Is Religious Freedom Possible in a Liberal Culture?

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For several years, I have had the occasion -- within the framework of the ministry entrusted to me in my service at the Pontifical Council for the Family -- to travel to a number of countries on different continents to speak on issues concerning human love, marriage, and the family. More and more, I have the impression that in the majority of the world's regions, the space for religious freedom is shrinking more and more. As it already has been demonstrated in different presentations, religious freedom is a right whose practice integrates different aspects, as much on the collective level as on the personal level. This right does not have quite the same meaning according to the point of view of liberal democracies, or in the Church's point of view. More than three centuries ago, modern democracies already were theorizing a view that was at times philosophical (Bayle, Voltaire) and especially legal concerning religious freedom. How could we not think of Article I of the *Bill of Rights*: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof?* Even closer to us in time, this right is affirmed clearly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 approved by the United Nations: *This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance*. The text *Dignitatis Humanae*, proposed by the Church only a half century ago, formalized what she always had defended: The rights of conscience seen as a sanctuary that always must be respected. In this sense, the Church had never forged a division between interiority and exteriority, or between conscience and right, as certain authors have been able to observe.[1] The human dignity of the person demands that his freedom to adhere or not to a determined faith be recognized, as well as his freedom of worship, his freedom to act in the name of his religious and moral convictions, the right to pastoral services, and the exercise of conscientious objection founded upon faith. Societies that find their inspiration in a relativistic philosophy make themselves out to be theoretical

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[1] Among them: F. D'AGOSTINO, Preface, « La libertà religiosa in un orizzonte post-secolare », in *Credere è reato ? Libertà religiosa nello Stato laico e nella società aperta*, Luigi Berzano (ed.), Messaggero, Padova 2012, 5-12.

defenders of individual freedoms that they sometimes glorify emphatically. We will illustrate how this assertion contradicts reality. At the collective level, religious freedom concerns the autonomous organization of churches; the free practice of ministry; the freedom to conduct religious formation and teaching, that of preaching in matters of faith and morals; and finally that of acting as a group in the name of its religious and moral convictions across a number of areas within social life: education, accompaniment of the sick, and different works of solidarity. When *Dignitatis Humanae* was written, we found ourselves within a social and cultural context that was decipherable easily enough. Two world views clashed with one another: one being collectivist, present within the countries of the Communist bloc; and the other view that willingly would define itself as that of the *free world*. It is not a matter of dispute that this dual vision covered a tangible reality: It was possible to practice faith and to teach in religious matters, and within the moral realm in all of the countries that formed the *free world*. The latter readily found itself in the example offered by the New World. How can we not remember the admirable statement articulated by Pope Benedict XVI on April 15th, 2008 on board the plane that was transporting him to the United States? Responding to a question that had been formulated by a journalist in Italian, Pope Benedict stated the following : *What I find fascinating in the United States is that they began with a positive concept of secularity, because this new people was composed of communities and individuals who had fled from the State Church and wanted to have a lay, a secular State that would give access and opportunities to all denominations, to all forms of religious practice. The State itself had to be secular precisely out of love for religion in its authenticity, which can only be lived freely ... This seems to me to be a fundamental and positive model ... worthy of being borne in mind in Europe*[2]. It is not for me to say if the Pope would say the same words concerning the same country today, five years later. What I do have the freedom to state clearly is that during the course of the past five years, something has changed within the regions that we represent here.

Before providing evidence of it to you, I would like to return to the expression *liberal culture* that is used in the title of this presentation. There are two possible meanings for this term. The first refers to a social organization that would leave alone the great economic balances of a country organized naturally according to the laws of supply and demand and free exchanges, favoring as much as possible the free enterprise of its citizens. In this view, without a doubt, initiative is respected and encouraged among persons, groups, enterprises,

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[2] BENEDICT XVI, *Interview of the Holy Father during the Flight to the United States of America*, 15 April 2008.

and associations. In liberal societies, according to the meaning that we have just detailed, State intervention, very reduced in scope, is exerted only to correct minor malfunctions in principle. Yet even there, it is difficult to assess whether or not this kind of society really continues to exist. The question is legitimate, if one considers the ever increasing standards imposed by international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations.

The second meaning of the expression *liberal culture* refers to the moral liberalism involving a view of absolutized freedom. A *liberal culture* here refers to a permissive society where partial or subjective values are exalted, among which – in addition to a notion of freedom without limits – there is the pursuit of well-being in the hedonistic sense of the term, the elimination of moral norms as well as a confused view in the religious sphere. In simple terms, we have a strict separation between freedom and nature, this term being for that matter increasingly ignored and discredited. Our reflection thus is written within the context of a *liberal culture* along the lines of the second description that we have just defined. It is characterized by a real *ethical relativism*, an expression dear to Pope Benedict XVI and for which we could propose the following definition: Relativism is the intentional or unintentional neglect of the natural moral Law.

On October 5th, 2007, in an address to the members of the International Theological Commission, the Pope stated the following: *If, by tragically blotting out the collective conscience, skepticism and ethical relativism were to succeed in deleting the fundamental principles of the natural moral law, the foundations of the democratic order itself would be radically damaged ... When the fundamental requirements of human dignity, of human life, of the family institution, of a fair social order, in other words, basic human rights, are at stake, no law devised by human beings can subvert the law that the Creator has engraved on the human heart without the indispensable foundations of society itself being dramatically affected.*[3]

When the successor to Peter refers to the democratic order, he does not intend to give a lesson in political science; he intends to underscore the fact that a human society organizing itself in a political community needs to respect its foundations, namely the natural moral law, without which the honor owed to the dignity of the human person and to institutions that structure social life tend to disappear: marriage, family, and judiciary systems just to name a few. It is appropriate then to specify the conditions for the existence of – or today for the survival of – a political community in the proper sense of the term: the *polis*; this will permit

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[3] BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the International Theological Commission*, 5 October 2007

us afterwards to see what is meant by the disregard for these conditions in a morally liberal downward spiral. The response to the question "*Is religious freedom possible in a liberal culture?*" will become more apparent.

I.   The requirements of political community

What is striking in political debates overall is the lack of criteria for defining the nature of human society when it is organized in political community. The debt that all democratic societies have towards Greek thought, most especially to Plato and Aristotle, must be acknowledged. We owe to the latter this fundamental idea that the city (the *polis*) is the end in which all communities find their fulfillment and are able to better themselves. We owe to Aristotle as well the assertion that a genuine political community is organized according to a principle of justice. Justice is a virtue that permits a harmonious relationship to operate between an individual and politician. It thus does not involve -- as a large number of political officials and commentators pretend to believe -- responding to individual demands emanating from this or that lobby or vocal minority. According to Aristotle as well as for nearly all philosophers who have thought about political affairs (*res publica*), with a small number of exceptions (for example Hobbes, Marx, and a half century ago representatives of postmodern thought), the virtue of justice is a requirement of the nature of man, considered as a *political animal* (*politikon zoon*). For Aristotle, the *city* is the result of a natural process that starts from the basic human need to interact with others, in order to realize the supreme good of the community. A good of the community thus exists in itself, one that cannot be the sum total of its citizens' singular aspirations, but which has a consistency that only the virtue of justice can give. The subject of a *common good* is less and less extensive in our day. One of the last philosophers to have done so is the French Jacques Maritain, whom it pleases me to acknowledge in this place could only have developed and taught his thought in the United States, after the well-meaning institutions of his own country already had judged incorrect any social or political thought that found its inspiration in Gospel teaching. It is known that the Church's thought concerning the rights of the human person owes itself to the thought of this master.

Today, in order to appreciate this kind of contribution, it has become necessary to consider what makes man a being in relation. The desire to communicate exists within each person, to develop relationships with others in different ways, which can range from a simple external relationship to the most intimate communion. This everyday observation corresponds

to the nature of man and woman; it cannot be reduced to an absolute choice but conforms to the need for every spiritual creature to have interpersonal relationships. An interpersonal relationship supposes that each party act humanly as a person, and therefore in turn is treated as a person. This approach excludes any objectification or manipulation of the other person. It also entails that what distinguishes each must be respected, personal freedom.

It is impossible to cover here the innumerable contributions of personalistic thought in this regard. How could we not mention the distinction that Gabriel Marcel made between *problem* and *mystery*? A problem is resolved, but one cannot resolve a mystery … It is entered into with respect. According to Marcel, *mystery* designates all that be referenced to the human person.

For his part, in *Love and Responsibility* Karol Wojtyła described the elements that define a being in relation: the *citizen* (member of a public community), the *parent* (member of a familial community), and the *believer* (member of a religious community). Men are members of several communities at one time. To belong to a community of interest or of destiny is only the first degree of relationship. There is a shift toward a more intimate reality: the moment that allows us to recognize the other person as our neighbor. How could we not mention in contrast the response that Cain gave to God when He questioned him about his brother Abel: *Am I my brother's keeper?*

Recognizing our neighbor in the other is to take upon ourselves a responsibility towards him. Emanuel Lévinas called this sentiment *responsibility for others*: *The connection with another is tied up in responsibility, one that may be accepted or refused, one that someone may or may not know how to assume, one in which someone may or may not be able to do something tangible for another.* It is known that this author expressed the person of the other by his *face*, which he defined as the *expressive in the other*, that which *orders* me to serve him[4]. The uniqueness of the person cannot be expressed any better.

The first application of the foregoing is that persons are not interchangeable, and they elude all reductivist applications, especially those that fall into the minority. Yes, Cain, you were responsible for your brother. He was your neighbor!

What is a neighbor? It is he to whom we feel to be close and whom we recognize as being close to us. It concerns the recognition of familiarity, of a community of nature, and the acknowledgement of the other as a wealth given to us. Friendship and love are a specific and more intense participation in the humanity of a person, more intense because it engages

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[4] E. LEVINAS, *Ethique et infini*, Ch. 8: responsabilité pour autrui.

interiority. Love is the *presence of the beloved in the one who loves,* the ancients of old would say. It appertains to the same essence of love that it be an interpersonal, and not unilateral, relationship. Only an individualistic view of love, according to which the presence of a personal feeling would guarantee authenticity in itself, forgets the essential character of reciprocity and the gratuity of the double gift that is made to the other by each party in the relationship. This relationship generates a common good in two ways: friendship and love. All friendship love (*amor benevolentiae*) implies alterity ("otherness"), which often is the driving force of love and not an obstacle to its development. Louis Lavelle observed that *there is only true than where, instead of suffering from the difference between the other and me, it is this same difference that gives me joy.*[5] This alterity appears at its highest point in the particular form of communion that consists of the loving relationship between man and woman. In effect, it is deeply rooted in the nature of one and the other. However, alterity is present necessarily in every relationship of sincere friendship; what is recognized in the friend is a particular richness perceived as an enrichment and not as a threat.

We could explore leisurely how man's essential and structural relationships always assume fundamental alterity: the relationship between man-woman, or the relation between son-father. On the basis of this personalist and social anthropology that is barely outlined here, it is understood that a political community -- in the best sense of the term -- describes a society that recognizes and acknowledges the alterity within it.

The *city* is not the abolition of all these communities. It respects them while giving them the means to exist and to find their fulfillment.

It protects the good of all because it is the depository for it. It does not create an imaginary, ideal, or ideological common good. The common good precedes the responsibility of politicians who do not have the mandate to do or undo as they wish that which on the contrary they are supposed to serve and protect.

The fact that a genuine political community is organized around a formal unity in principle accepted by all (the idea of justice) leads it not to fall into what we would call today a *communitarian society*. A *communitarian society* is a comunity at large where communities live unconnected, impermeably, and do not unite around safeguarding the common good.

Conversely, as it has been said, the *city* does not abolish communities because if it were to do so, it inevitably would be transformed into a concentration camp-like universe worthy of an Orwellian world. To do away with communities would mean destroying social

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[5] L. LAVELLE, *De l'Acte*, p. 520

alterity. Men would become citizens without personality, interchangeable among themselves, no longer being able to distinguish between children and parents, one another no longer considered as neutral citizens: the child could attack his parents in justice.   At an extreme, members of the same family even could be separated by violence, as happened for example in Cambodia twenty years ago for millions of individuals.   When distinctions are abolished between citizens, rights necessarily enter into conflict.

II. The downward spiral of liberal societies

Contemporary societies are not only governed by leaders bearing a legitimate authority that allows them to carry out the duties of government or administration of the country entrusted to them for a determined period of time. Political responsibility now must assimilate and integrate another power, that of the press in all of its forms -- written and oral -- a power that is part of what is now called a *media-centered culture.* It is obvious that we can find people who lament it as much as delight in it. It seems to me that focus is not given often to the unprecedented fact that the capacity of the media has been magnified in recent years by the ability to communicate in real time, such that every limit of time and space has been eliminated. This has major implications for the abolition of a social *ethos* that we ourselves are witnessing. To communicate information "live" in a manner destined to reach a large number of persons simultaneously is to lose the minimum time necessary for the analysis and interpretation of related events. That could be as well the expression of unlimited power that imposes new criteria for judgment, new standards of living, and ultimately new ways of thinking about the relationship between individual and community. This power is immense because communication does not remain content with transmitting ideas, arguments or even summaries but also communicates images whose force of impact is now able to shape crowds according to the latest trends, trends that are now introduced into the moral realm. Allow me then to introduce within my definition of a liberal society this specific characteristic of the media-centered culture as we are able to see expressed today.

The second element that seems to me to characterize liberal society is the *individualism* that consists in limiting a person's own cultural and relational horizon to his own personal ideas, to his tastes and desires, without being able to bring into this horizon any consideration of another's freedom, dignity, or objective wealth. From the point of view of government officials who favor it, individualism involves favoring this isolation of persons while multiplying demands or secondary or anecdotal commodities upon them, in short, while

deploying an infinite number of choices. The individual has the immediate illusion of being infinitely free, at the moment where he is enslaved by an infinity of products that alienate and divide him. Political cynicism in these societies consists of ignoring these devastating effects and eventually these endless demands. The individual isolated within his increasingly virtual universe, ever more removed from the concrete experience of relationship with another, is not a threat to the political power who then can manipulate him with ease. Until only some years ago, the products proposed were especially of a material kind.   One spoke of a consumer society and consumer products thirty years ago. Today, what seems decisive to me is the capacity of the liberal culture to propose immaterial goods: virtual history without seemingly any link to concrete life, the illusion of feelings, *online sexuality*, and finally ideological conditioning at the moral and social levels. It is not our aim here to go into detail concerning the instruments placed in the service of these counter-values propagated within this artificial universe. Nevertheless, we must remain conscious that the problem posed -- by the utilization of unprecedented and infinite means placed at the service of new ideologies – has not yet found a credible solution.

I would like to give witness here to what I personally have observed during the course of these past years during which, in service to the Pontifical Council for the Family, I have travelled to a number of countries to speak on the important theme of marriage and the family. Consequently, I will take as my example the diffusion of *gender theory* across the different continents. For a little less than ten years at the Council for the Family, and also at the John Paul II Institute, we have been able to work on this question of *gender*, well before the question entered into public debate in my country two years ago, concerning the intent behind the question of school biology curricula that put forward *gender theory* as a scientific certainty. The parents of these students reacted, and the question was debated in the French Parliament. The problems that we have mentioned here called some years ago for treating the anthropological and ethical aspects of the problem, something that remains indispensable to do in any case even today. I have chosen simply to tell you how many of these problems mentioned have worsened over the past three or four years, in an accelerated process difficult to measure at the time. During the course of the 13th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization last October, everyone noted that more than 100 bishops had mentioned the essential question of the familial institution during their presentations. All arrived at the conclusion that there will be no new evangelization without strong pastoral action towards families. In the final message of October 26, one reads: *Ever since the first evangelization, the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next found a natural*

home in the family … A new evangelization is unthinkable without acknowledging a specific responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to families and to sustain them in their task of education. A comment is necessary: If the family cell explodes, the natural place for faith to be transmitted and lived disappears.

On the occasion of his Christmas wishes to the Roman Curia, the Pope expressed himself with unusual gravity. Meditating on the capacity of man and woman to enter into relationship for their entire lives, he added: *Man's refusal to make any commitment – which is becoming increasingly widespread as a result of a false understanding of freedom and self-realization ... means that man remains closed in on himself ... Only in self-giving does man find himself, and only by opening himself to the other, to others, to children, to the family, only by letting himself be changed through suffering, does he discover the breadth of his humanity. When such commitment is repudiated, the key figures of human existence likewise vanish: father, mother, child – essential elements of the experience of being human are lost.* It thus did not escape the synodal Fathers or the Successor to Peter that the recent evolution has been much more grave than what was anticipated even five years ago.

Let us consider the example of the legalization of unions between persons of the same sex in different countries, unions to which the name of "marriage" has been given abusively. Not long ago, the transgressive aspect of such a choice predominated. Nevertheless, the situation has become extremely complex and troubling, insofar as it gives this transgression legal consistency, making this issue an absolute novelty that is penetrating different areas of social life: areas of relationship, of politics, and of institutions. The accelerated character of this novelty -- giving legal recognition to a homosexual union -- leads us to ask if there is a deliberate drive crossing cultures and nations to establish a new morality (actually called a *morality of consensus*) and a new organization of social life. For the past three years, I have been able to go to Argentina on two occasions. The first time, I met with members of the Argentinian Parliament who led me to observe that government's use of an argument seemingly impossible to contradict, the argument of *equality* to justify the initiative of a completely revolutionary law in Latin America. The expression that was used by the Argentinian government was *matrimonio igualitario*, or *egalitarian matrimony*. These parliamentarians had understood perfectly well that the *principal of equality* is practically infallible insofar as it provides legal grounds for marginalizing opponents of the law. After this first trip, I was able to explain to different bishops from my country -- together with family associations during their visit to Rome -- that after a delay of some months, the argument of equality would be utilized in several European countries, beginning with France.

I even tried with them to imagine how this concept would be translated in French.   I had to admit that, at the time, I had not imagined the expression that became a true slogan in France over the course of mere weeks: *marriage for all* -- an expression far more alluring than in the original Spanish!   As you doubtlessly know, this bill was passed last week by the National Assembly, in spite of the extraordinary demonstration of more than one million people last January 13th. Permit me to remark to you that during the same week, the same project happened coincidentally to be passed by the British Parliament by way of a proposal by the conservative government. And what is there to say of the threat of that country's Prime Minister addressed to African countries to do away with all economic aid if their government officials were not to take steps to ensure homosexual persons the same rights as others regarding not only behavior, but also the ability to contract a *same-sex marriage*?

Let us now turn to a new visit to Argentina three months ago. In the city of San Luis, more than three thousand people, couples, and families had gathered together. Several dozen among them got my attention concerning the fact that the law voted upon two years earlier had not only divided the Argentine citizens, but it had rendered fragile the unity at the heart of their families. Everyone was saying that it had become impossible to speak about this issue in the family, as children and adolescents were being subjected to incessant propaganda in their schools, colleges, and universities. If you have the opportunity as I have had to go to Buenos Aires, you will be welcomed by huge advertisements on the walls of the city, containing such statements as "Argentina, an egalitarian country!" or even more, "Argentina, an inclusive country!"

I also could speak to the situation in Malta, which is one of the three last truly Catholic countries in Europe. I visited it last October. The heads of family movements meeting there told me that the country had changed in just one year, and several members of parliament already had stated their favoring a law establishing "marriage" between persons of the same sex. Whoever knows Malta is able to measure the enormity of this change for that country.

We have little time to mention the accelerated secularization of Poland since the tragic disappearance of its president three years ago. There are voices out there denouncing the traditional agreements of that country with the Apostolic See (the concordat). As for Ireland, it is useless to mention the atrocious scandals that country has witnessed; but it is impossible for anyone to elude unjust and defamatory character of the accusations lodged publicly by very high-ranking political officials against the Apostolic See and the Successor of Peter concerning these distressing questions.

I could give you multiple additional examples. The most recent concerns the situation in the Philippines where, in spite of a heroic resistance by their bishops, a reproductive health bill was just imposed. This law provides not only for the free distribution of condoms to rural populations at village medical centers, but it includes teachings on sexual education for children starting from the age of ten. What is significant here is that there is a clause prohibiting these children from bringing home said pedagogical material, because their parents might not be in agreement with the contents. I hope that these examples have convinced you of the radical change of civilization that we are seeing. It is not for me to give an apocalyptic interpretation of the situation, but rather a citation from the Minister of Justice of my country. Other measures that appear more anecdotal also are extremely serious. I will mention only the declared willingness to receive children into nursery schools starting at the age of two in order -- and this time I am quoting the Minister of the Family – to wrest from them every possible social, philosophical, familial, and religious determinism.

III. City of men and City of God

The moment has come to draw conclusions from these reflections and facts that I have sought to place before you. You will have noted: Up to this moment, I have not once used the term secularism, even though it falls precisely at the heart of our debate. In my country, there is a philosophical tradition concerning rights that stems from the Age of the Enlightenment, from the French Revolution, and finally from the separation of Church and Staet (laws of 1905). In the 18th century, the philosopher Voltaire -- the secular apostle of tolerance -- following Locke advocated the recognition of religious freedom for all religions, except for one among them, the Catholic religion. In 1793, the rights of clergy found their end, as it is well known, under the blade of the guillotine. Whenever there is separation of Church and State, it gives rise to the expulsion of religious and the expropriation of their goods. In the case of the French Revolution, what was done in 1793 was totally contrary to what had been professed in Article 10 of France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*No one shall be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious ones, provided their manifestation does not disrupt the public order as established by law*).

This philosophical and political tradition led to the definition of a concept: French secularism. It was until several years ago a *unicum* or, if you prefer, a sad distinction to have. This view, as several examples I have barely conveyed to you have demonstrated, professes theoretically a strict separation between church and state, not in the sense of a healthy

autonomy within their spheres of influence – a perspective that the Church has affirmed numerous times (making its own the expression *positive secularism*[6]) -- but in exclusion of the Church from public debate.

I was here in the past on occasion, in 2007, to show how a society that affirms itself to be ideologically tolerant in reality is incapable of accepting assertions within it that contradict its ideology.[7] Founded upon ethical relativism, in particular it does not tolerate the idea that there may be a truth to seek; it only tolerates such a truth that might have a universal character; it removes all substantive debate, which it changes into an exchange of relative ideas: As each party *informs* the other of his own ideas and must refrain from considering the latter as possibly valid for the other, they cease being substantive ideas; there is no real debate in play. In fact, a liberal society in the ideological sense of the term excludes any reflection concerning personal ethical questions. In reality, it always places itself above substantive debates and disqualifies them. This *liberal culture*, this tolerant society imposes one thought. In this sense, it is totalitarian. Most logically, it cannot even accept conscientious objection, as recent debates in the French Parliament have illustrated concerning the question of *marriage for all*. Several civil officials of the State, in fact, asked to be exempted for personal reasons of conscience, from the obligation to celebrate civil marriages between persons of the same sex. This was refused.

In light of what has been said concerning the nature of an authentic political community, to know if it is capable of recognizing alterities, we are allowed to affirm that a *liberal culture* does not have this capacity. It is so weak on its foundations that it feels any rigorously founded argument to be a threat. It cannot support an honest debate that goes to the heart of problems reaching the deepest longings of the people. *Liberal culture* is not able to measure what other contributions could be made other than those that pander to his own weak thought. In this sense, it contributes to the degradation of the social fabric. Alexis de Tocqueville entitled a chapter of his great work *Democracy in America* in this way: *From religion considered as a political institution, how powerfully it serves the maintenance of the democratic republic among the Americans*. It can only indulge the curiosity there to read such a paragraph as this one: *It has been around fifty years since Ireland began to pour a Catholic population into the heart of the United States.* The author was writing his work in 1780 in

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[6] The term has become more diffuse after the address given by President Nicolas Sarkozy at the Lateran during the course of his first official visit to the Vatican on December 20, 2007. Benedict XVI since that time has used the phrase on a number of occasions.

[7] J. LAFFITTE, *Tolérance intolérance ? Petite histoire de l'objection de conscience*, Edition de l'Emmanuel, Paris 2008.

reference to the 1730s. *For his part,* he adds, *American Catholicism makes converts: One encounters in the Union today more than one million Christians who profess the truths of the Roman Church. These Catholics display great fidelity to the practices of their religion, and they are full of fervor and zeal in their belief; however, they form the most republican and most democratic class within the United States.* Tocqueville outlines some hidden reasons that I will let you discover on your own from reading this major work[8]. Tocqueville could not imagine any better confirmation of his words than the fruitfulness of the contribution made to the social life of this country by a son of Ireland like Michael McGivney one century later.

Few minds are now able of making out what Tocqueville clearly had identified: The advantage that a free society can derive from the contribution of religion within it. On the contrary, there seems to be a kind of unanimism in postmodern thought. The majority of authors marvel at a social organization that would have attained what they call *democratic neutrality.* They believe, or they pretend to believe, that there is such a thing as *democratic neutrality*, an expression coined by one of these authors, Marcel Gauchet. The latter characterizes with delight modernity's movement by the expression *departure of religion.* It is pointless to say that these authors do not share the judgment of Tocqueville in praising the New World. Gauchet writes: *The principal pluralism of faiths in the American arena, to take an extreme example, was able for a long time to accommodate especially legalistic forms of membership within different denominations. Each one recognizes the freedom of others but does not affirm less for its account a style of conviction excluding the consideration that other convictions are possible*[9]. It seems to me that there we find the interpretative key permitting us to understand what muddles postmodern thought: the pretention of universality.

And yet, the only religion that has given thought in a deepened manner to universality is the Christian religion and, among the different Christian confessions, rightly Catholic thought. It would be interesting to list all facets of the Catholic profession that come into play in this direction: the creation of all men in Christ, in the image and likeness of God; the universality of salvation: *God desires that all men be saved*; the universality of the vocation to holiness; the mission that reaches *to the ends of the earth* … One could write a Christian encyclopedia starting from universality. The question of knowing if religious freedom is possible in a *liberal culture* could now be formulated in this way: "Is Christian freedom possible in a *liberal culture*?" My conviction is that a religion accommodating the ethical relativism proper to liberalism has no need to worry. The weak consensus always will reserve

[8] A. DE TOCQUEVILLE, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Gallimard, Paris 1961, 427.
[9] M. GAUCHET, *La religion dans la démocratie*, Gallimard, Paris 2007, 83 et s.

for it a modest but comfortable place, as long as it does not disturb the mandate of a moral unanimism. Woe to anyone who meddles with distinguishing good from evil or teaching what distinguishes them.

If we think of all those who have given tribute to Christian freedom by their lives -- the martyrs – we understand that there no longer was a place for them within human society, each time it asserted the establishment of political unanimity in thought and worship. Whoever refused to sacrifice to the gods of the Empire had to be sacrificed to the beasts or decapitated. You signed your death warrant, Cyprian, when you wrote: *I am a Christian and bishop. I do not know any other god except the one true God, who created heaven and earth, the sea and all that is contained therein.* And you, Thomas More, you signed yours when you dared not only to refer to the natural Law when contesting the validity of the law of royal succession, but yet to the right of your conscience to remain faithful to the Successor of Peter. The martyrs were excluded from the earthly city that did not support their difference, the unique character of their testimony of holiness: They incarnated a living reproach to societies that claimed to develop themselves without God. I do not know if it is right to say that in an ideologically consensual society, there is no place for witnesses of the faith; but such witnesses of the faith know what awaits them.

We know that the ideal society is not of this world, in spite of the dreams of Plato. But returning to Saint Augustine, whom Benedict XVI always has found to be the inspiration for and father of a healthy secularism, this ideal society is a communion of saints based on both the diversity of unique individuals and recognized alterities. The communion of saints proper to the City of God is the universe where each person becomes eternally himself, on the grounds that he receives the wealth of others at the same moment where, freely, he gives himself to them.

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