ct. at 1882 (ruling in favor of a Catholic foster care agency with religious objections to certifying same-sex couples as foster parents); *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 573 U.S. 682, 688–91 (2014) (ruling in favor of closely held for-profit businesses with religious objections to providing health insurance for contraceptives that could, in their view, result in abortions).

61 *See supra* note 59.

satisfactory to those who share it. As Adrian Vermeule has written, he is not interested in “the latest minor paper on Rawlsianism.”⁶² This is, in part, because he is most interested in lived rather than theoretical liberalism,⁶³ but it is also because he and many other critics have something very different in mind. Behind many of today’s conservative Christian critiques of liberalism is a longing for a vision of politics that is integrated with religious principles and reflects the priority of God in all aspects of human life. There is a “hunger,” Vermeule writes, “for a real politics” where citizens can “liv[e] fully . . . according to the truth,” and “[h]uman nature wearies, sickens and eventually rebels” when this is not possible.⁶⁴ For Catholic integralists, like Vermeule, this means that the state should not be neutral about the good, and robust private rights to pursue religious visions of human flourishing are not sufficient. The state must promote the common good understood as something greater than any private good and as something that is oriented ultimately to the highest of all human goods, life with God.⁶⁵ Vermeule rejects the priority that comprehensive versions of liberalism place on human autonomy, and he also challenges the overlapping consensus in favor of liberal values that political liberalism assumes and seeks to build upon. For Vermeule and those who share his views, liberalism is simply incompatible with their holistic vision for politics, and they turn the page from liberalism to postliberal understandings of the state.

However, today’s Christian postliberals turn the page too quickly. The desire for an integrated vision of religion and politics is not surprising, and it is nothing new. At the heart of religious belief and practice is a relationship between persons and the divine ground or source of all that is, and the demands of this relationship naturally reach out into all aspects of human life and assume a priority over all other concerns. Indeed, Rawls himself recognized this when he understood that the citizenry’s comprehensive belief systems must support liberal political values for liberal societies to be stable.⁶⁶ However, integration can take different forms, and it makes a difference what integration looks like. Today’s postliberal critics assume too readily that the integration of religion and politics cannot take a liberal form, and they slip from a desire for integration to specific assumptions about what integration must look like.

At this point, I will turn my focus to Catholic integralism. Catholic integralism includes some of today’s most radical critiques of

62 Vermeule, *supra* note 7.

63 *See id.*

64 Vermeule, *supra* note 12.

65 *See* discussion *infra* notes 67–71 and accompanying text.

66 *See* RAWLS, *supra* note 14, at 38–39, 44.

liberalism and most well-developed alternatives for a postliberal society. Their slip from a desire for integration to a rejection of liberalism is preceded by a more serious error. Catholic integralists misunderstand the religious authority that they rely upon, and they end up with a vision of politics that misses some of the Church's most important insights about human freedom and the relationship between persons, truth and the state.

While Catholic integralists differ from one another in important ways, they agree that politics should be oriented to virtue and the common good.⁶⁷ The common good as they understand it is not a collection of private goods, much less an aggregation of private rights or interests. Rather, it is the shared and indivisible good of a social and political order directed first to the earthly happiness of the community and, finally, to the eternal good.⁶⁸ The highest good of the individual is participation in the common good,⁶⁹ and true liberty is not autonomous choice but participation in this shared good.⁷⁰ Rights exist, but their content is informed by the flourishing of the political community as a whole.⁷¹ Because the spiritual good exceeds the temporal good, the temporal power must be subject to the spiritual one, which is in the care of Christ and his Church.⁷² Catholic integralists do not envision the Church ruling the state directly. However, the Church's moral teaching should inform its laws,⁷³ and temporal rulers should protect and advance religious truth.⁷⁴ For some integralists, this means a

67 See THOMAS CREAN & ALAN FIMISTER, *INTEGRALISM: A MANUAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY* 28–31, 103 (2020); Ahmari, *supra* note 34; Adrian Vermeule, *As Secular Liberalism Attacks the Church, Catholics Can't Afford to Be Nostalgic*, CATH. HERALD (Jan. 5, 2018, 2:31 PM), <https://catholicherald.co.uk/as-secular-liberalism-attacks-the-church-catholics-cant-afford-to-be-nostalgic/> [<https://perma.cc/P9DY-2L5L>]; Edmund Waldstein, *Integralism and Gelasian Dyarchy*, THE JOSIAS §§ 2.2, 3 (Mar. 3, 2016), <https://thejosias.com/2016/03/03/integralism-and-gelasian-dyarchy/> [<https://perma.cc/WB2S-6VFD>]; Waldstein, *supra* note 26.

68 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 28–31; Vermeule, *supra* note 67; Waldstein, *supra* note 67; Edmund Waldstein, *An Integralist Manifesto*, FIRST THINGS (Oct. 2017), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/10/an-integralist-manifesto> [<https://perma.cc/JSH4-ZWAV>].

69 VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 7, 165; Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 2.2; Waldstein, *supra* note 26.

70 VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 39–41.

71 See *id.* at 36–38, 42–43, 165–66.

72 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 20–21, 77–78; Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 3; Edmund Waldstein, *Integralism in Three Sentences*, THE JOSIAS (Oct. 17, 2016), <https://thejosias.com/2016/10/17/integralism-in-three-sentences/> [<https://perma.cc/ER85-JEB9>].

73 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 103–05; Pink, *supra* note 37; Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 3.

74 See Thomas Pink, *Conscience and Coercion: Vatican II's Teaching on Religious Freedom Changed Policy, Not Doctrine*, FIRST THINGS (Aug. 2012), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/08/conscience-and-coercion> [<https://perma.cc/PU6E-4E2F>]; Waldstein, *supra* note 68; Edmund Waldstein, *What Is Integralism Today?*, CHURCH LIFE J. (Oct. 31, 2018), <https://www.churchlifej.com/2018/10/31/what-is-integralism-today/>.

confessional state.⁷⁵ Others go further and reach back to medieval models of church-state relations as they recover the ideal of a state acting as the secular arm of the Church and tasked with promoting religious truth, discouraging and restricting religious error, and even, for some, punishing heresy.⁷⁶

Integralists recognize the authority of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Liberty,⁷⁷ but they minimize its significance and interpret it very narrowly. For example, some have argued that *Dignitatis Humanae* represented only a policy change for the Church. The Church made a decision to reverse her prior policy licensing states to act as her coercive agents, but the state should still recognize and privilege the Catholic Church.⁷⁸ Others have argued that the degree of religious liberty affirmed in *Dignitatis Humanae* depends on different social circumstances with greater restrictions on the practices of non-Catholics appropriate in majority-Catholic countries.⁷⁹ Still others see *Dignitatis Humanae* as a concession to the end of Christendom and the temporal sword as something the Church may one day reclaim.⁸⁰ At the very least, Catholic integralists argue that state power can and should be used to promote moral goods, including through coercive pressure when it is prudent to do so.⁸¹

Thus, what emerges is a vision of a state which recognizes and promotes Catholic understandings of individual, social, political and spiritual goods. Liberty and rights are de-emphasized and reimagined as the freedom to embrace the common good. Church-state separation is replaced with a hierarchical relationship with the state subordinate to the spiritual order governed by the Church.⁸² Political and other social relationships are described in hierarchical terms as government

churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-is-integralism-today/ [https://perma.cc/ZT2T-SGEX].

75 See Pink, *supra* note 37.

76 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 113–19, 232–35, 268; Waldstein, *supra* note 74.

77 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *DIGNITATIS HUMANA: DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY* (1965), reprinted in 1 VATICAN COUNCIL II: THE CONCILIAR AND POST CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS 799 (Austin Flannery ed., 1975).

78 See Pink, *supra* note 74; see also Edmund Waldstein, *Religious Liberty and Tradition II*, THE JOSIAS (Jan. 1, 2015), <https://thejosias.com/2015/01/01/vatican-ii-and-religious-liberty-ii/> [https://perma.cc/P47V-6XDX] (supporting Pink's view).

79 Thomas Storck, *Recent Discussions of Religious Liberty*, THE JOSIAS (June 3, 2021), <https://thejosias.com/2021/06/03/recent-discussions-of-religious-liberty/> [https://perma.cc/UN8E-KKUY].

80 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 273.

81 See VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 37–38, 171–73.

82 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 21; Waldstein, *supra* note 72; Waldstein, *supra* note 68.

officials become “rulers” and citizens become “subjects,”⁸³ and liberty is understood as obedience.⁸⁴ Democracy is optional,⁸⁵ and for some, not even preferable.⁸⁶ The state, while distinct from the Church, becomes part of the “city of God”⁸⁷ under the Kingship of Christ.⁸⁸ The desired ideal is a political community that aspires to be happy, just, good, and godly.

While some of Catholic integralism’s most basic assumptions accurately reflect the Church’s current teaching, integralists distort many of these core principles and ignore others. Indeed, as integralists reach for classical and medieval sources, the more recent body of Catholic social thought almost disappears. The documents that compose the Church’s current social doctrine span well over a century. The tradition began with *Rerum Novarum*, a late nineteenth-century papal encyclical addressing the plight of the working classes during the Industrial Revolution,⁸⁹ and it continues to this day, including Pope Francis’s recent encyclicals addressing a range of economic, social, and ecological problems.⁹⁰ It also contains important documents from the Second Vatican Council.⁹¹

In all of its teaching, the Church affirms that social, political, and economic life should be ordered according to enduring principles rooted in human nature and divine design.⁹² A social order that is not

83 VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 1, 37–38; Waldstein, *supra* note 26.

84 See Waldstein, *supra* note 26.

85 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 149; VERMEULE, *supra* note 24, at 47–48.

86 See Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 4.

87 CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 21; see Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 3.

88 See CREAN & FIMISTER, *supra* note 67, at 229; Gabriel Sanchez, *Catholic Integralism and the Social Kingship of Christ*, THE JOSIAS (Jan. 23, 2015); <https://thejosias.com/2015/01/23/catholic-integralism-and-the-social-kingship-of-christ/> [https://perma.cc/G8VC-VQ9L]; Waldstein, *supra* note 67, § 3.

89 POPE LEO XIII, *RERUM NOVARUM* (1891), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT: ENCYCLICALS AND DOCUMENTS FROM POPE LEO XIII TO POPE FRANCIS 14 (David J. O’Brien & Thomas A. Shannon eds., 3d rev. ed. 2016) [hereinafter CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT].

90 See Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (Oct. 3, 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html [https://perma.cc/VZ9C-LXZK]; POPE FRANCIS, *LAUDATO SI’* (2015), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 593.

91 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *GAUDIUM ET SPES: PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD* (1965), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 174; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77.

92 See, e.g., SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 23, at 188; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA* paras. 42, 207–09, 215, 217 (1961), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 87, 93, 122–23, 124 [hereinafter POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*]; POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS* paras. 1, 6, 37–38, 45 (1963), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 137, 137–38, 143–44 [hereinafter POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*]; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *CARITAS IN VERITATE* paras. 5–7 (2009),

founded on truth will yield neither peace nor progress, Pope Francis has recently taught,⁹³ echoing Benedict XVI and John Paul II before him.⁹⁴ The most basic of these truths is the recognition of human dignity, a rich concept that includes the human person's possession of reason and free will and capacity for both interpersonal relationships and divine connection. The human person, the Church teaches, is made in the image of God⁹⁵ with capacities for reason, creativity, and responsible decisionmaking.⁹⁶ Human persons are also made for God. They are able to transcend their earthly existence and enter into a dialogue with God.⁹⁷ The "call of God [is] contained in the being of things,"⁹⁸ and "we can ascend from created things 'to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy.'"⁹⁹ Human persons are also made for love.¹⁰⁰ They experience their existence as a gift,¹⁰¹ and they have the capacity for relationships with others¹⁰² that allow them to extend the gift of self in return.¹⁰³ Humans can only find fulfillment in love, the Church has repeatedly taught.¹⁰⁴ Human persons also have an intrinsic

reprinted in CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 528, 530–31; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 206–10.

93 *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 206–10.

94 POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 5, at 530 ("Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present."); POPE JOHN PAUL II, CENTESIMUS ANNUS para. 5 (1991), reprinted in CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 473, 477–78 (stating that "there can be no genuine solution of the 'social question' apart from the Gospel").

95 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, paras. 12, 17, at 181, 183–84; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 45, at 559; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 11, at 482; POPE JOHN PAUL II, SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS para. 47 (1987), reprinted in CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 426, 462.

96 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 2, at 801; see SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 17, at 183–84; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 118, at 629.

97 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 19, at 184; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 81, at 617; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 76, at 579.

98 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 13, at 483.

99 POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 77, at 616 (quoting Pope Benedict XVI, *Catechesis* (Nov. 9, 2005), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20051109.html [<https://perma.cc/8LHC-QTKR>]).

100 *Id.* para. 58, at 610; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 88.

101 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 34, at 550.

102 POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, paras. 81, 119, at 617, 629; see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 12, at 181.

103 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 24, at 189; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 41, at 506.

104 See, e.g., *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 68 (stating that "we were created for a fulfillment that can only be found in love"); see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 24, at 189 (stating that "man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"); POPE JOHN

dignity that is not diminished when human faculties are compromised or exercised improperly.¹⁰⁵ All persons are created and redeemed by God, who has joined himself to humanity in the Incarnation and sacrificed himself for them on the Cross.¹⁰⁶ All share an “equal natural dignity”¹⁰⁷ and “divine calling and destiny.”¹⁰⁸

From this dignity certain basic rights in society follow. For example, because they are made with reason and free will and called to a relationship with God, humans must have the freedom to seek the truth freely and to follow the truth as they come to know it, including in religious matters.¹⁰⁹ Because human beings have intrinsic value, they have the right to material and social goods essential for a life worthy of their dignity.¹¹⁰ Because humans have the capacity for reason, self-determination and creativity, they have the right to work which not only provides income sufficient for their support but also opportunities to participate as fully as possible in the workplace so that they “can in a certain sense ‘work for themselves’ through the exercise of their intelligence and freedom.”¹¹¹ Because humans are made for relationships with others and for the gift of self, the economic life of society must also allow room for workers to collaborate with one another in

PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 41, at 506 (stating that “it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself”).

105 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 28, at 191; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 107, 191; POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 158, at 164–65.

106 See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 40, at 456; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 85; POPE LEO XIII, *supra* note 89, para. 21, at 24.

107 POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 89, at 152.

108 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 29, at 191.

109 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 2, at 801.

110 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 26, at 190; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 118.

111 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 43, at 507 (footnote omitted); see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 67, at 222 (stating that “[t]he opportunity should also be afforded to workers to develop their own abilities and personalities through the work they perform”); *id.* para. 68, at 223 (stating that “[i]n economic enterprises it is persons who work together, that is, free and independent human beings created in the image of God,” so “the active participation of everyone in the running of an enterprise should be promoted”); POPE PAUL VI, *OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS* para. 14 (1971), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 280, 285 (stating that “[e]very man has the right to work, to a chance to develop his qualities and his personality in the exercise of his profession” as well as “to equitable remuneration”); POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 20, at 140 (stating that “[f]rom the dignity of the human person, there also arises the right to carry on economic activities according to the degree of responsibility of which one is capable”). The Church further explains that “man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the creator.” POPE JOHN PAUL II, *LABOREM EXERCENS* para. 25 (1981), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 380, 415.

enterprises that advance the good of the entire community.¹¹² Because persons are capable of responsible action, they have a right to participate in their government.¹¹³ This right undergirds the Church's preference for democratic political institutions,¹¹⁴ as does their promotion of government accountability, human freedom and peace,¹¹⁵ and their allowance for the benefits of a free exchange of ideas.¹¹⁶

In the Church's view, all human rights are connected with corresponding duties. Thus, the right to seek the truth is correlated with the duty to do so and to follow truth as it is found.¹¹⁷ The right to work and participate in economic enterprises correlates with a duty to shape these enterprises for the benefit of those within and outside of them.¹¹⁸ The right to participate in government correlates with the duty to act for the common benefit.¹¹⁹ This essential connection between rights and duties means that freedom must never be confused with license or unlimited autonomy.¹²⁰ The Church envisions a responsible freedom oriented to truth,¹²¹ and the deepest truth that must inform all human activity is the creation of persons by and for love.¹²² "God is love,"¹²³ the Church wrote during the Second Vatican Council, and "the . . . command of love [is] the basic law of human perfection and . . . of the

112 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 43, at 507–08; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, para. 92, at 103.

113 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 75, at 228–29; POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 47, at 299; POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 26, at 141.

114 See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 46, at 509–10.

115 See *id.*; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 21, at 539.

116 See POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 182, at 648 (approving "transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views").

117 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 2, at 801.

118 See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 43, at 508; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 111, para. 16, at 403–04.

119 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 75, at 228–29.

120 See *id.* paras. 17, 41, at 183–84, 200; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 6, at 594; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, paras. 43, 68, 70, at 557, 575, 576.

121 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 2, at 801; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, paras. 17, 41, 46, at 486, 506, 510.

122 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 103 (discussing the inadequacy of a "shallow understanding [of liberty that] has little to do with the richness of a liberty directed above all to love"); POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 19, at 538 (discussing "the central place of charity within [human] development" and describing it as "the summit" of this development); POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 47, at 299 (teaching that human freedom "develop[s] in its deepest human reality" when it "involve[s] itself and . . . spend[s] itself in building up active and lived solidarity" and that "for the Christian, it is by losing himself in God who sets him free that man finds true freedom").

123 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 38, at 197 (quoting 1 *John* 4:8).

world's transformation."¹²⁴ Love respects human freedom, but it also gives it content.

The role of the state in the social and political order is to promote the common good, which includes the defense of human rights as well as other conditions that facilitate human development.¹²⁵ The Church does not envision the common good as a collective good that subsumes individual goods or defines them. Rather, the Church "lays stress on reverence for man,"¹²⁶ and the human person is the "source, the center, and the purpose of all socioeconomic life."¹²⁷ The common good "is the good of 'all of us,' . . . who together constitute society," Pope Benedict XVI explained.¹²⁸ More specifically, the Church defines the common good as the "sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families, and groups can achieve their own fulfillment in a relatively thorough and ready way."¹²⁹ The common good has material, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, just as the human person does,¹³⁰ but the promotion of all facets of the common good must

124 *Id.*

125 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 6, at 803–04; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, paras. 156–57, at 640–41; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 11, at 481; POPE JOHN XXIII, MATER ET MAGISTRA *supra* note 92, para. 20, at 90; POPE JOHN XXIII, PACEM IN TERRIS, *supra* note 92, paras. 56–64, at 147–48.

126 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 27, at 190.

127 *Id.* para. 63, at 219. The Church has repeated this teaching numerous times. *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 232 (placing "at the centre of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good"); POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 57, at 567 (asserting that "all things on earth should be ordered towards man as to their centre and summit" (quoting SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 12, at 181)); POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 14, at 285 (stating that "the beginning, the subject, and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person" (quoting SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 25, at 189)); POPE JOHN XXIII, MATER ET MAGISTRA, *supra* note 92, para. 219, at 125 (teaching that "individual men are necessarily the foundation, cause, and end of all social institutions"). While human persons have a unique dignity, the Church rejects a "tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures," POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 68, at 613, each of whom also reflects and expresses God's love, *id.* paras. 69, 84–86, at 613–14, 618–19, and should be cared for by human beings, *id.* paras. 67–68, at 613.

128 POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 7, at 531.

129 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 74, at 227. This definition is repeated throughout the Church's social teaching. See, e.g., *id.* para. 26, at 190; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 6, at 803; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 156, at 640 (quoting SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 26, at 190); POPE JOHN XXIII, MATER ET MAGISTRA, *supra* note 92, para. 65, at 98.

130 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, paras. 26, 57, at 190, 214; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 61, at 520; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 46, at 461; POPE JOHN XXIII, PACEM IN TERRIS, *supra* note 92, paras. 57, 64, at 147, 148; see also POPE PAUL VI, POPULORUM PROGRESSIO para. 14 (1967), reprinted in CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 253, 256 (advocating an "integral" development that promotes the good "of every man and of the whole man").

respect human freedom.¹³¹ When the state acts, it must leave room for, and indeed, facilitate the exercise of human freedom,¹³² including by recognizing and safeguarding the role that individuals and intermediate groups play in advancing the common good.¹³³

The Church also envisions special restrictions on government involvement with religion. The state promotes religious goods primarily by protecting religious freedom, including accommodating its laws to religious needs with limits to protect the rights of others and the public order.¹³⁴ The state must also refrain from implementing policies that favor nonreligious choices over religious ones,¹³⁵ and it must not discriminate among citizens based on their religious beliefs or affiliations.¹³⁶ It must also guarantee the independence and self-government of the Church and other religious institutions.¹³⁷ The Church does not need nor claim any of her former privileges, including the support of a confessional state.¹³⁸ Rather, the Church envisions herself as a

131 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 26, at 190 (stating that the social order “must be founded on truth, built on justice, and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance”); see also *id.* para. 74, at 227 (stating that political authority “must dispose the energies of the whole citizenry toward the common good, not mechanically or despotically, but primarily as a moral force which depends on freedom and the conscientious discharge of the burdens of any office which has been undertaken”); POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 17, at 537 (stating that “[o]nly when it is free can development be integrally human; only in a climate of responsible freedom can it grow in a satisfactory manner”); POPE JOHN XXIII, PACEM IN TERRIS, *supra* note 92, para. 48, at 145 (stating that “[a]s authority rests chiefly on moral force, it follows that civil authority must appeal primarily to the conscience of individual citizens, that is, to each one’s duty to collaborate readily for the common good of all”).

132 See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 11, at 481; POPE JOHN XXIII, PACEM IN TERRIS, *supra* note 92, paras. 34, 48, 60, 65–66, at 142, 145, 147, 148–49; POPE JOHN XXIII, MATER ET MAGISTRA, *supra* note 92, para. 55, at 96.

133 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 57, at 567–68; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, paras. 13, 48, at 483, 511–12; POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 46, at 298–99; POPE JOHN XXIII, MATER ET MAGISTRA, *supra* note 92, paras. 65–66, at 98. This is the principle of subsidiarity. See PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH paras. 185–88 (2004) for further discussion of this principle.

134 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, paras. 2–7, at 800–05.

135 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 29, at 546; Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* para. 255 (Nov. 24, 2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [https://perma.cc/A2EX-YN5X].

136 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 6, at 804.

137 See *id.* paras. 4, 13, at 802–03, 809–10; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 76, at 229.

138 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 76, at 230; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 53, at 515.

teacher¹³⁹ and citizen,¹⁴⁰ speaking on social matters to all people of good will,¹⁴¹ and contributing her insights to a dialogue that includes many other voices and perspectives as well.¹⁴² She also guides by example,¹⁴³ acting as a “leaven” in society,¹⁴⁴ and a “‘sacrament,’ . . . [or] ‘sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.’”¹⁴⁵ The Church points the way to a kingdom of God built on justice, peace, and love, though this kingdom must never be confused with the earthly progress that foreshadows and anticipates it, and it will only be realized when Jesus returns at the end of history.¹⁴⁶

The picture that emerges from the Church’s social doctrine is a version of liberalism,¹⁴⁷ but one that differs in important ways from the most familiar contemporary versions. Like comprehensive forms of liberalism, Catholic social teaching affirms the value of human autonomy and self-determination, but it couples liberty with truth and truth with love. Love, in turn, strives for the common good,¹⁴⁸ and charity becomes a political value in a “civilization of love.”¹⁴⁹ Like political

139 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 76, at 230; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, para. 1, at 87; see also POPE LEO XIII, *supra* note 89, para. 13, at 19–20; POPE PIUS XI, *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO* paras. 7–13 (1931), *reprinted in* CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, *supra* note 89, at 43, 44–45.

140 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 56, at 567; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 5, at 477.

141 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 6; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 3, at 593.

142 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 6; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, paras. 3, 7, 63, at 593, 595, 611; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 56–57, at 567; see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 40, at 198–99 (describing a “dialogue” and “mutual exchange” between the Church and the world).

143 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 76, at 230; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, para. 6, at 88.

144 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 40, at 199.

145 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 31, at 448 (quoting SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *LUMEN GENTIUM* para. 1 (1964), *reprinted in* 1 VATICAN COUNCIL II: THE CONCILIAR AND POST CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS, *supra* note 77, at 350, 350); see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 45, at 204; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 276.

146 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 39, at 198; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 25, at 492–93; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 48, at 463–64.

147 The Church’s modern social teaching initially assailed liberalism, associating it with laissez-faire capitalism. See POPE PIUS XI, *supra* note 139, paras. 10, 25–30, at 45, 48–49. By 1961, Pope John XXIII associated “unregulated competition” with “so-called” liberalism, not liberalism per se. POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, para. 23, at 91.

148 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 7, at 531–32; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 231, at 662.

149 POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 231, at 662 (quoting Pope Paul VI, *Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace* (Jan. 1, 1977), https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19761208_x-world-day-for-peace.html [https://perma.cc/B232-RRTJ]); see *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 180–86; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 10, at 481.

liberalism, Catholic social doctrine embraces the core principles of liberty, equality, and fairness, but to these it adds the essential values of truth and love and their integral connection.

The Church also rejects any moral or legal limits on public dialogue that would exclude religious voices or other appeals to comprehensive belief systems. Rather, politics must be founded on enduring truths that are discovered and more deeply understood through a process of dialogue open to all voices, including religious ones.¹⁵⁰ The Church does not confuse consensus with truth, but she sees timeless principles emerging from open dialogue and being sustained by it.¹⁵¹ This includes the recognition of human dignity and the rights that follow from it.¹⁵² The Church recognizes that disagreements will persist in conditions of freedom¹⁵³ and that dialogue requires patience,¹⁵⁴ but she rejects political liberalism's conclusion that politics should eschew comprehensive understandings of the good. To the contrary, open dialogue is "fruitful."¹⁵⁵ We can grow—and so can our understanding—when we encounter those with different experiences or novel ideas.¹⁵⁶ An openness to hearing from others, including those with whom we disagree, is also a demand of love¹⁵⁷ and part of what it means to respect human dignity.¹⁵⁸ For the Church, dialogue is a dynamic process in which "prophetic" voices can challenge or convict us,¹⁵⁹ religious arguments can "echo" in human minds and hearts,¹⁶⁰ the "light" of revelation can illuminate our human experiences,¹⁶¹ and the insights of faith can "stimulate[] reason to broaden its perspectives."¹⁶²

150 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 203–14.

151 See *id.* paras. 211–13; see also POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 49, at 513 (stating that "[m]an remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in that truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations").

152 *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 213.

153 See *id.* para. 215.

154 See *id.* paras. 50, 190.

155 *Id.* para. 203. The Church's social teaching is itself an illustration. Later popes have recounted the welcome reception of *Rerum Novarum*, the first of the Church's modern social encyclicals, among Catholics and non-Catholics alike even as the encyclical also generated criticism from others. See POPE PIUS XI, *supra* note 139, paras. 7–14, at 44–45; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, para. 9, at 88.

156 *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 215; see also POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 47, at 606 (describing "true wisdom[]" as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons").

157 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 190–91.

158 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 23, at 188; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 191.

159 See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 16, at 486.

160 *Id.*

161 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, paras. 13, 22–23, at 181–82, 187–88.

162 *Evangelii Gaudium*, *supra* note 135, para. 238.

Even positions that we ultimately reject may contain valuable insights or “fragment[s] of truth” that we can recognize when we do not close ourselves off to them.¹⁶³

IV. CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT AND THE LIBERAL TRADITION

My purpose in describing the Church’s current social teaching is not primarily to point out where Catholic integralism goes wrong or to demonstrate that the desire for integrating religion and politics can take different forms. Nor is it just to clarify what the Church says about the relationship between freedom, truth and political power, or to explain that Catholic social doctrine embraces a form of liberalism that overlaps in important ways with familiar contemporary versions while also offering a much richer and more nuanced understanding of human freedom and a different understanding of the purpose and possibilities of political dialogue than many of these versions. All of these are important purposes of this Essay, but the examination of current Catholic social doctrine has more to contribute to current debates about the value and content of liberalism.

An essential feature of Catholic social thought is its dynamism. The Church continually draws upon what it understands to be enduring insights about human nature and ends, and it revisits its fundamental commitments over time as circumstances change and new challenges emerge.¹⁶⁴ As it does so, it builds upon and adapts its teaching.¹⁶⁵ Its understanding of fundamental principles deepens, its commitments are expressed and applied in new ways, and the emphases in its doctrine shift to address new insights and social conditions. The Church recognizes this body of thought as a “tradition”¹⁶⁶ characterized by both continuity and renewal.¹⁶⁷ In this process, the Church is a student as well as a teacher as she “scrutiniz[es] the signs of the times”¹⁶⁸ and “draws forth new things . . . in harmony with the old.”¹⁶⁹

163 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 46, at 510; *see Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 203, 217, 228.

164 *See* POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 3, at 427; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 3, at 474; POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 42, at 296–97.

165 *See* POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 3, at 427; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 3, at 474; POPE PAUL VI, *supra* note 111, para. 1, at 280; POPE JOHN XXIII, *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 92, paras. 9, 28, 50, at 88, 91, 95; POPE PIUS XI, *supra* note 139, para. 18, at 46–47.

166 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 3, at 474; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 12, at 534.

167 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 3, at 427; *see* POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 12, at 534.

168 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 4, at 175.

169 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 1, at 799.

She is also a dialogue partner with all those of good will.¹⁷⁰ The willingness of the Church to return continuously to the foundations of her social doctrine and to draw new things from old has kept the tradition vibrant and relevant.¹⁷¹

Today, liberalism has many detractors whose attacks come from a variety of different perspectives, and it is, perhaps, not an exaggeration to say that the overlapping consensus in favor of liberal values is cracking or even breaking up. Political liberals, in particular, have tended to be agnostic about the justifications for liberal values, assuming a consensus about them and avoiding questions that would draw them into debates about comprehensive understandings of the good.¹⁷² However, the emergence of today's Christian critics, among others, and the spillover of their ideas into the world of real politics makes entering into this terrain essential. We need to talk about liberalism's justifications, and we cannot do it without dialogue about human nature, purposes, and goods. We also need the type of open and inclusive conversations that the Church envisions. Many versions of liberalism will make liberalism stronger and more resilient. They will enrich one another and push one another to develop and grow. Liberalism must understand itself as a tradition that combines both continuity and change and includes diverse voices and perspectives. Its endurance requires continued reflection upon and development of its foundations and content over time.

The Church's social doctrine contributes an important perspective to this process of reflection and renewal. The Church's teaching itself draws on many influences including America's own political traditions,¹⁷³ and it offers an especially rich understanding of human freedom that can inform an understanding of politics that is not morally and spiritually empty but, rather, free and full. Catholic social thought also emphasizes values that are usually overlooked in more conventional versions of liberalism. Liberty is coupled with truth, truth is tied to love, and love respects human freedom as it strives for the common good. All human beings are worthy of love and called to extend it to others in return. Love respects human dignity, but it is not afraid to

170 See *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 6; see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, paras. 3, 40, at 175, 198.

171 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 12, at 534 (describing the Church's social thought as an "ever-living Tradition"); POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 3, at 474 (stating that "the true meaning of the church's tradition . . . [is] ever living and vital").

172 See QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 5–7, 8, 22, 291, 316–17.

173 For a discussion of the influence of America's tradition of religious liberty on the Church's embrace of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*, see JOHN T. NOONAN, JR., THE LUSTRE OF OUR COUNTRY: THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 351–53 (1998).

talk about truth with others.¹⁷⁴ This emphasis on love is, perhaps, the most important and distinctive contribution that Catholic social teaching can offer to the defense and understanding of liberalism today. It would certainly be surprising if the Church's social doctrine were adopted in full in any human society, but it would also be surprising if the Church's teaching has nothing to say even to those who disagree with large parts of it. I suspect that what the Church has to say about love would echo in many hearts tired of today's polarization, and it may even intrigue those who have been used to focusing on the basic principles of liberty, equality, and fairness.

V. THE REQUIREMENTS OF FAITH

There is, perhaps, one further concern that motivates many of today's Christian critics of liberalism. Catholic integralism's de-emphasis on human rights and embrace of coercion as a mechanism to promote moral and spiritual values reflects, in part, a deep concern that freedom does not appear to be working. Liberal societies that have embraced robust personal liberties have generated understandings of marriage, family, and human sexuality that depart from church teaching, and these understandings have not only received state support but also threatened to marginalize traditionalist religious believers and their institutions.¹⁷⁵ Liberal societies are also becoming more consumerist as the accumulation of things replaces the acquisition of wisdom and truth.¹⁷⁶ Thus, in their view, greater freedom is not deepening our understanding of the truth, but undermining it.

However, the Church counsels a different response. The Church recognizes that all earthly societies fall short of their ideals and that progress can be difficult and results disappointing.¹⁷⁷ She pays particular attention to persistent income inequalities and poverty within and among nations as well as economic conditions that devalue human persons.¹⁷⁸ She also calls attention to the dangers of consumerism,¹⁷⁹ threats to religious liberty,¹⁸⁰ and social trends and policies that undermine the essential role of the human family as the basic cell of human

174 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 28, at 191.

175 See Ahmari, *supra* note 34; Vermeule, *supra* note 11; Waldstein, *supra* note 68.

176 See *supra* note 8 and accompanying text.

177 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 78, at 580–81; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, paras. 47–48, at 462–64; POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, paras. 155–56, at 164.

178 See POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 33, at 548; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 47, at 462.

179 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 36, at 502.

180 POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 29, at 545–46; *Evangelii Gaudium*, *supra* note 135, para. 61.

society and the primary site of moral formation.¹⁸¹ In recent years, increasing polarization within societies has prompted a particularly bleak assessment.¹⁸² However, the answer is never despair,¹⁸³ nor a solution that would override the demands of human dignity and the requirements of love.¹⁸⁴ The Church envisions a role for the state in transmitting values and reinforcing social structures that enhance human flourishing, including the family and an ethical marketplace.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, she rejects solutions that would devalue or snuff out human freedom. “Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness,” the Church taught in the Second Vatican Council,¹⁸⁶ and a society that relies on external force is inhuman.¹⁸⁷ The Church also rejects any approach that views those in error as enemies to be overcome rather than

181 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, paras. 47, 52, at 205, 210–11; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 44, at 558–59; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 39, at 504–05; *Evangelii Gaudium*, *supra* note 135, para. 66.

182 *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 15–16. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes: “A plan that would set great goals for the development of our entire human family nowadays sounds like madness. We are growing ever more distant from one another, while the slow and demanding march towards an increasingly united and just world is suffering a new and dramatic setback.” *Id.* para. 16.

183 *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 54–55; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, paras. 21, 78–79, at 540, 580–81; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 47, at 462.

184 See, e.g., *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, para. 92 (rejecting the “imposition of . . . ideologies” or “a violent defense of the truth”); POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 17, at 537 (teaching that “[o]nly when it is free can development be integrally human; only in a climate of responsible freedom can it grow in a satisfactory manner”); POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 29, at 495–96 (rejecting the coercion of conscience); *id.* para. 46, at 510 (rejecting a “fanaticism or fundamentalism” that would “in the name of an ideology which purports to be scientific or religious, claim the right to impose on others [its] own concept of what is true and good” and teaching that “in constantly reaffirming the transcendent dignity of the person, the church’s method is always that of respect for freedom”); POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 34, at 142 (teaching that “[t]he dignity of the human person also requires that every man enjoy the right to act freely and responsibly” and that “any human society that is established on relations of force must be regarded as inhuman”).

185 See SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 52, at 211; *Fratelli Tutti*, *supra* note 90, paras. 112–14, 168; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 44, at 559; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, paras. 36, 40, at 502, 505; *Evangelii Gaudium*, *supra* note 135, paras. 54–58.

186 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 17, at 183; see also POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 94, para. 13, at 483 (teaching that “the good of the individual” cannot “be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil”).

187 POPE JOHN XXIII, *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 92, para. 34, at 142; see also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 17, at 183–84 (teaching that “man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice” that “is personally motivated and prompted from within,” not “from blind internal impulse nor . . . mere external pressure”).

persons to be respected and loved.¹⁸⁸ Thus, instead of abandoning liberty, Catholics must defend it and make use of their own freedom to develop, preserve, and share their own understanding of the truth and enter into dialogue with those who disagree.¹⁸⁹

In the face of setbacks and obstacles, the Church further counsels her members to “turn to God’s love”¹⁹⁰ and to deepen their faith and trust in God’s power and faithfulness while following Christ’s own example of self-giving and sacrifice.¹⁹¹ The Church does not envision a blind faith. There will always be a gap between earthly conditions and the kingdom of God, but she has “confidence” in God and in the human person.¹⁹² Progress that foreshadows and anticipates this kingdom should be sought with hope and expectation,¹⁹³ but results must be judged by the means available. Respect for human dignity and love for persons work differently than force. They seek voluntary assent and social development that is cultivated, not imposed. Faith in the power of God also entails humility about one’s own judgments. In the gap between the present we inhabit and the future we anticipate, our understanding will grow, and we can learn things from others, including those with whom we disagree. As Steven Smith has also observed in this Symposium, it is unlikely that conservative Christians would be the ones in charge of the state they seek to empower.¹⁹⁴ Catholic integralists worry that freedom does not work, but the form of integration that they envision almost certainly would not yield the results they intend.

Many of today’s liberals also have their own fears. Political liberals, in particular, tend to hew closely to a basic set of liberal principles that they believe all reasonable people will accept and then reason within them. In doing so, they exclude those who do not agree with their assumptions from the process of justification.¹⁹⁵ They also close themselves off to other views and fail to appreciate that liberalism’s

188 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 14, at 811.

189 See, for example, the counsel in *Dignitatis Humanae* that Christians “treat with love, prudence and patience those who are in error or ignorance with regard to the faith.” SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 14, at 811.

190 POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 79, at 581.

191 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 91, para. 38, at 197; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *supra* note 77, para. 14, at 811; POPE FRANCIS, *supra* note 90, para. 74, at 615; POPE BENEDICT XVI, *supra* note 92, para. 79, at 581; POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, paras. 40, 47–48, at 456, 463–64.

192 POPE JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 95, para. 47, at 462.

193 *Id.* (teaching that “[u]ltimately, this confidence and this possibility are based on the Church’s awareness of the divine promise guaranteeing that our present history does not remain closed in upon itself but is open to the kingdom of God”).

194 Steven D. Smith, *Christians and/as Liberals?*, 98 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1497, 1518 (2023).

195 See QUONG, *supra* note 13, at 290, 314.

vitality depends on engagement with new ideas, including new ideas about liberalism's foundations, justifications and requirements. This is, perhaps, in part because they fear that opening politics out to comprehensive views of the good will lead to something like Catholic integralism or other forms of illiberalism.¹⁹⁶ They may worry that liberalism might not survive the contest. Here, however, liberals need to revive their own faith: a faith in the power of reason and dialogue to support the liberal project. The alternative, we can already see, has the opposite effect of weakening liberalism.

196 For example, see the concern expressed in Richard Schragger & Micah Schwartzman, *Jews, Not Pagans*, 56 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 497, 510 (2019) (stating that "Jews embrace liberalism not because they are pagans but because, unlike any Christian politics they have known, it has guaranteed their free and equal citizenship").