RELIGIOUS REALISM IN FOREIGN POLICY: LESSONS FROM VATICAN II

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It is widely acknowledged that the great Vatican II Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae, was influenced by the American experience. Filtered through the work of Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray, the American understanding of religious freedom and its place in the nation’s democratic experiment helped to inform the Council Fathers in developing the Church’s doctrine of human freedom in civil society, and its view of the proper role of government in addressing the religious dimension of individual and social life.¹

It is thus sadly ironic that the American Founders’ understanding of religious freedom which influenced Father Murray’s work, and through him Dignitatis Humanae, has largely been abandoned by the American political class. What now pervades U.S. academic, judicial, and policy discourse is a thin and fragile view of religion as mere personal preference, and religious freedom as a privatized right with little legitimate connection to democratic public policy.² The consequences of this understanding for America’s moral and political well-being have been the subject of extensive commentary.³ What is perhaps less well known is that contemporary secularist notions of religious liberty have also had a crippling effect on American foreign policy. This article will examine how a broad and vigorous understanding of religious freedom is essential to U.S. foreign policy objectives, particularly the democratization of the Muslim nations of the greater Middle East. It suggests that the U.S. democratization strategy is being compromised by the foreign policy establishment’s suspicion of religion, and argues that principles articulated in Dignitatis Humanae can provide an important corrective to America’s faltering effort to foster Islamic democracy.

Religious Freedom as Keystone of Islamic Democracy

American national security strategy is now grounded in opposing tyranny and promoting democracy in the greater Middle East. The U.S. international democracy project, of course, is not new. It was begun under the Carter and Reagan administrations and has in the last two decades been responsible for considerable diplomatic activity, as well as the funding and growth of a cottage industry in democracy-promoting NGOs.

What is new is the application of this strategy to the Muslim countries of the greater Middle East. For decades the United States sought “stability” in this region by cooperating with tyrants and autocrats who abused their own citizens but, it was reasoned, at least kept the lid on Islamist extremism. It took 9/11 to dislodge this so-called “realist” assumption and force a major rethinking of American policy. Today the strategic goal is not only to capture or kill the terrorists in the global War on Terror, but to remove their raison d’être over the long-term by implanting political institutions of ordered liberty. Freedom, it is thought, is not only the lubricant of democracy, but the antidote to extremism.

Such a project cannot realistically be pursued, let alone succeed, without incorporating religious freedom in its broadest sense. That means going well beyond our current humanitarian policy of condemning religious persecution and the abuse of religious minorities, or achieving nominal constitutional protections. U.S. policy must also find ways of encouraging an accommodation between Islamism and democracy. In virtually every prospective Muslim transition to democracy—Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia—it will be the religious communities and the practitioners of political Islam that determine success or failure.

This is not as unusual as it may seem. Transitions to democracy in societies where religious communities play a significant role in public life, such as 18th-century Protestant America or 20th-century Hindu India, are often preceded by debate within the dominant religious communities. This debate is typically not about separation or secularism, but about the compatibility of religious norms with political reform. In other words, the groundwork for durable democracy is often laid by doctrinal development and an accommodation between religion and political order. Indeed, as Samuel Huntington, Peter Berger and others have argued, it was Vatican II in general and Dignitatis Humanae in particular that encouraged Catholics to support democratic reform in the “third wave” of democratization that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s.

The problem is, of course, that there are significant obstacles to democracy in some Islamic traditions. Modern Islamism, with some important exceptions, admits no legitimate distinction between the sacred and the secular. It is at base a monism that understands the ideal political order as one governed by divine (or shari‘a) law. Consequently, there is no durable moral or political concept of human freedom, and every reason for the state to employ coercion in religious matters against mainstream Muslims, let alone against heretics, apostates, and infidels. Depending on one’s reading of shari‘a, women may be viewed as less than equal persons under the law.

Iraq provides an example of the problem. If the insurgency is to be defeated and democracy to take root, there must be a political settlement between dominant ethnic (Kurd and Arab) and sectarian (Shia and Sunni) communities. But there must also be a democratic covenant between the authorities of religion and the state. Critics of the newly adopted constitution have highlighted provisions that may enable judges and lawmakers to sweep aside individual rights believed to contradict principles of Islam. Similar constitutional tensions between Islam and democracy exist in other Muslim states, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, and have led to shari‘a-driven suppression of individual rights.

But the problem goes far beyond the wording of a constitution. The critical issue is its interpretation over time. That will be determined by the intellectual climate that pervades the political order, the educational system, the media, and in particular schools of law. In the case of Iraq and most other Muslim countries, the intellectual climate will be greatly influenced by the prevailing religious understanding of the common good, i.e., what Islam believes a democracy to be.

Here is where American diplomacy—both private and public—is falling grievously short. To its credit, it did engage vigorously in the process of drafting an Iraqi constitution. But it is utterly unprepared over the long haul to
influence how Iraqi religious, political, and educational elites view the relationship between Islam and democracy. The current U.S. approach to rooting democratic institutions is essentially secularist. It focuses on developing the procedures of democracy and the secular associations of civil society (e.g., trade unions or women's movements). Those religious leaders we do engage tend to be “moderates” in the secularist sense—Muslims who, often educated in the West, are either nonobservant or dissidents with reinterpretations of Islam too liberal to resonate outside Western college faculty lounges (and the State Department). On those rare occasions when American diplomats address religion and politics with conservative Muslims, it is on an ad hoc basis; there is no long-term strategy to do so.

By the same token, a perusal of U.S.-funded NGO programs in Iraq reveals that little or no attention is being paid to the religious aspects of Muslim institutions, such as viewing religion as part of the “social capital” so vital to democracy. U.S.-Iraqi legal programs have largely been driven by secularist NGOs such as the American Bar Association, for whom religion is to be rigidly separated from matters of public policy.

As for U.S. public diplomacy—the “war of ideas” we are said to be undertaking in the Muslim world—there is no sustained attention to religious individuals and communities who shape the intellectual climate, especially the clerics and religious scholars. There have been two important U.S.-sponsored international women's conferences in Iraq, but no parallel energy invested in religion-state issues, such as regular discussions with Muslim groups about how religiously informed moral norms and democratic legal structures can be integrated, while protecting the fundamental rights of all citizens. Our foolish silence suggests we believe democracy and religion are incompatible. It invites the damaging inferences that we reject our own history and that democracy is inherently anti-Islamic.

There are today orthodox Muslims working to develop a democratic public theology which acknowledges the legitimate autonomy of a secular civil order and posits a distinctly Islamic argument for human rights and democracy. These men and women, spurred by the events of 9/11, democratic elections in Iraq, and their own political experiences, are not blind to the movement of history or its implications for Islam. In Iran, for example, there are traditionalist clerics who are now convinced that theocracy is destructive of Islam. The United States must identify and encourage such people. Orthodox Muslim reformers also live in America, and we should earnestly look for a Muslim John Courtney Murray who might have an impact on the development of a doctrine of religious liberty in the Islamic world. Indeed, we should include American Muslims more aggressively in our own public diplomacy efforts.

U.S. policy must, in short, learn how to identify those reformers who speak authentically from their religious traditions, as opposed to those who reflect Western strict separationist views. Whether we like it or not, it is the former, not the latter, who will control the future of Muslim democracies.

While recognizing the inevitable resistance it will encounter, America’s international religious freedom policy must find ways to influence the debate within Islam, and to encourage the emergence of an Islamic public theology compatible with liberal norms. To accomplish such a task, American diplomacy in all its forms—public, private, and U.S. funded NGO programs—must improve its ability to understand the stakeholders in Muslim societies as they understand themselves, namely, as political actors for whom religion is an end, not a means.
Foggy Bottom and the Privatization Premise

The fact is, however, that U.S. international religious freedom policy is not being employed effectively as an instrument of broader American interests abroad. In 1998 Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), which mandated that the United States advocate religious liberty worldwide. \(^\text{10}\) To guide that effort, the law established a policy and a bureaucracy to carry it out. Whatever else may be said about it, however, the new policy has not been seen as a means to address the larger implications of religion’s growing international importance, or to further the American democracy project. IRF policy has in effect been pigeonholed at the State Department. Few senior U.S. officials believe advancing religious freedom could or should be used to encourage stable relationships between political and religious authorities in key countries. Despite the ongoing efforts of some at State, “promoting religious freedom” has too often meant merely humanitarian activism: denouncing persecuting governments and engineering prisoner releases.

An irony of this narrow approach is that IRFA, while it certainly intended to focus on religious persecution, also provided the means to pursue a comprehensive religious freedom strategy. It established a high-level position, an Ambassador-at-Large, to head the office of International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, and designated the Ambassador as “principal advisor to the President and Secretary of State.” On paper the new official and his office are given considerable authority to “advance religious freedom worldwide” and a variety of tools to do it.

But neither the Ambassador’s title nor his legal authority has altered the official resistance to addressing religion systematically in American foreign policy. From the beginning, the IRFA Ambassador and his office were placed under the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). Although staffed by talented and dedicated people, DRL carries little policy influence at State and is generally shunned by Foreign Service Officers as “out of the mainstream” of foreign policy. While few FSOs oppose human rights advocacy per se, they tend to see it as a compartmentalized issue that has little connection to larger U.S. interests. For its part, DRL has in recent years adopted a secularist approach to the subject of human rights, treating religious liberty as relatively unimportant—or occasionally even dangerous—in the larger scheme of priorities. Although its record was mixed, the Clinton State Department tended to see the highest human rights priority as population control, and was doubtless aware that too much freedom for traditional religious communities could frustrate that goal. \(^\text{11}\) While Bush administration appointees have not carried that ideological baggage, they have done little to change the situation.

The bureaucratic and functional quarantine of international religious freedom policy has been no secret in Washington. The problem was publicly revealed in a 2003 report of the State Department’s Inspector General, which was sent to Congress and reported in the media. \(^\text{12}\) But neither Congress nor the coalition that originally lobbied for IRFA has seen fit to address the issue. A separate Commission on International Religious Freedom, established by the Act as a watchdog agency, has made a number of excellent policy recommendations. But it too has largely ignored the State Department’s isolation of religious freedom policy and its circumvention of the Ambassador and office of International Religious Freedom.

What are the reasons for this shortsightedness? One is the State Department’s well-developed ability to ignore unwanted congressional mandates (which is not always a bad thing, but is counterproductive in this context). The most significant source of the problem, however, is the crippling assumption
by foreign policy elites that religious freedom entails the privatization of religion, the strict separation of religion from public life. Religion, according to this view, is not only not a constituent of democracy, but the very nature of religion—irrational, unpredictable, and productive of passions—places democracy at risk. Far from being what natural law would label a human good, religion is at best a private human choice that, like consensual sex or stock car racing, merits some protection in law.

The “privatization” assumption has been absorbed like mother’s milk by almost the entire range of those groups composing the foreign policy establishment. That spectrum includes the realists, the liberal internationalists, and, perhaps to a lesser degree, even the neoconservatives who are thought to run contemporary American foreign and defense policy. Interestingly, the problem is worsened by some on the Christian Right, who while vigorously opposing the privatization of religion in America are yet willing to countenance the privatization premise in U.S. policy toward the Muslim world. For some in this group, “engaging Islam” is a metaphor for military action and little else.

Somewhat ironically, the privatization premise has also been embraced by a strain of “progressive” American Catholics who have wrongly concluded that Vatican II and Dignitatis Humanae established a bright red line between freedom (a public democratic virtue) and truth (a private opinion). This view, articulated most famously by Mario Cuomo in a 1984 speech at Notre Dame, holds that religiously-informed moral judgments (e.g., that abortion is a grave moral evil and a human rights abuse destructive of the common good) are matters of private conscience and therefore may not be “imposed” on others in a democratic order. The Church, seen as a mere broker of private religious activity, may not legitimately hold to account those adherents who, elected to public office, openly decline to follow its teachings.\(^\text{13}\)

This view is nowhere to be found in the teachings of Dignitatis, as the following section will demonstrate.\(^\text{14}\) No one could reasonably conclude that Dignitatis abandoned the Church’s religious liberty right to demand fidelity from elected Catholic politicians (who are entirely free as a civil matter to leave the Church if they reject its teachings).\(^\text{15}\) Nevertheless, the “progressive” understanding of religious freedom clearly contributes to the paralysis besetting our foreign policy elite in addressing that issue in other cultures.

Because our diplomats too often see “religious freedom” as simply one of many privacy rights, without any special claim on the human person or public human behavior, our religious freedom policy lacks the vocabulary or the will to engage foreign religious communities, especially non-Western religious communities, on how their traditions might accommodate or be accommodated by democracy. At the same time, and largely because of our incoherence on the subject, many Muslim religious communities view our democracy project and our religious freedom policy as inherently anti-Islamic.\(^\text{16}\)

The Religious Realism of Dignitatis Humanae

The Catholic Church’s Declaration on Religious Freedom can help American foreign policy out of its self-defeating privatization premise. There are at least two areas where the principles established in Dignitatis Humanae would repay study by the foreign affairs establishment. The first is the Declaration’s portrayal of the natural religious dimension of the human person, a dimension that is intimately tied to human flourishing and requires protection in the civil order precisely for that reason, and not because it is one among many private human choices.

If Dignitatis Humanae is correct about human nature, it provides reasonable grounds for abandoning the thin privatization approach to religious liberty. If its arguments are compelling, it gives American foreign policy good reasons for integrating religion into its assumptions about human behavior and how to influence it. If the drive to discover religious truth is as universal and influential as the drive to political power and economic gain, then
no one can rationally ignore its implications for political order. Religious freedom would then necessarily take its place as a key factor in any strategy to facilitate democratic institutions, and to tie the religious impulses of men to public purposes in a democratic society.

The thin view of religious liberty, as well as its implicit anthropology, has long been buttressed by the so-called secularization theory. Born in the 18th-century French Enlightenment, that theory survives among Western academic, political, media, and entertainment elites to this day.17 It holds that religion will inevitably decline among individuals and societies, and ultimately will disappear, with the advance of reason, science, and modernity.

The core premise of the secularization theory is that religious observance is not only unnatural, but comprises little more than a superstitious grasping for meaning that cannot survive the maturing of human knowledge. Those who retain the superstition should be tolerated in a democratic system, but should be permitted no more influence on public policy than alchemists and sorcerers. Modern American versions of such sentiments abound—from the Washington Post’s infamous caricature of evangelical Christians as “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command,” to New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof’s lament about a poll showing that 91 percent of American Christians actually believe in the Virgin birth of Jesus—up five percent from the previous year! This, Kristof wrote, was a sure sign of the “withering” of the intellectual traditions of Christianity, akin to the crisis in the Muslim world that, he implies, led to 9/11.18

In 1965 the Vatican II Council Fathers were asserting precisely the opposite theory of religion’s place in the human makeup. They taught that all persons are in fact religious by nature, i.e., that every person naturally yearns to know the truth about God and man. Far from some leap into the dark, this religious yearning reflects men’s “dignity as persons—that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear individual responsibility” (section 2 of Dignitatis Humanae).19 Moreover, the search for truth must be carried out “in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the search for truth” (3). As a constitutive element of human dignity, the quest for religious truth is utterly necessary to human flourishing, both individually and in society.20

Now if the religious enterprise is natural, necessary, and good, Dignitatis Humanae reasons, then all persons, individually and as parts of religious communities, have a natural right not to be coerced by any human agency in matters of religion. This right is to be manifested in politics and society by means of a twofold constitutional immunity. The first is what we might call an interior right not to be forced to believe something contrary to conscience. The second is the right not to be restricted from manifesting one’s belief in public, except in cases where the government has the responsibility to protect “the just demands of public order” (2, 4).

According to the Council this right to religious freedom applies to every person by virtue of his/her very existence. It does not derive from “the subjective disposition of the person,” including the quality of his religious opinions or commitments. The Church is here saying that the right to religious freedom as an immunity from coercion does not increase or decrease with the proximity to religious truth achieved by an individual or community. Everyone must be immune from coercion in the civil order because that immunity is required by the very nature of the human person. “In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it” (2).

In a manner similar to America’s founders, Dignitatis Humanae grounds religious freedom in an assertion about human nature that cuts across other distinctions of race, sex,
nationality, or ethnicity. So understood, the right to religious liberty becomes more than yet another item on the list of particular rights that are in a bureaucrat’s “portfolio” at the State Department. Just as the religious quest itself is acknowledged as a powerful but rational aspect of the personality, its protection becomes more than a matter of special pleading for one or another interest group.

Nor should this grounding of religious freedom be feared by the non-religious. Indeed it provides better protection for their non-belief than secularist theories of religious liberty, wherein religion merits no more protection than any other preference and the right to believe or not believe can be swept away by majority vote. The Council understood religious freedom as nonnegotiable not because religious people are superior to others, or because the right to the religious quest supersedes other rights. It is a necessary freedom because without it no one can be said to live a fully human life, and to have the opportunity to flourish as a person in community. Moreover, to protect religious liberty is necessarily to protect other fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, and equality before the law.

But is there any contemporary empirical evidence that this argument about the religious nature of man, however appealing in its philosophic universality, is true? In part the answer is yes. We are today faced with overwhelming data that religious observance is spreading and deepening around the world.21 As a result, sociologists of religion, or at least those capable of discerning reality from wishful thinking, have in the last three decades begun to abandon the secularization theory.22

For example, New School sociologist Jose Casanova observes that “we are witnessing the deprivatization of religion in the modern world … [in which] religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them.”23 Surveying the evidence, Penn State historian Philip Jenkins predicts that the 21st century will “be regarded by future historians as a century in which religion replaced ideology as the prime animating and motivating force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood, and, of course, conflicts and wars.”24

If the international spread of religion, then, provides some evidence that the Dignitatis view of human nature is accurate, how is this reality to be dealt with in the social and political order? Here we turn to the second aspect of Dignitatis Humanae that would repay study by America’s foreign policy establishment, particularly in light of its goal of fostering democratic institutions in the Muslim world—the role of religion and religious communities in society. If the United States intends to facilitate democracy in nations dominated by religious communities, how should it think about the role of those communities in civil society? What is their proper relationship to a democratic government?

The Council Fathers approached the issue of religious communities by acknowledging their inevitability and their appropriateness. Dignitatis Humanae puts it this way: “The social nature of man requires … that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion; that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community” (3). Accordingly, the constitutional immunity from coercion demanded for individuals must also extend to religious communities.

Part of the Council’s interest in religious communities was of course intended to reaffirm the freedom of the Church itself, a freedom which Dignitatis Humanae grounds not only in natural law but also in revelation. Here we touch upon one of the several areas where the document reaffirms the Church’s view of itself, and identifies its particular truth
claim. The Catholic Church, says Dignitatis Humanae, “is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth” (14). Its freedom, purchased with the blood of Christ, is sacred, and, as Murray put it, “unique, proper to herself alone, by reason of its foundation.” To act against the Church’s freedom was “to act against the will of God” (13). This is true because the “one true religion subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church.” The teaching of Vatican II therefore “leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the one true religion and the one Church of Christ” (1). This is no invitation to a vacuous “indifferentism” which concludes that all religions are the same.”

And yet, notwithstanding their reaffirmation of the Church’s centrality in the life of men, the Council Fathers were not reasserting the Church’s right to a privileged position in the civil order. Indeed, to the extent that position lingered as an acceptable one in the minds of some Roman Catholics, they were abandoning it altogether and affirming the right of other religious communities, both Christian and non-Christian, to equality in that order. Dignitatis Humanae demanded for these communities a host of rights, including the right to select, train, and place clergy, communicate with “religious authorities and communities abroad,” raise funds, own property, erect buildings, and “establish educational, cultural, charitable and social organizations, under the impulse of their own religious sense” (4).

Further, religious communities were not to be hindered in “public teaching and witness” concerning their religious and moral beliefs, provided there was nothing coercive, dishonorable, or unworthy involved, such as the exploitation of the uneducated or the poor. Perhaps most important of all for the construction of durable democracy, the Declaration asserted for all religious communities the right publicly to demonstrate “the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity” (4).

Here we arrive at the apex of the Declaration’s logic, and its defense of truth-claiming religion in the democratic public square. The search for religious truth is innate and necessary for human flourishing, hence it must be protected by societies and governments. Because it is accomplished in community with others, the religious quest requires protection for communities, whose essence is the public proclamation of what they believe. The good of men and of societies mandates that governments not only protect the right to pursue these matters, but that, as Dignitatis Humanae puts it, it must “help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life,” so that people might “exercise their religious rights and … fulfill their religious duties, and also in order that society itself may profit from the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in men’s faithfulness to God” (6).

Conclusion

We have in Dignitatis Humanae a Catholic doctrinal statement which demands immunity from coercion in the civil order for all persons and institutions in matters of religion, subject only to the just requirements of public order. Assume for a moment that the powers that be at Foggy Bottom had read Dignitatis Humanae and accepted both its political anthropology and its principles about the role of governments in respecting and favoring the religious life. Aside from having to hire lawyers to defend themselves against lawsuits from strict-separationists like the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, what might our diplomatic leaders do in a practical sense to act on these principles and increase the effectiveness of U.S. international religious freedom policy?

In fact there are numerous realistic steps that could be taken, all of which would help
move robust religious freedom from the margins to the center of U.S. foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. A full slate of policy recommendations exceeds the bounds of this essay, but I would suggest four near-term points of departure. First, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom should be given working authority and resources within the State Department commensurate with what IRFA has stipulated all along. Second, the Ambassador and others within the U.S. foreign policy establishment should broaden the U.S. religious freedom strategy and increase dialogue with conservative Muslim scholars and jurists open to reform. Third, the Foreign Service should develop a religion specialty within its political affairs career track and—here’s the rub—treat it seriously; even those disposed to do so will hesitate to embrace a new specialty unless it is widely supported by the Service, integrated into key embassies, and rewarded. Lastly, religious communities must be incorporated into U.S. public diplomacy and U.S.-funded democracy programs, including “civil society” programs. If there is to be a Muslim John Courtney Murray, let’s help him or her find a voice.

An increased role for religious freedom and religious communities in U.S. foreign engagement will of course be fraught with challenges and pitfalls. But it would be the height of irresponsibility to continue America’s current privatization-driven inertia on matters of religion and foreign policy. Americans, of all peoples, should be more open to—and realistic about—the authentic religious wellsprings of human behavior. After all, the development of the Catholic doctrine of political freedom in Dignitatis Humanae was inspired by the American experience.

7. This has been a hot topic in the United States for over a decade. See, for example, Corwin Smidt, ed., Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004).
10. The text of the RFI Act can be found online at http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/22937.pdf.
11. The Department’s efforts on population control took center stage during the 1994 international conference on population in Cairo. In a February 1, 1995 press briefing on the Department’s Human Rights Report, Under Secretary for Global Affairs Tom Wirth emphasized State’s emphasis on “the new non-traditional issues” such as population. He argued elsewhere that “population… is the central switching issue that relates to everything else.” See www.hrw.org/ipsp/twirth.htm.
14. “The Declaration nowhere lends its authority,” wrote John Courtney Murray, “to the theory for which the phrase [freedom of conscience] frequently stands, namely, that I have the right to do what my conscience tells me to do, simply because my conscience tells me to do it. This is a pernicious theory, — the notion that, in the end, it is my conscience, and not the objective truth, which determines what is right or wrong, true or false.” Walter H. Abbott, ed., The Documents of Vatican II (Piscataway: New Century Publishers, 1966), pp. 678-79, footnote 5.
15. Ibid. On the rights of the Church, see especially p. 693, paragraph 13.
16. Some of this distinct differences stems from an association of American democracy with libertarianism, or with the French model of command based secularism. Aboud Faki-Asnani argues that Muslim fears of secularism derive from a series of 19th century mistranslations of “secular” as “nonreligious” and “godless.” Faki-Asnani, Muslims and Democracy in Larry Diamond et al., eds., World Religion and Democracy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005), pp. 154-155. This argument, it seems to me, ignores the substantially anti-religious strain in modern secularism.
19. Further citations of Dignitatis Humanae will be given parenthetically by section number. All quotations are from Abbott, ed., The Documents of Vatican II.
20. John Finnis, in a 2003 address, put Dignitatis’ philosophical argument this way: “So important is it for each human being to seek, find, and live according to the truth about God and man—religious truth—that coercion, which prevents, distorts or tends to render inauthentic that search for religious truth is wrongful.” This means that each person possesses a natural right, a claim against all civil authority, not to be coerced in matters religious, and that government has, in Finnis’ words, the “duty not to commit that wrong.”