

## Evaluation of the democratic way of thinking of the Catholic Church 50 years after the Council Declaration *Dignitatis humanæ*



On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1965, during the closing meeting of the II Vatican Council in Saint Peter, the ecclesiastical hierarchy advocated democracy by approving the declaration *Dignitatis humanæ* on civil right to religious freedom. During these four council meeting several obstacles had been put on the way chosen by John XXIII towards this direction by giving the Secretariat of Christian Unity the responsibility of thinking over the religious pluralism. Three theological schools had confronted with a religious truth that the Catholic Church affirmed to be the only depositary of: the Curial one (impenetrable and strong towards any change that can modify both the superiority of the Catholic Church over the other Churches and the superiority of the catholic religion over the other monotheistic religions), the Francophone one (the most advanced willing to justify biblically – *sub luce revelationis* – the idea of religious freedom the Church was ready to accept) and the American one (the most pragmatic and, for this reason, able to suggest those distinctions necessary to make the council meeting to come to an agreement with the approval of a document that

could have important political repercussions both on national and international level).

The social and political implications, that the Council declaration on civil law to religious freedom in the national and international field could cause, weren't long in coming. In a world where the democratic regimes were consolidating as a form of political and social organization able to protect the freedom of man, the civil right to religious freedom changed into democracy so it could enter those countries still ruled by totalitarian regimes of both left and right wing. For this reason both the case of Spain under Franco and the case of those catholic countries into the soviet orbit are typical examples.

In Spain, the Twentieth Century was characterized by an almost constant confessional State, apart from the period of the Second Republic. But what perhaps should be emphasized is the adherence of the State legislation on religion with Catholic doctrine: totally divergent during the republican stage, in total agreement during the remaining period, specially the era of the Franco dictatorship. The II Vatican Council opened a conflict phase of adjustment and redefinition of the relationships between State and Church which – according to the principles of the 1978 Constitution and to the 1979 Agreement regulated by the Concordat – pays a special attention to the catholic religion in a regime of separation and religious freedom. In this case, the civil right to religious freedom was used not so much to defend the right of the Spanish citizens to profess their religion freely as to protect the *libertas Ecclesiae* from a statist inclination.

With regard to the catholic countries of the soviet field in those days, the civil right to religious freedom helped as a vehicle to the democratic freedom forbidden by the communist regime (the freedom of association and the freedom of the press) besides defending the freedom of the catholic hierarchy to spread the evangelical message without being accused of political opposition to the regime. From this point of view the patient democratic action, which Monsignor Casaroli led since the early sixties, certainly contributed to undermine the socialist soviet system from inside. Not least –for an international recognition of Vatican action in the world – was the ecumenical politics Paul VI began in the 70s and John Paul II would have further developed during his papacy.

The aim of this monograph is to evaluate the results the Council Declaration on the civil right to religious freedom had in Europe on the second half of the Twentieth century. In particular way, we want to show the way through which the *Dignitatis humanæ* helped to fight both against the soviet totalitarianism and against the remainders of authoritarianism that still existed in Western Europe. Extending the focus on the ecumenicalism, from a catholic point of view, you can also define the way through which the Vatican ecumenical Council helped to achieve the same purpose.

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