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Piotr Mazurkiewicz
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0003-1079-9904

Christian vs liberal conceptions of human rights

Abstract: The Catholic Church has traditionally raised four objections to the doctrine of human rights in its liberal version: the lack of reference to God as the source of human rights, individualism, the absence of a list of human duties accompanying individual rights, and the doctrine's vulnerability to proliferation and creative interpretation of those rights. The paper mainly focuses on the first two concerns. From the point of view of secular liberalism, the idea of God appears as an unnecessary by-product of the process of human evolution. From the point of view of Christianity, creation in the image and likeness of God is the source of man's inalienable dignity, and serves, at the same time, to safeguard his rights from reinterpretation by the state, should the state consider itself the source of such rights. Christianity presents man as an inherently social being, with two communities, i.e., the family and the nation, that are recognized as natural. Liberal individualism views people as a collection of elementary particles that collide with one another but never connect. The difference is fundamental when it comes to attitudes towards obligations prior to individual decisions, but also when it comes to a person's emotional backing. The human being, therefore, seeks to create either family-type ties, or merely ones based on a voluntary contract. It is a paradox that the more atomized a society is, the more necessary a strong state becomes to guarantee individual rights and a sense of security in times of crisis. As a result, a system called statist individualism comes to existence. Religion not only reveals the ultimate meaning of human life and the reasons for which it is worthwhile to be human, but it has also been a source of public morality. The liberal concept of neutrality and the privatization of religion reopen the question of the axiological foundations of the state. On the one hand, why, in the end, should people obey state laws when the state itself convinces them that they are morally neutral? On the other hand, this raises the question of the preferred model of education. From the point of view of the state and society, can a culturally and axiologically neutral education, in which children are taught about what is allowed and what is forbidden by law, but not about what is morally right and wrong, be sufficient? One answer suggests that a liberal state conceived in this way is unstable, and able to exist only for a while. The alternative would be a liberal state that is imperfect, culturally charged, and open to the presence of the Church as a public and publicly meaningful authority.

Benedict XVI, in a discussion on Marcello Pera's interpretation of the doctrine on human rights, says: "It was only thanks to your book that it became clear to me how much the encyclical *Pacem in terris* had set a new direction in thinking. I was aware of the strong influence of the encyclical on Italian politics: it gave a decisive impulse to the opening of Christian Democracy to leftist views. However, I did not realize to what great an extent it signified a new premise also to the basis of the party's thinking".[1] Pera himself believes that the Church, by making the doctrine of human rights part of the Church Magisterium, proclaimed "by virtue of the Gospel committed to her" (*Gaudium et spes*, 41[2]) has fallen into a "liberal trap".[3]

The universalist claim of liberalism

Why is it important to confront Christian and liberal approaches to human rights? The importance of such a comparison seems to be well explained by John Gray, who portrays liberalism as "the illegitimate offspring" of Christianity and its most formidable competitor in the struggle over "the rule over the souls". "It is characteristic, and perhaps definitive, of liberalism", Gray writes, "that it should seek to ground the historical contingencies of liberal practice in a foundation of universally valid principles. No aspiration is more peculiarly liberal".[4] The universalist claim of liberalism, he argues, leads to attempts to delegitimize all non-liberal political forms, recognizing at most their relative legitimacy by virtue of being "necessary stages on the way to a form of life possessing universal authority. (…) For the liberal, then, a liberal society is not merely one of the options open to human beings, but a moral necessity".[5] Liberalism understood in this way carries an internal contradiction. It proclaims tolerance and pluralism regarding the behaviours of individuals, while at the same time it proclaims intolerance in the realm of political demands. What we have here is a liberal inconsistency about the status of values – for all values are relative, except liberal values. All values should be tolerated, provided they are liberal. Such a position may be called apparent relativism. "Liberalism", Gray writes, "has always strenuously

[1] Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Liberare la libertà. Fede e politica nel Terzo Millennio,* Edizioni Cantagalli, Siena 2018, p. 8.

[2] Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* "*Gaudium et Spes*", https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

[3] Cf. Marcello Pera, *Diritti umani e cristianesimo. La Chiesa alla prova della modernità*, Marsilio Nodi, Venezia 2015, pp. 37-44.

[4] John Gray, "Postscript: After Liberalism", in: idem, *Liberalisms. Essays in Political Philosophy,* Routledge, Abington 2010, p. 239.

[5] Ibid.

resisted this commonplace observation, since it cannot but undermine the claim to universal authority of liberalism as a political faith – a claim which exhibits the structural similarity of liberalism to the evangelizing Christianity of which it is the illegitimate offspring".[6] In a similar vein, Yoran Hazony comments on the goals of Enlightenment philosophers in general: "Their aim was to create their own system of universal, certain truths, and in that pursuit, they were as rigid as the most dogmatic medieval".[7] Thus, if one defines liberalism, as Gray does, as a "political religion" with the goal of establishing a liberal "control over souls", its conflict with Christianity as a rival religion seems inevitable.

Liberalism, however, is unthinkable without Christianity. It could and did arise exclusively within the realms of Christian civilization. This also means that it contains many Christian ideas, albeit at the same time it substantially transforms them. Until recently, liberalism as an auxiliary social and political ideology played a useful role, reminding us, *inter alia*, of the importance of individual freedom, the limitation of the role of the state in social and economic life, the binding nature of contracts, etc. The contemporary problems with liberalism – in my opinion – are closely related to its domination in the political and cultural sphere, and thus to its assumption of responsibility for the whole life of the community, for which it was either unprepared or entirely unsuited. I am aware that liberalism, like Christianity, has many strands, so what can be compared is a certain contemporary image of liberalism and a certain – yet based on Church documents – image of Christianity. More precisely, however, here, we are only interested in the difference in the approach of liberalism and Christianity to the doctrine of human rights.

It is usually said that the Catholic Church had four objections to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which led, among other things, to Pius XII never mentioning it in his teaching after its approval. These are the lack of reference to God as the source of human rights, individualism, the lack of a list of human duties accompanying human rights[8] and finally, stemming from the first objection, the

[6] Ibid.

[7] Yoran Hazony, "The Dark Side of the Enlightenment", *The Wall Street Journal*, 06.04.2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-dark-side-of-the-enlightenment-1523050206.

[8] Traditionally, the Catholic Church teaches that human rights are accompanied by duties. Each right imposes on someone an obligation to respect it. This obligation is firstly on the part of the subject of that right himself, secondly on the part of other persons, and finally on the part of the State (cf. John XIII, *Encyclical Pacem in terries*, 10, 16, 28-30, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html).

vulnerability of human rights to proliferation and creative reinterpretation. We will reflect only on the first two.

The overturn of the God's order

The reference to God is fundamental in this list. It is not some kind of devotional appeal, but the invocation or omission of a word that fundamentally changes the meaning of the entire Declaration. In a 1947 letter to U.S. President Harry Truman, Pius XII states that to exclude the reference to God from the Declaration will mean recognizing that the state is the ultimate source of human rights. Eventually, this will result in reducing the subject of these rights to the status of a slave in the hands of those who can manipulate the meaning of the words used in the Declaration.[9] Thus, in the Catholic understanding, the source of human rights is inviolable human dignity, the primary source of which is the fact that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Dignity is inviolable because this "image" is sacred, as it were, a "part" of God incorporated into the human person. Consequently, whoever speaks against the dignity of man speaks directly against God.

In this context, it must also be emphasized that the reference to God reminds us of the basic limitation of political power, which is not God and cannot ascribe to itself divine prerogatives. The source of human dignity is transcendent to it. Thus, temporal authority encounters an impassable limit that it does not itself establish. God is the creator of human nature, and by this fact also of natural law, called by John Paul II "moral grammar".[10] Today, we are experiencing the temptation to reject the "idea of God" itself as an already unnecessary by-product of the process of human evolution. However, the consequence of going beyond

[9] "[The foundations of peace] can be secure only if they rest on bed-rock faith in the one, true God, the Creator of all men. It was He who of necessity assigned man's purpose in life; it is from Him, with consequent necessity, that man derives personal, imprescriptible rights to pursue that purpose and to be unhindered in the attainment of it. Civil society is also of divine origin and indicated by nature itself; but it is subsequent to man and meant to be a means to defend him and to help him in the legitimate exercise of his God given rights. Once the State, to the exclusion of God, makes itself the source of the rights of the human person, man is forth-with reduced to the condition of a slave, of a mere civic commodity to be exploited for the selfish aims of a group that happens to have power. The order of God is overturned; and history surely makes it clear to those who wish to read, that the inevitable result is the subversion of order between peoples, is war" (Pius XII, *Letter to President Harry S. Truman, 26.08.1947,* https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/letters/documents/hf_p-xii_lett_19470826_have-just.html (28.08.2018)).

[10] Cf. John Paul II, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 5 October 1995, 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html.

the Creator-creation paradigm is to question the very idea of human nature, and therefore also the immutable moral norms common to all humans.[11]

Morality itself is then treated as a product of man, which can be transformed according to the purposes man sets for himself at any given moment in history. Replacing the theology of creation with the ideology of evolution makes the very idea of human nature fluid. The truth about man is only the truth of a certain stage of human history. "A woman is not born a woman, but rather becomes one", feminists erstwhile proclaimed. And today we see that a similar approach is also popular for man, which ultimately means for humans in general. From the assumption "as if there would be no God", we come to the assumption "as if nature had not been created". I do not mean to question the theory of evolution, but only its ideological interpretation, as Thomas Nagel does in his book *Mind and Cosmos*.[12] In St. Augustine's writings, we find repeated references to the hierarchy of created beings. "For a great thing truly is man, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts" (*in quantum bestias rationalis animae honore praecedit*).[13] Thus, man is below the angel and above the animals, although it happens to us that because of sin we disregard this hierarchy and "a higher price is often paid for a horse than for a slave".[14] Today, an example of such disregard is, on the one hand, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Animals, drawn up along the lines of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On the other hand, the recognition that at a new stage of history, man should take evolution into his own hands and decide for himself what man should be and whether man should survive as a human being at all, and not, for example, as a post-human being. As Rémi Brague writes: "The modern project is perfectly fine when it comes to producing goods: material, cultural, and moral goods (…). On the other hand, however, it seems to be incapable of explaining why it is good that there are human beings to enjoy the goods are thus put at their disposal".[15]

[11] Cf. John Paull II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 32, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

[12] Cf. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos. Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

[13] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I,22,20, trans. J. F. Shaw, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York 2009, p. 13.

[14] Saint Augustine, *City of God*, XI,16, trans. H. Bettenson, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1984, p. 448.

[15] Rémy Brague, *The Kingdom of Man. Genesis and Failure of the Modern Project*, trans. P. Seaton, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2018, p. 331.

A London double-decker

Benedict XVI points out another consequence of the lack of reference to God. Today it is customary to treat the secular vision of human rights, or *ordo naturalis* in general, as a certain closed, complete system. In it, God and religion are utterly redundant. The popular image of the relationship between the order of nature and the supernatural order evokes the image of a double-decker London bus[16]. On the lower level, there is the engine, the driver, conductor, and a few lay passengers. And upstairs, there are passengers interested in spiritual life, mostly nuns and priests. Perhaps looking through the windows from the upper deck they can see more, but they still have no influence on the direction or speed of the travel. From the point of view of those on the lower level, interested only in natural life, they are altogether redundant on the bus. "If the *ordo naturalis* is seen as a totality that is complete in itself and does not need the Gospel, there is a danger that what is properly Christian will seem like an ultimately superfluous superstructure superimposed on the natural human" – writes Benedict XVI.[17] But if we completely reject the public importance of a religious justification for morality, even an indirect one, derived from the private faith of individual citizens, then the question arises for what reason should people respect human rights and, in general, why should they obey the law? If we are unable to say anything certain about right and wrong, or we find it a topic of no interest at all, what then is the primary regulator of social life? If mature, "neutral" reason is supposed to be free of history, tradition, and experience, is it actually capable of giving us an answer to the question of what we are to do in this concrete place and time, and not merely in some universal, abstract reality?[18] Indeed, does the categorical imperative obvious

[16] Cf. Wojciech Giertych, *Jak żyć łaską. Płodność Boża w czynach ludzkich [How to Live by Grace. God's Fecundity in Human Actions]*, Bernardinum, Pelplin 2014, pp. 26-27.

[17] Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Liberare la libertà. Fede e politica nel Terzo Millennio*, op. cit., p. 13.

[18] It seems that the concept of the neutrality of reason understood in this way is related to the assumption of the existence of "pure nature", i.e., nature devoid of any reference to culture. The very concept of *natura pura* emerged in the theological discussion regarding the relationship between nature and grace. During the Enlightenment period, this "purity" also began to be understood as the deprivation of any connection with culture, which would take place in a natural pre-social state. However, already Jean Jacques Rousseau perceived that it is not about some historical state, but a hypothetical one. The concept of a "pure state of nature" (*pur état de nature*), is thus a constructed concept, created by "purifying" (i.e., a mental operation of separating) the historical being of any supernatural gifts and any acquired skills. Hence, Rousseau's man, for example, does not use language, since it is an acquired skill, an element of culture, requiring contact with another human being (cf. Robert Spaemann, *Rousseau – człowiek czy obywatel. Dylemat nowożytności [Rousseau – Man or Citizen. The Dilemma of Modernity]*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 2011, p. 105). Similarly,

to anyone using reason have no connection to experience, tradition, culture, and religion? Kant speaks here of "an apodictic certainty", but this does not convince everyone.[19] The ultimate rationale that determines concrete social behaviour at this point, Leszek Kołakowski states, for example, is that people are afraid of the law and the punishments they face if they do not obey it. In a "neutral" secular reality, it is not necessary for people to be convinced that such behaviour is morally right. It is sufficient that, out of concern for their own safety, they do what the State expects of them.[20] Ultimately, then, such a liberal, religiously and philosophically "neutral" State is based on fear. Kołakowski thus poses the question: is such a radically liberal state stable? In his view, it is a utopia subject to self-destruction. "The liberal state is incapable of survival through the sheer inertia of the neutral state's system of non-intervention. (…) A perfectly neutral liberal state could live only a short while".[21]

Leszek Kołakowski places the issue of religious and philosophical neutrality of the State in the context of the question about the place of children in liberal philosophy. What is their status? They are not things, but neither are they rational, autonomous subjects. Do they therefore have the right to make their own decisions regarding, for example, commencement of sexual activity, getting married, signing contracts, serving in the military, or even getting a driving licence? If the answer is 'no', how can this be justified in a liberal manner? It seems no coincidence that the revolutionaries of the 1960s demanded not only the abolition of all the restrictions concerning sexual relations between adults, but also the abolition of the legally established minimum age for sexual activity. One of the most fundamental decisions concerning children is the one regarding their education. In a neutral state, should education also be world-view- and axiologically neutral?

the concept of the neutrality of reason assumes that it can be free from any cultural references, i.e., that it arose, as it were, outside society and outside any culture. Historically, this is absolutely false. In fact, what is felt to be natural always comes from a historical social structure. The realization of this fact enables the process of abstracting from cultural dependencies, which, however, is always only partial, whereas failure to realize this fact results in an attempt to impose one's own cultural preference by violence under the guise of its neutrality. The liberal conception of neutrality, as Alasdair MacIntyre notes, is as biased as any other. The difference with the others is that liberals impose their ideology under the guise of neutrality, i.e., claiming that this is what they do not do (cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict", in: Susan Mendus (ed.), *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2000, p. 138).

[19] Cf. Yoran Hazony, "The Dark Side of the Enlightenment", op. cit.

[20] Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, *Moje słuszne poglądy na wszystko [My Correct Views on Everything]*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 1999, pp. 178-181.

[21] Ibid., p. 183.

Is it enough if children at school are taught what is legally permissible and what is forbidden, without considering their ability to distinguish good from evil? Is it enough to prepare them through "culturally neutral" education to be citizens of the world? Can we then remove from school curricula any references to history, tradition, and culture understood as our own? Is it enough to instil "constitutional patriotism", i.e., fear of transgressing the law? If not, who should make decisions on these matters on behalf of children, and in the name of what? It appears that the ultimate answer in a state of perfect liberalism is to say that this is the responsibility of the government or parliament. But this means that the government or parliament assumes the competence of the family and the Church. In other words, it becomes a sacral authority whose decisions – in the absence of any, other than formal, criteria for challenging these decisions – increasingly resemble the infallible rulings of the gods. An exemplification of this trend is today's liberal aversion to the conscience clause.

This way of thinking, however, makes the erroneous assumption that there exists a kind of "naked nature", independent of time and place, utterly devoid of ties to any culture. Well, such nature exists only in the minds of the Enlightenment thinkers. Our cognition of the world always contains some admixture of culture. And it is this admixture of culture, even when its presence is not realized, that provides a minimum of stability to social life. Hence the conclusion that we should defend a liberal state that is imperfect, burdened by culture, and thus educate future citizens to live moral and virtuous lives, in which religious justification is extremely helpful.

Like mushrooms

The second objection to the "official" doctrine of human rights concerns individualism. Liberalism brings with it an individualistic vision of man, combined with a voluntaristic conception of choice. Liberal society consists exclusively of adult, rational entities capable of autonomous decision-making. They are at the same time a-historical individuals, the same everywhere in the world, with the same needs, aspirations, and ways of thinking.[22] This is well expressed by Thomas Hobbes, who states that people appear on earth adult and mature, without parents, unbound one to the other by any obligation, "like mushrooms" coming out of the ground after the rain. "To return once again to the natural state and to look at men

[22] Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, "On the Practicability of Liberalism: What About the Children?", *Critical Review. A Journal of Politics and Society***,** Volume 7, 1993, Issue 1, pp. 1-13.

as if they had just emerged from the earth like mushrooms and grow up without any obligation to each other".[23]

Therefore, according to liberalism, man is a non-relational being and, in making life choices, should be guided primarily by selfishness. He makes short-term commitments to others only by conscious and voluntary decisions, and their content – including the marriage contract – can be renegotiated at any time. At the same time, he sees his life as a constant process of emancipation. Unlike in the classical tradition, expanding the realm of freedom is not about gaining control over "sexual indulgence and gluttony"[24] through virtue training, but rather liberation from external constraints. In the first instance, it is liberation from bonds with other people, in the second: from historical and cultural identity, and, finally, from the constraints of biological nature, including biological sex. Child, marriage, family, and nation are basic categories that potentially limit individual freedom. Liberation occurs through ridding oneself of the state of belonging (e.g., through divorce, apostasy, or emigration[25]), the dismantling of moral norms, traditions and practices, through to the abolition of the category of truth and the deconstruction of language. The result is a "lonely crowd" of competing individuals, or, as Michel Houellebecq states, a collection of elementary particles that constantly collide with one another but never truly connect.[26] They live "increasingly alone, left to themselves without structures of affection and support", as John Paul II said.[27] Under such an anthropology, even the right to marry and found a family is only an individual right. While the family may be considered the basic cell of social life, it is not a separate subject of natural law. Similarly, when it comes to the category of the nation. Viewing the institution of marriage and family from the perspective of individual rights leads today to attempts to reinterpret them. Marriage and having offspring are seen as an individual right of every person, regardless of sex. Thus, everyone has the "right" to marry anyone and expect the state to provide him/

[23] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 102.
[24] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0058%3Abook%3D1%3Asection%3D1253a.
[25] Thomas Jefferson considered the right to leave the country of birth to be the most basic right of a free person (Thomas Jefferson, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, p. 3, https://thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Rights-of-British-America-by-Thomas-Jefferson.pdf).
[26] Michel Houellebecq, *The Elementary Particles*, Vintage 2001.
[27] John Paul II, *Exhortation Ecclesia in Europa*, 8, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html.

her with offspring, even if he/she is a single, unmarried individual. The Christian response to this vision of human rights is the Charter of the Rights of the Family.[28]

According to Catholicism, the second – besides the family – natural community to which a person belongs is the nation. Thus, in 1995 at the UN, John Paul II proposed a kind of charter of the rights of nations. In modern liberal philosophy, however, the concept of the nation either does not appear at all, being replaced by the term "society", "civil society", or is associated solely negatively, i.e., with the excesses of nationalism, the return of which should be decisively prevented. Abstract universalism leads us to place our hopes for the organization of social life at an ever-higher level: from the nation-state to the federal state, from the federal state to the global "state". National governments should be replaced as soon as possible by global government, and nations by global civil society. However, observing the transformation of the UN, we must conclude that within the framework of global governance, nation-state governments, the entities that brought the UN into existence, have less and less to say, while global civil society has little in common with either historical nations or democratic societies. In practice, it involves NGOs on the UN register and prominent individuals selected according to obscure procedures.[29]

Roberto Esposito reminds us of the Latin etymology of the word "community" (*communitas*) which derives from *munus*: duty, service, unpayable debt, or gift that cannot be kept. Belonging to a community involves incurring an unpayable debt, binding oneself to a common obligation of mutual gift, which gives rise to an obligation to step out of oneself to turn towards others. Belonging to *communitas* inevitably involves loss, with "expropriation", and thus poses a potential threat to the subject's individual identity and autonomy. Others gain the right to overstep the boundaries of the subject and influence his decisions. Liberalism strongly opposes this understanding of collectivity, relegating the question of community to the sphere of private decisions of individuals. An individual can protect himself from "infection by others" through immunization, turning towards himself and closing off within himself, "in the husk of his own subjectivity". Immunization

[28] Cf. Charter of the Rights of the Family, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_19831022_family-rights_en.html.

[29] Cf. Marguerite A. Peeters, *The Emergence of Global Governance as a Political Revolution. New Political Paradigms and the Shift to Postmodern Politics (1945-1996)*, https://bip.uksw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/2022-06-29-M.%20Peeters%20PhD%20Thesis%20-%20Final-_.pdf.

means not only freeing oneself from social debt, but also breaking the system of compulsory mutual endowment that conditions the existence of a community.[30] Man – according to liberal philosophy – is completely independent of the collective. "But neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it" – wrote John Stuart Mill.[31] The trouble is that consistent liberalism, according to Patrick Deneen, has led to the almost complete privatization of the citizen, resulting in the disappearance of the instinct for community and the atomization of society.[32] The ideal liberal citizen limits his interest in the community to participating in elections every four years, and the pandemic has further taught him to view the other as a potential threat of infection.

Deneen's merit is to point out that this is not a spontaneous process of emancipation and individualization, but that a "laissez-faire was planned".[33] Liberalism contains a specific ideal of freedom, the realization of which requires a strong state. Only a strong state can force a radical change in society leading to a redefinition of basic anthropological and social categories: sex, the institutions of marriage, motherhood and fatherhood, human rights, the category of discrimination, and finally freedom itself. Liberalism thus claims that it is individuals, who are inherently equal and free, who consent to the creation of a state with limited powers, while in fact it is only the liberal state, with all the tools of power, that creates such untethered individuals, whose survival depends on the ability of the authorities to eliminate "political blasphemers". "The more individuated the polity, the more likely that a mass of individuals would inevitably turn to the state in times of

[30] Cf. Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics*, Fordham University Press, New York 2013, pp. 48-49.

[31] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford 2005, p. 113.

[32] According to Norberto Bobbio, the process of atomization was initiated with the 1791 French constitution's ban on acceptance by representatives of "any binding mandate from those who had elected them": "If by modern democracy we mean representative democracy, and if it is of the essence of the latter that the representatives of the nation are not directly obliged to the particular individuals they represent not to their particular interest, then modern democracy is premised upon the atomization of the nation and its recomposition at another level – the level of parliamentary assemblies (…). Now this process of atomization is the same which underlies the liberal conception of the state, whose foundation (…) is to be sought in the assertion of the individual's natural and inviolable rights" (Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper, Verso, London – New York 2006, p. 29).

[33] Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2018, p. 52.

need".[34] The liberal conception of man thus leads inevitably to statist individualism, which cannot do without the support of the state apparatus.

An entirely opposite interpretation of the importance of binding the individual to the community is held, for example, by Jesse Gleen Gray. He states that co-participation, i.e., binding us to others, frees man from the cage of individualism and of the feeling of individual hopelessness in the face of challenges. "In moments like these, many have a vague awareness of how isolated and separate their lives have hitherto been and how much they have missed by living in the narrow circle of family or a few friends".[35] I think the war in Ukraine unleashed by Russia in 2022 makes many realize how vulnerable a single individual would be to aggression, which, however, a community united by the bonds of patriotism is able to successfully resist. This reveals the liberal paradox that a liberal state depends for its existence on soldiers who must think about life and death in illiberal terms. MacIntyre argues: "Good soldiers may not be liberals and must indeed embody in their actions a good deal at least of the morality of patriotism. So the political survival of any polity in which liberal morality had secured large-scale allegiance would depend upon there still being enough young men and women who rejected that liberal morality. And in this sense liberal morality tends towards the dissolution of social bonds".[36]

The encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, called the Catholic constitution of human rights, is characterized by the document's striking secular language, on the one hand, and optimism on the other. John XXIII writes:

> When the rules of coexistence among citizens are formulated as rights and duties, then people come to understand more and more their spiritual and intellectual values, and in particular to understand what truth is, what justice is, what charity is, what freedom is, and to realize that they are members of a community which presupposes these very values. (…) People (…) who are interested in such matters seek to know better the true God who is personal and who is beyond human nature. For

[34] Cf. ibid., p. 61.

[35] Jesse Gleen Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1998, p. 45.

[36] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism A Virtue?*, The Lindley Lecture, The University of Kansas 1984, pp. 17-18, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/12398/Is%20Patriotism%20a%20Virtue-1984.pdf.

> this reason, they consider the relationship that binds them to God as the basis of their lives, both their interior life and their relationships with others.[37]

Through the guarantee of human rights, human sensitivity to both moral values and God must grow, John XXIII said. Are we really witnessing an increase in sensitivity in these areas today? Benedict XVI does not seem to share this optimism. On the one hand, he notes that "for great liberals, God is ultimately indispensable", while "liberalism loses its own foundation when it overlooks God". On the other hand, he states that "the concept of human rights detached from the concept of God leads not only to the marginalization of Christianity but ultimately to its rejection".[38] Liberalism makes Christianity redundant. One universalism displaces another competing universalism. There are many variants of liberalism today, some that are not atheistic in nature, others that even attempt to restore the idea of community to some degree. Nevertheless, as John Gray argues, all of them share the same universalist claim. However, when we carefully read *Gaudium et spes*, we find not absolute but only conditional support of the Church for the doctrine of human rights: "For we are tempted to think that our personal rights are fully ensured only when we are exempt from every requirement of divine law. But this way lies not the maintenance of the dignity of the human person, but its annihilation".[39] This is an essential warning that we rarely hear about in Catholic commentaries on the theory of human rights.

[37] John XXIII, Encyclical *"Pacem in terris"*, 45, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

[38] Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Liberare la libertà. Fede e politica nel Terzo Millennio,* op. cit., p. 8.

[39] Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "Gaudium et Spes"*, 41, op. cit.

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