

# *Annotated Encyclical Series*

*On  
the  
Nature*



# *Libertas*



*of  
Human  
Liberty*

*Christ the King Books*

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*“For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect.” -Ephesians 6:12-13*

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# LIBERTAS

## ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON THE NATURE OF TRUE HUMAN LIBERTY

*To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates,  
Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and  
Communion with the Apostolic See.*

The papal encyclicals have been traditionally named from their first word/words in Latin.

The popes are well aware of a false liberty taking root in men's minds.

To whom did he write this encyclical? Does this mean nobody else can / should read it?

## Part One: What Liberty Is

### The Specific Dignity of the Rational Nature

Paragraph 1: Liberty, the highest of natural endowments, being the portion only of intellectual or rational natures, confers on man this dignity - that he is "in the hand of his counsel"(1) and has power over his actions. But the manner in which such dignity is exercised is of the greatest moment, inasmuch as on the use that is made of liberty the highest good and the greatest evil alike depend. Man, indeed, is free to obey his reason, to seek moral good, and to strive unswervingly after his last end. Yet he is free also to turn aside to all other things; and, in pursuing the empty semblance of good, to disturb rightful order and to fall headlong into the destruction which he has voluntarily chosen.

### This Dignity Can Only Be Recovered and Established Through Jesus Christ

Paragraph 1.5: The Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, having restored and exalted the original dignity of nature, vouchsafed special assistance to the will of man; and by the gifts of His grace here, and the promise of heavenly bliss hereafter, He raised it to a nobler state. In like manner, this great gift of nature has ever been, and always will be, deservedly cherished by the Catholic Church, for to her alone has been committed the charge of handing down to all ages the benefits purchased for us by Jesus Christ. Yet there are many who imagine that the Church is hostile to human liberty. Having a false and absurd notion as to what liberty is, either they pervert the very idea of freedom, or they extend it at their pleasure to many things in respect of which man cannot rightly be regarded as free.

### Warning Against False Notions of Human Freedom

Paragraph 2: We have on other occasions, and especially in Our encyclical letter *Immortale Dei*,(2) in treating of the so-called *modern liberties*, distinguished between their good and evil elements; and We have shown that whatsoever is good in those liberties is as ancient as truth itself, and that the Church has always most willingly approved and practiced that good; but whatsoever has been added as new is, to tell the plain truth, of a vitiated<sup>4</sup> kind, the fruit of the disorders of the age, and of an insatiate<sup>5</sup> longing after novelties. Seeing, however, that many cling so obstinately to their own opinion in this matter as to

Free will, the natural power of choosing between one thing and another, does not, alone, ensure the good for man. It must be directed towards the true good – perceived by practical reason, not merely a semblance of the good – lest man voluntarily bring evil upon himself.

Two main errors about liberty:

- 1) A completely false definition
- 2) An overly-broad idea of what it really is

During the seventeenth century and ever since, those calling themselves philosophers have attempted to "rewrite" human nature so that they could renounce the doctrines of the Church regarding the human nature (especially socially/politically). One of the primary errors of these so-called philosophies is a confusion between the natural power of *free will* and the true freedom – a moral ability to do the good. And so here, Pope

<sup>4</sup> **vitiated**: imperfect, impure

<sup>5</sup> **insatiate**: never satisfied

imagine these modern liberties, cankered<sup>6</sup> as they are, to be the greatest glory of our age, and the very basis of civil life, without which no perfect government can be conceived, We feel it a pressing duty, for the sake of the common good, to treat separately of this subject.

### Important Distinction between Natural Liberty and Moral Liberty

Paragraph 3: It is with moral liberty, whether in individuals or in communities, that We proceed at once to deal. But, first of all, it will be well to speak briefly of natural liberty; for, though it is distinct and separate from moral liberty, natural freedom is the fountainhead from which liberty of whatsoever kind flows, *sua vi suaque sponte*.<sup>7</sup> The unanimous consent and judgment of men, which is the trusty voice of nature, recognizes this natural liberty in those only who are endowed with intelligence or reason; and it is by his use of this that man is rightly regarded as responsible for his actions. For, while other animate creatures follow their senses, seeking good and avoiding evil only by instinct, man has reason to guide him in each and every act of his life. Reason sees that whatever things that are held to be good upon Earth may exist or may not, and discerning that none of them are of necessity for us, it leaves the will free to choose what it pleases. But man can judge of this contingency,<sup>8</sup> as We say, only because he has a soul that is simple, spiritual, and intellectual - a soul, therefore, which is not produced by matter, and does not depend on matter for its existence; but which is created immediately by God, and, far surpassing the condition of things material, has a life and action of its own so that, knowing the unchangeable and necessary reasons of what is true and good, it sees that no particular kind of good is necessary to us. When, therefore, it is established that man's soul is immortal and endowed with reason and not bound up with things material, the foundation of natural liberty is at once most firmly laid.

At this point, the pope has only discussed *natural* liberty. *Moral* liberty will be discussed in the coming paragraphs.

### The Catholic Church as the Safeguard of the Freedom of the Human Will

**Paragraph 4:** As the Catholic Church declares in the strongest terms the simplicity, spirituality, and immortality of the soul, so with unequalled constancy and publicity she ever also asserts its freedom. These truths she has always taught, and has sustained them as a dogma of faith, and whensoever heretics or innovators have attacked the liberty of man, the Church has defended it and protected this noble possession from destruction. History bears witness to the energy with which she met the fury of the Manichaeans and others like them; and the earnestness with which in later years she defended human liberty at the Council of Trent, and against the followers of Jansenius, is known to all. At no time, and in no place, has she held truce with *fatalism*.<sup>9</sup>

Leo is pointing out that any true claims that these philosophies make regarding freedom are found already in Catholic teaching, while this Divine teaching condemns the innovations which lead to the “liberty of perdition” invented by Satan, the father of lies.

Here, then, is the distinction between moral liberty and natural liberty.

Natural liberty is the natural power of free will that flows from our nature, whereby a rational being is able to CHOOSE BETWEEN one thing or another.

This natural liberty has its foundation in the immateriality of the rational human soul – a power which can know an objective, unchanging universal truth. Brute animals also have souls (as St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle prove – see Aristotle’s *De Anima* and St. Thomas’ commentary on it) but those brute animal souls are *material souls*, and thus they are unable to think or ponder universal ideas which are “above matter”.

That we men have the natural power of free will is a truth often taken for granted by us Catholics; but not so for many philosophers and heretics through the ages. Jansenius, Luther and Calvin, as well as philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, for example, effectively denied that man has free will. We will say more on this below.

<sup>6</sup> **cankered:** affected by a malign or corrupting influence

<sup>7</sup> **sua vi suaque sponte:** “by virtue of its own accord/motion”

<sup>8</sup> **contingency:** the possibility that something could be or not be depending upon some condition or cause.

<sup>9</sup> **fatalism:** the belief that events are inevitable; “free will” is an illusion because everything is already pre-determined.

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## Part Three: The Great Need of Law

**Paragraph 7:** Such, then, being the condition of human liberty, it necessarily stands in need of light and strength to direct its actions to good and to restrain them from evil. Without this, the freedom of our will would be our ruin. First of all, there must be *law*; that is, a fixed rule of teaching what is to be done and what is to be left undone. This rule cannot affect the lower animals in any true sense, since they act of necessity, following their natural instinct, and cannot of themselves act in any other way. On the other hand, as was said above, he who is free can either act or not act, can do this or do that, as he pleases, because his judgment precedes his choice. And his judgment not only decides what is right or wrong of its own nature, but also what is practically good and therefore to be chosen, and what is practically evil and therefore to be avoided.

In other words, the reason prescribes to the will what it should seek after or shun, in order to the eventual attainment of man's last end, **for the sake of which all his actions ought to be performed.** This ordination<sup>16</sup> of *reason* is called law.

### Law is Necessary for True Freedom

In man's free will, therefore, or in the moral necessity of our voluntary acts being in accordance with reason, lies the very root of the necessity of law.

Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that, because man is free by nature, he is therefore exempt from law. Were this the case, it would follow that to become free we must be deprived of reason; whereas the truth is that we are bound to submit to law precisely because we are free by our very nature. For, law is the guide of man's actions; it turns him toward good by its rewards, and deters him from evil by its punishments.

If by nature our intellects always saw things correctly, and our wills always chose the greatest good, there would be little need for law.

Taking the liberals' argument to its logical extreme: If reason is a limiting factor on our so-called "freedom", then, we'd be better off without it. But the opposite is the truth: because we have the freedom to choose X vs. Y action, we need *help* to choose well. This help is not a restriction, but an aid to being free and reasonable.

#### A short explanation of Law – please read!

Above Pope Leo laid the framework showing that our intellect *needs* law in order to achieve true freedom, due to the effects of Original Sin. In the next section, he will touch upon the various kinds of law. If you have never heard of the Eternal Law, Natural Law, or Human Law – or the distinctions between them - then you might find the next part of the Pope's words difficult to understand. But have no worries because the following short explanations will explain the terms the pope uses. These quotations come directly from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Treatise on Law*.<sup>17</sup>

**Law** "is nothing else than (a) an ordinance of reason (b) for the common good, (c) made by him who has care of the community, and (d) promulgated." Notice: there are four distinct requirements for a valid law.

The **Eternal Law** is "the very Idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the universe." It is unchanging (thus eternal) and governs all of creation – angels, men, lower animals, plants, rocks, planets, stars, etc. For example, God has an eternal, unchanging idea of what He always envisioned squirrels as looking and acting like; their very bodies, DNA, powers, and instinct are the Eternal Law manifested in that particular creature.

<sup>16</sup> **ordination:** In this case, the "being ordered to"; the reason orders the wills towards a choice, and the reason is SUPPOSED to always order the will in such a way that the good presented is one which will get the creature to its last end – heaven.

<sup>17</sup> The *Treatise On Law* is just a very small and beautiful part of St. Thomas' masterpiece, the *Summa Theologiae*. The Treatise on Law is not very long, and we urge all Catholics to read it, as it is life-changing and very important! In that treatise, he defines law in general, the requirements for a valid law, the various just-mentioned kinds, and how they relate to one another. It is also a great help to understand the purpose of government; the limits and duties of rulers; to come to realize that bad "laws" are really not laws at all; to develop a healthy respect for law and government; and to see clearly how rulers are figureheads of God. You can download this treatise for free [http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/aquinas\\_law.pdf](http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/aquinas_law.pdf) Treatise on Law (Summa Theologica I-II)  
- THE SOPHIA PROJECT

The **Natural Law** is limited to those creatures with the power of intellect: angels and men. The Natural Law is “nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the Eternal Law.” It is God's idea of what He wants for *us*, implanted directly in our minds and consciences. Thanks to it, we naturally know the basic principles of good and evil and because we have reason, we can in great part rule our own actions (unlike a squirrel). The most basic principle of the Natural Law – known to ALL men – is this: avoid evil and do good. But this extremely general precept can be extended to at least one level of particulars beyond and still safely be called precepts of the Natural Law. For example, all men – even the most uneducated barbarians – cannot erase the knowledge deep in their heart that murder, suicide, adultery, and certain other crimes are evil and are to be avoided. These actions are not in conformity with “do good and avoid evil”. They are thus *against the Natural Law*. Doing the opposite virtuous actions are precepts of the Natural Law: let the innocent live, preserve your own health, give to others their due, remain faithful to one's spouse for life, etc.

But, “... the precepts of the natural law” are “*general* and indemonstrable principles”. The “human reason needs to proceed to the *more particular* determination of certain matters.” This working out of the more particular application of the Natural Law in society is called **Human Law**. The laws of nations are *supposed* to always reflect the more basic precepts of the Natural Law. For example, a state's lawmakers may rule that homeowners are not allowed to shoot and kill a thief just because he is stealing one's property and is posing no immediate physical threat. Such a law might be good, or might be bad; you can see that things become less clear and more debatable as we move farther and farther away from the very general precepts of the Natural Law (which nobody can argue with), and delve into particulars.

We hope that was not too much to throw at you! But understanding those basics, we are confident you are now better-equipped to jump back into the encyclical. You will see that Pope Leo is an astute student and teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas' writings.

8. Foremost in this office comes the *natural law*, which is written and engraved in the mind of every man; and this is nothing but our reason, commanding us to do right and forbidding sin. Nevertheless, all prescriptions of human reason can have force of law only inasmuch as they are the voice and the interpreters of some higher power on which our reason and liberty necessarily depend. For, since the force of law consists in the imposing of obligations and the granting of rights, **authority** is the one and only foundation of all law - the power, that is, of fixing duties and defining rights, as also of assigning the necessary sanctions of reward and chastisement to each and all of its commands. But all this, clearly, cannot be found in man, if, as his own supreme legislator, he is to be the rule of his own actions. It follows, therefore, that the law of nature is the same thing as the *eternal law*, implanted in rational creatures, and inclining them *to their right action and end*; and can be nothing else but the eternal reason of God, the Creator and Ruler of all the world. To this rule of action and restraint of evil God has vouchsafed to give special and most suitable aids for strengthening and ordering the human will. The first and most excellent of these is the power of His divine *grace*, whereby the mind can be enlightened and the will wholesomely invigorated<sup>18</sup> and moved to the constant pursuit of moral good, so that the use of our inborn liberty becomes at once less difficult and less dangerous. Not that the divine assistance hinders in any way the free movement of our will; just the contrary, for grace works inwardly in man and in harmony with his natural inclinations, since it flows from the very Creator of his mind and will, by whom all things are moved in conformity with their nature. As the Angelic Doctor<sup>19</sup> points out, it is because divine grace comes from the Author of nature that it is so admirably adapted to be the safeguard of all natures, and to maintain the character, efficiency, and operations of each.

9. What has been said of the liberty of individuals is no less applicable to them when considered as bound together in civil society. For, what reason and the natural law do for individuals, that *human law*, promulgated for their good, does for the citizens of States. Of the laws enacted by men, some are concerned

A man CANNOT really believe that it is good to steal; it is indelibly engraved on his conscience that such things are wrong. True, we CAN deaden our conscience by sin, to the point that we no longer even consult it; but we cannot erase the basic laws engraved there by our Creator.

This is very important: he gives us the definition of **authority**, AND shows that man is not his own authority by nature. Man is only given authority from God, through man's office, when his duty requires ruling others (e.g., the father of a family, the mayor of a city, etc.)

Believe it or not, there have been heresies claiming that grace makes a man into a robot, where man MUST do such-and-such.

<sup>18</sup> **invigorated**: given vigor, strength, or vitality

<sup>19</sup> The “Angelic Doctor” is one of the glorious titles given to St. Thomas – in this case, given to him because of his beautiful purity, as if he were an angel with no body.

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extreme liberals and on other hand, there are those who are just a bit liberal. Between these extremes, there are also many other variations of liberalism. Pope Leo will analyze a few of these variations now.

## Liberal Type #2: Moderate Liberalism

**Paragraph 17:** There are, indeed, some adherents of liberalism who do **not** subscribe to these opinions, [“these opinions” – that is, referring to the previous paragraph of those who foment seditions, revolutions, etc.] which we have seen to be fearful in their enormity, openly opposed to the truth, and the cause of most terrible evils.

### *Moderate Liberalism is Still Godless*

Indeed, very many amongst them, [that is, this second type of liberal, the moderate liberal] compelled by the force of truth, do not hesitate to admit that such [extreme] liberty is vicious, nay, is [in fact] simple license, whenever [it is] intemperate in its claims, to the neglect of truth and justice; and therefore they [that is, the moderate liberals] would [prefer to] have liberty ruled and directed by right reason, and consequently subject to the natural law and to the divine Eternal Law. **But here they think they may stop**, holding that man as a free being is bound by no law of God except such as He makes known to us through our natural reason.

Did you catch the key difference between an extreme liberal and a moderate liberal? An extreme liberal denies ANY higher law than his own reasoning power: no Eternal, Natural, or Divine Law. But a moderate liberal admits there is a Natural Law in us, and that our thinking must be in line with that law. But what does the moderate think about the claim that there is a binding Divine Law (that is, laws of the Gospel)? No – the moderate liberal also denies such a thing. In other words, the moderate liberal admits that there is a Law in us, whereby we know basic right from wrong, but that everything is on the **natural level**. He says, “My reasoning power, guided internally by this Natural Law, is sufficient.” But the moderate, just like the extreme liberal, would refuse to admit that God has also given *supernatural* commands to man *externally* through the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church.

### *Inconsistency of Moderate Liberalism*

In this they are plainly inconsistent. For if - as they must admit, and no one can rightly deny - the will of the Divine Law-giver is to be obeyed, because every man is under the power of God, and tends toward Him as his end, it follows that **no one can assign limits to His legislative authority** without failing in the obedience which is due.

### *There Remains a Denial of Divine Law*

Indeed, if the human mind be so presumptuous as to define the nature and extent of God's rights and its own duties, reverence for the *Divine Law* will be apparent rather than real, and arbitrary<sup>26</sup> judgment will prevail over the authority and providence of God.

### *All Men Have a Duty to Divine Law*

Man must, therefore, take his standard of a loyal and religious life from the Eternal Law; and from all and every one of those laws which God, in His infinite wisdom and power, has been pleased to enact, and to make known to us by such clear and unmistakable signs as to leave no room for doubt [through

Moderate liberalism, however, is more dangerous as it is more hidden and cunning. This view holds that men should be restrained by law according to reason, that is, Law on the NATURAL level. But they reject that reason also needs the guidance and authority of the DIVINE law.

It makes no sense to say, “God can speak to me through the Natural Law, but He cannot make an additional, external, Divine Law.” But to deny the objective force of Divine law, given through Divine Revelation, is to limit the authority of God.

If the proud man tries to put a limit on the ways and means God can speak to him, then he is not really a believer at all in the authority of God.

Good and true religion is that religion which God has been pleased to establish and reveal – the Catholic religion. No other religion is lawful

<sup>26</sup> **arbitrary:** based on, or subject to, individual judgment or preference

Divine Revelation]. And the more so because laws of this kind have the same origin, the same author, as the Eternal Law, are absolutely in accordance with right reason, and perfect the natural law. These laws it is that embody the government of God, who graciously guides and directs the intellect and the will of man lest these fall into error.

#### *Union Between and Natural and Supernatural (Natural Law and Divine Law)*

Let, then, that [that is, the Divine Law] continue to remain in a holy and inviolable union [with the Natural Law] which neither can nor should be separated; and in all things – for this is the dictate of right reason itself – let God be dutifully and obediently served.

or just, nor does any religion but the Catholic religion have any real social right.

Moderate liberals should not try to unnaturally separate the union between the Eternal, Natural, and Divine Laws, for all three have the same Divine Author.

## Liberal Variation #3: Liberals Who Deny the State's Duty Toward God

**Paragraph 18:** There are others, somewhat more moderate though not more consistent, who

- affirm that the morality of individuals is to be guided by the divine law,
- but **NOT** the morality of the State, so that in **public affairs** the commands of God may be passed over, and may be entirely disregarded in the framing of laws.

**Hence follows the fatal theory of the need of separation between Church and State.**

This is an even less noticeable, but more common and dangerous compromise, which many modern Catholics, in ignorance, hold to, and preach as if it was blessed by God. This makes the Divine Law a *subjective* reality, rather than an *objective* one, (supposedly) only binding on those who recognize it.

Let us summarize so far. The extreme liberal denies the Eternal, Natural, and Divine Law. The moderate liberal admits there is an internal and Natural Law in us, but denies any **supernatural** and external law. This third type of liberal, being discussed now, allows for all three Laws – Eternal, Natural, and Divine. But this type thinks the APPLICATION of these sets of laws is only a matter for the private individual and should not affect the government and society as a whole. This is a fatal and very common mindset, even among Catholics. **There are many LIBERAL CATHOLICS out there. Dear student, study and pray that you may not be one of them!** Jesus Christ is King over society as well, not just individuals!

But the absurdity of such a position [that is, of this third type] is manifest.

- Nature herself proclaims the necessity of the State providing means and opportunities whereby the community may be enabled to live properly, that is to say, according to the laws of God.
- For, since God is the source of all goodness and justice, it is absolutely ridiculous that the State should pay no attention to these laws, or render them abortive<sup>27</sup> by enacting contrary legislation.
- Besides, those who are in authority owe it to the commonwealth not only to provide for its external well-being and the conveniences of life, but **still more to consult the welfare of men's souls in the wisdom of their legislation.**

Even the Natural Law itself manifestly commands that the State has a duty towards God, and therefore towards His religion. Even the pagans (for example, the Romans) would have been appalled at the thought of a society without some god and religion.

The civil power must remove any impediment to the welfare of men's souls as well. God-given authority (the right to rule) exists to help men live virtuously in this life and to help them get to heaven after this life.

That last statement was very important! The pope is teaching the very thing that even non-Catholics thinkers like Aristotle stressed 2,300 years ago: the purpose of the State is to allow and assist men to live in peace, justice, **and virtue.** **The following is a long, but important note on the duties of the State. Please read it carefully.**

<sup>27</sup> **abortive:** failing to accomplish an intended objective; fruitless

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So many Catholics these days, affected by liberalism all around us, think the government is simply there to build roads, “run things smoothly”, etc. That is all true, but this narrow mindset misses the mark by a mile. Both the Church and good philosophy show that government must also help men reach their end, which is the highest degree of virtue. Aristotle wrote an entire treatise called *The Politics* on this very subject. Of course, living 300 years before Christ, he did not know the true end of man is the Beatific Vision of God, and he did not know about supernatural virtue. *But he was correct in principle*: man is meant to be happy, the only way to be happy is to be virtuous, and the State MUST do all that it can to bring that about.

So, just about everything Aristotle taught in that work is, on the natural level, perfectly in line with what Pope Leo teaches here. Dear student, **let nobody ever tell you that the Church is unreasonable, illogical, etc.** Her two-thousand-year-old teachings mesh perfectly with the highest wisdom of the ancients before Her time, such as Aristotle.

But this subject of Church and State can be confusing, since the Church is a Divine and supernatural society, working directly on the supernatural level. The State – although still a creature of God, and completely subject to Him – works on the mere natural level. So how should these two societies interact? To understand this, the Pope will lay down some principles. There is only one final end of man, and that is a supernatural end – the Beatific Vision. Oak trees and dogs have a natural end, but man’s is a *supernatural* end (that is, *above* our nature). A cow can reach its goal and become a good cow just by using its instincts. But men and angels are, in fact, the only creatures that cannot reach their ends by simply using their unassisted natural faculties; we need *supernatural* help. And that is precisely where Revelation, grace, and the Church come in to fill that need.

But where does all this leave the job of the State? Actually, the Church has always taught that a well-ordered State has a dual purpose/goal: a **proximate** and a **remote** purpose. These two terms are used quite a bit by Pope Leo below, so it is good to get comfortable with them now:

--- The **proximate**<sup>28</sup> and more obvious purpose of the State is to create peace, order, justice, and naturally happy and **virtuous** citizens. That is, government must “lead men to the prosperity found in this life,” as the pope will say further on. Many people would deny even THIS claim, and instead try to limit government to just making things smooth so “I can do what I want – don’t you dare interfere with my personal morals and beliefs!” But this is ridiculous, as if God would create government so it can simply cater to men’s whims. Aristotle proved in *The Politics* that the purpose of all good legislation should be to make men virtuous. And this proximate end of the State – running civil society smoothly and making civil laws, is NOT the job of the Church.

--- But what many Catholics today do not understand is that the State also has another purpose – a more important one. Its **remote**<sup>29</sup> purpose is *to do all that it can to directly assist the Church in Her supernatural mission of bringing men to their supernatural end, the Beatific Vision*. In his encyclical *Mirari Vos*, Pope Gregory states this unambiguously in paragraph 23: “May Our dear sons in Christ, the princes [here the Pope is referring to civil rulers such as kings, presidents, etc.], support these Our desires for the welfare of Church and State with their resources and authority. May they understand that they received their authority not only for the government of the world, but **especially for the defense of the Church**. They should diligently consider that whatever work they do for the welfare of the Church accrues to their rule and peace. **Indeed let them persuade themselves that they owe more to the cause of the faith than to their kingdom.**” So, for example, a good State would make marriage laws that are in complete conformity with God’s teachings, make tax laws that reflect the moral theology of the Church. Such a State would prohibit divorce, contraception, adultery, same-sex “marriage”, and every other perversion; it would censor immoral materials and media; it would open official diplomatic relations with the Vatican; and so on. The civil rulers in a good State tell themselves, “What is the purpose of our making a little utopia here with beautiful roads, safe from enemy invasions, and lots of stores and material goods, but then after our citizens die, they go to hell?” To prevent this tragedy, wise civil rulers work in close UNION WITH THE CHURCH and allow themselves to be guided by learned priests and bishops, so that they will frame proper laws which help men obtain heaven.

We warned you that would be a long note! But at least you are better prepared now to understand the following:

But, for the increase of such benefits, [that is, for the “external well-being and the conveniences of life” and the “welfare of men's souls”] nothing more suitable can be conceived than the laws which have God for their author [that is, the Eternal, Natural, and Divine Laws]; and, therefore, they who in their government of the State take no account of these laws abuse political power by causing it to deviate from its proper end and from what nature itself prescribes.

And, what is still more important, and what We have more than once pointed out, although the civil authority has not the same *proximate* end as the spiritual, nor proceeds on the same lines, [yet its] subjects [that is, the citizens of the State] are the same [as the members of the Church], and not infrequently they [that is, Church and State] deal with the same objects, though in different ways.

IMPORTANT: Those who govern without concern of the Divine law ABUSE political power, since this power includes a defense of God’s laws.

The “same objects, though in different ways”: For example, the State and the Church are both concerned with marriage, but in different ways / respects. The State should make laws about minimum

<sup>28</sup> **proximate**: very near or next, as in space, time, or order

<sup>29</sup> **remote**: just the opposite of proximate: far away in space, time, or order

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*Distinction Between Natural and Moral Rights*

42. From what has been said it follows that it is quite unlawful to demand, to defend, or to **grant unconditional freedom of**

- thought,
- of speech,
- or writing,
- or of worship,

as if these were so many rights given by nature to man.

For, if nature had really granted them, it would be lawful to refuse obedience to God, and there would be no restraint on human liberty. It likewise follows that freedom in these things may be tolerated wherever there is just cause, but only with such moderation as will prevent its degenerating into license and excess. And, where such liberties are in use, men should employ them in doing good, and should estimate them as the Church does; for liberty is to be regarded as legitimate in so far only as it affords greater facility for doing good, but no farther.

*Oppression of the Church is a Just Reason for Change of Government*

43. Whenever there exists, or there is reason to fear, an unjust oppression of the people on the one hand, or a deprivation of the liberty of the Church on the other, it is lawful to seek for such a change of government as will bring about due liberty of action. In such case, an excessive and vicious liberty is not sought, but only some relief, for the common welfare, in order that, while license for evil is allowed by the State, the power of doing good may not be hindered.

*Democracy is Just as Long as Civil Power is Recognized as Coming from God*

44. Again, it is not **of itself wrong** to prefer a democratic form of government, if only the Catholic doctrine be maintained as to the origin and exercise of power. Of the various forms of government, the Church does not **reject** any that are fitted to procure the welfare of the subject; she wishes only - and this nature itself requires - that they should be constituted without involving wrong to any one, and especially without violating the rights of the Church.

A quick note here: Notice in the above paragraph that the pope carefully limits his words to “it is not **of itself wrong**” to prefer democracy, and “the Church does not **reject**” democracy. This does NOT mean the Church has absolutely no preference for any form of government. She does; She prefers monarchy. The Church itself is a monarchy, and She unofficially follows the teachings of St. Thomas, who in the already-referenced work *On Kingship*, shows that monarchy is the best form of government.<sup>50</sup> The pope is simply saying here that democracy (and its variation, the republic) is not forbidden.

A right is a strict claim in justice. But by nature, we do not know all truth and possess all virtues. Rather, as fallen creatures, we are prone to error and sin. And so the right to free manifestation of thought, whether in writing or in speech, cannot be a natural right of all men, but rather can only be claimed by those who manifest truth and goodness.

This is a powerful argument that men do not *really* possess these “rights,” for, if men really had a strict claim to these things, then it would be *just* for us to demand that God allow us to think, say, and write what we please, and to join any false religion we please.

All civil power comes from God, even if the instrument through which the law is promulgated is the same as those governed – that is, the people. But the origin and right to govern comes from the authority of God.

<sup>50</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship*, Book One, Chapter Four: “For democracy stands in contrary opposition to polity, since both are governments carried on by many persons, as is clear from what has already been said; while oligarchy is the opposite of aristocracy, since both are governments carried on by a few persons; and kingship is the opposite of tyranny since both are carried on by one person. Now, as has been shown above, monarchy is the best government. If, therefore, “it is the contrary of the best that is worst.” it follows that tyranny is the worst kind of government.”

45. Unless it be otherwise determined, by reason of some exceptional condition of things, it is expedient to take part in the administration of public affairs. And the Church approves of every one devoting his services to the common good, and doing all that he can for the defense, preservation, and prosperity of his country.

46. Neither does the Church condemn those who, if it can be done without violation of justice, wish to make their country independent of any foreign or despotic power. Nor does she blame those who wish to assign to the State the power of self-government, and to its citizens the greatest possible measure of prosperity. The Church has always most faithfully fostered civil liberty, and this was seen especially in Italy, in the municipal prosperity, and wealth, and glory which were obtained at a time when the salutary power of the Church has spread, without opposition, to all parts of the State.

### In Closing

47. These things, venerable brothers, which, under the guidance of faith and reason, in the discharge of Our Apostolic office, We have now delivered to you, We hope, especially by your cooperation with Us, will be useful unto very many. In lowliness of heart We raise Our eyes in supplication to God, and earnestly beseech Him to shed mercifully the light of His wisdom and of His counsel upon men, so that, strengthened by these heavenly gifts, they may in matters of such moment discern what is true, and may afterwards, in public and private at all times and with unshaken constancy, live in accordance with the truth. As a pledge of these heavenly gifts, and in witness of Our good will to you, venerable brothers, and to the clergy and people committed to each of you, We most lovingly grant in the Lord the apostolic benediction.

The Church has always endorsed political respect and assistance. In fact, it is part of the fourth commandment that we care for our civil society.

*Given at St. Peter's in Rome, the twentieth day of June, 1888, the tenth year of Our Pontificate.*

**LEO XIII**

## Do exercises for Parts Five and Six

### REFERENCES:

1. Ecclus. 15:14.
2. See no. 93:37-38.
3. John 8:34.
4. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Gospel of St. John*, cap. VIII, lect. 4, n. 3 (ed. Vives, Vol. 20 p. 95).
5. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, lib. I, cap. 6, n. 15 (PL 32, 1229).
6. Rom. 13:2.

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