

ARTICLE

Fraternal Pluralism: Pope Francis's Contributions and Precedents

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Abstract

The late Pope Francis wrote at length about human fraternity. This article calls his approach to interreligious relations “fraternal pluralism.” It goes beyond thinner forms of pluralism, rejoicing in encounter, sharing, and collaboration. Fraternal pluralism is not new to the Church. It grows out of historical roots as interpreted, refined, and sometimes radically reoriented by the Second Vatican Council. Catholics have been living it ever since. This article begins by situating fraternal pluralism among other understandings of pluralism, including earlier Catholic ones. It then turns to three different categories of “others”: non-Christians, non-Catholic Christians, and dissenting Catholics. Fraternal pluralism shows these people appreciation, cooperation, and respect. Next, the article asks where fraternal pluralism might go. Retreat from it is unlikely, as is its translation into an internal governing model for the Church, but fraternal pluralism is already developing into a way to think about non-humans.

Keywords

Pope Francis, pluralism, fraternity, Catholic social teaching, interfaith, ecumenism, dissent, religious liberty, Vatican II, Second Vatican Council

Introduction¹

The late Pope Francis envisioned human fraternity in his 2020 encyclical, or teaching letter, entitled *Fratelli Tutti* (“All Brothers”).² The encyclical builds from the teachings of the twentieth-century Second Vatican Council (commonly referred to as “Vatican II”). What this article calls the modern Catholic Church’s “fraternal pluralism” also reflects lived histories. This article explores how fraternal pluralism guides the Church’s relationships with three categories of people: (1) non-Christians; (2) non-Catholic Christians; and (3) dissident Catholics. Fraternal pluralism positively embraces each group in a different way, teaching appreciation for non-Christian religions, unity among Christians, and respect for personal conscience.

As the three main sections below discuss, each teaching reflects aspects of earlier Church history and a different Vatican II document, and each can be illustrated with a modern example. The final section suggests directions fraternal pluralism could go in the future, taking note of Pope Francis’s ecological thought and inconsistent responses to dissent. First, though, the next section discusses pluralism, the hierarchy of Catholic doctrines, and *Fratelli Tutti*.

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- 1 For Father Francis X. Clooney, in gratitude. The phrase “fraternal pluralism” is inspired by Terence Sweeney’s description of Pope Francis’s “fraternal liberalism.” Terence Sweeney, “We Are Family: On Fraternal Liberalism,” *Church Life Journal* (June 16, 2022): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/we-are-family-on-fraternal-liberalism/>. This paper was presented at the 2024 ICLRS Conference at Notre Dame Law School. I thank my wife Julie and daughter Ellie for helping me love better. Thanks to David O’Brien for his excellent research assistance, and to Matthew Nolan, Luke Dickens, and the editors for their helpful feedback. This work was supported by the McDonald Agape Foundation and a Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy Research Fellowship.
 - 2 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (hereinafter *Fratelli Tutti*), encyclical letter, Vatican website, October 3, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html. See also Elizabeth Huddleston, “A Very Short Guide to Understanding the Scope, Purpose, and Doctrinal Weight of Papal Documents,” *Church Life Journal* (March 25, 2024): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/a-very-short-guide-to-understanding-the-scope-purpose-and-doctrinal-weight-of-papal-documents/>. Huddleston writes that encyclicals give “comprehensive teaching and guidance on contemporary issues” and “carry significant doctrinal weight.”

I. Background: What is fraternal pluralism?

A. Fraternal pluralism is particularistic yet thick

Fraternal pluralism does not abandon traditional claims of religious particularity, but it does call for deep encounter and shared social responsibility. A more radical *theological* pluralism is promoted by John Hick and Paul Knitter.³ Hick asserts that traditional claims of Christianity's divine priority are obsolete.⁴ Knitter takes theological modesty as a reason to prioritize "practical cooperation and the dialogue of life as religious persons struggle to create a better world."⁵

Radically revisionist Christian theology is not part of the Church's fraternal pluralism. The Church maintains its particularistic claim to be the "chosen depository for the message of salvation," ordained by God to "baptize all."⁶ The Church does reject an "exclusivist" theology that claims all non-Christians necessarily go to Hell. However, while some Catholics embrace theological pluralism, most Catholic theologians are inclusivist—they believe non-Christian religions represent genuine human strivings for God, but are imperfect, incomplete, and inferior.⁷

The Church engages in interreligious relations without endorsing universalism.⁸ In this regard it is similar to some varieties of pluralism

3 Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Orbis Books, 2002); John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

4 Hick, *Christian Theology of Religions*, 15.

5 Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 4.

6 Carlos Hugo Parra-Pirela, "Toward Religious Pluralism and Catholic Diversity: Catholic Involvement in the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 49, no. 3 (2020): 49–71, at 49.

7 Zbigniew Kubacki, "Religious Pluralism from the Catholic Point of View," *Verbum Vitae* 39, no. 2 (2021): 527–542, at 527, 529, and 533; see also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Dominus Iesus" on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, declaration, Vatican website, August 6, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html. Regarding the special case of Judaism, see generally Benedict XVI, "Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Iudaeis*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 45 (2018): 163–184.

8 See, e.g., Sameer Advani, *Ratzinger on Religious Pluralism* (Emmaus Academic, 2024), 14.

described by political philosophers. For instance, Will Kymlicka's pluralism envisions public support for the persistence of diverse cultural identities.⁹ Sustained engagement between groups is a key feature of fraternal pluralism. Charles Taylor's pluralism focuses on the importance of interactions between individuals and communities, arguing that identities emerge through continuous, intercultural encounter.¹⁰ *Fratelli Tutti* in particular embraces this reality.

Another way of situating fraternal pluralism contrasts “thin” and “thick” pluralism. Thin pluralism simply recognizes and tolerates the existence of different groups holding different normative values within a society.¹¹ Thick pluralism features “energetic engagement” with such diversity.¹² This includes encounter and ongoing relationships, as well as the pursuit of mutual understanding and cooperation.¹³ Thick pluralism is compatible with prioritizing particular religious truth claims. It is “the encounter of commitments”—dialogue necessarily involves two distinct voices.¹⁴ Fraternal pluralism is thick. It reflects the Church's commitment to engaging others in a spirit of solidarity, mutual care, and shared moral action.¹⁵ This model, while relevant for a globalized world, has historical foundations within Catholic practice and thought.

B. Fraternal pluralism developed from an earlier, thinner Catholic model

Thick pluralism had a false start among American Catholics in the late 1800s. In 1893, Catholics participated heavily in the Parliament of World's

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- 9 Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 95–106.
- 10 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, expanded edition, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton University Press, 1992), 95–106.
- 11 See, e.g., H. S. Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals and the Invention of Pluralism in France,” *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no. 2 (2021): 497–519; Martin Rhonheimer, *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy*, ed. William F. Murphy Jr. (Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 306. Rhonheimer (who, incidentally, is a Catholic priest) defines pluralism as “internal variety—religious, ideological, also ethnical—to a determined political culture” (306).
- 12 “About the Pluralism Project,” The Pluralism Project, accessed June 30, 2024, <https://pluralism.org/about>.
- 13 “Pluralism Project.”
- 14 “Pluralism Project.”
- 15 See Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 1.

Religions, a landmark interfaith assembly in Chicago.¹⁶ They wanted to highlight the Church’s compatibility with American religious freedom and democracy.¹⁷ Remarks sent there by Cardinal James Gibbons, the archbishop of Baltimore, endorsed interreligious relations happening on the basis “of charity, of humanity, and of benevolence.”¹⁸ However, Pope Leo XIII wrote to discourage Catholic participation in future conferences of this kind, proposing instead that the American Church allow others to attend *Catholic* meetings that discuss faith and morals.¹⁹ This idea reflected thin pluralism—recognition of religious diversity in the United States—but not a thick pluralism marked by mutuality.

Thin pluralism yielded fruit of its own. Pope Benedict XV’s humanitarian aid to all during the First World War inspired the raising of a monument to him in Istanbul.²⁰ During the same conflict, Catholic U.S. military chaplains worked closely alongside their Protestant and Jewish counterparts.²¹ In the midst of the Great Depression, representatives of these three communities jointly lobbied Congress to establish economic relief programs.²²

Catholic intellectualism reflected these developments. Before and during the Second World War, Jacques Maritain and other French thinkers advanced thin pluralism as a way of harmonizing two goals: Catholic acceptance of the secular French state and state acceptance of Catholic participation in public life.²³ This pluralism did not represent a deep desire for encounter across difference, but instead was meant to rebut secular individualism and defend the Church’s autonomy in a hostile political context.²⁴ It also focused on different civil institutions, rather than different

16 Parra-Pirela, “Toward Religious Pluralism,” 53.

17 Parra-Pirela, “Toward Religious Pluralism,” 53.

18 James F. Cleary, “Catholic Participation in the World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (1970): 585–609, at 595.

19 See Francis J. Connell, “Pope Leo XIII’s Message to America,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 109 (1943): 249–253.

20 John Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914–1958* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 57.

21 David Mislin, “One Nation, Three Faiths: World War I and the Shaping of ‘Protestant-Catholic-Jewish’ America,” *Church History* 84, no. 4 (2015): 828–862, at 828.

22 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Manufactures, *Federal Emergency Measures to Relieve Unemployment: Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Manufactures United States Senate*, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., 1932, S. Doc 4076, 7–8.

23 Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 505.

24 Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 505, 512.

religious and ideological groups, although Maritain and his allies did accept that the Church would be treated equally with other “spiritual families.”²⁵

Maritain’s pluralism spread through Western Christian intellectual circles. T. S. Eliot attributed pluralism to Maritain, as did the early Italian Christian Democrat Luigi Sturzo.²⁶ Without specifically mentioning pluralism, Pope Pius XII hinted at it during the Second World War when he invited “all men of good will” to cooperate in rebuilding the world.²⁷ French Catholic social activists embraced pluralism in the postwar 1940s and 1950s.²⁸ In 1950, the Vatican encouraged ecumenism.²⁹ Maritain’s thin pluralism was thickening into the fraternal pluralism of Vatican II (1962–1965) and beyond.

C. *Fraternal pluralism is authoritative Catholic doctrine*

Why does fraternal pluralism deserve to be treated as authoritative, rather than the thin pluralism of some earlier Catholics or the theological pluralism of some modern ones? Answering that question requires considering the Church’s hierarchy of teachings. Leading medieval Catholic theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that theologians’ authority derives from that of the Church, so Church authority holds precedent over Catholic intellectuals.³⁰

Vatican II confirmed longstanding doctrine that the Holy Spirit aids the Church in faithfully transmitting and interpreting Christian tradition.³¹ The specific organ for this is the worldwide College of Bishops, united with the pope, which exercises “supreme and full power over the universal Church.”³² This power “is exercised in a solemn way” in a Church council—such as

25 Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 505, 512.

26 Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 515.

27 Parra-Pirela, “Toward Religious Pluralism,” 54.

28 Jones, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 516.

29 Parra-Pirela, “Toward Religious Pluralism,” 54–55.

30 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Brothers, 1911–1925), II-II, q. 10, art. 12, resp.

31 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (hereinafter *Dei Verbum*), Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican website, November 18, 1965, paras. 8–10, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

32 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (hereinafter *Lumen Gentium*), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican website, November 21, 1965, para. 22, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

Vatican II—and Catholics owe conciliar teachings concerning faith and morals “the submission of faith.”³³ The Church’s authority is also exercised, albeit less authoritatively, through the pope’s ordinary “magisterium,” or regular public teaching, toward which Catholics are to show “reverence.”³⁴

For these reasons, the fraternal pluralism set out by Vatican II and modern popes should be treated as authoritative Catholic teaching. This is true even though fraternal pluralism is a modern formulation. Vatican II recognized the Church’s authority to develop Christian doctrine.³⁵ The development of doctrine is a theological subject with a rich history.³⁶ Pope Francis himself relied on the classical theology of development proposed by the fifth-century Saint Vincent of Lérins, who said doctrine grows similarly to how seeds become plants and children become adults—gradually, organically, and while conserving earlier judgments.³⁷ Similarly, the theologian Yves Congar, who had a major influence on Vatican II, taught that a seed’s “fullness and perfection” is revealed over time as it develops “progressively and by stages.”³⁸ In the words with which Pope Saint John XXIII opened Vatican II, Catholic doctrine is not merely a “museum-piece” to be guarded.³⁹ It has vitality. Fraternal pluralism is a development of earlier doctrines, but it is nonetheless authentic Catholic teaching.

33 *Lumen Gentium*, paras. 22, 25.

34 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 25; see also *Codex Iuris Canonici*, Vatican website, 750.1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann747-755_en.html#BOOK_III.

35 *Dei Verbum*, para. 8.

36 One classic analysis is John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

37 Thomas G. Guarino, “Pope Francis and St. Vincent of Lérins,” *First Things*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/08/pope-francis-and-st-vincent-of-lrins>.

38 Jordan A. Haddad, “St. Bonaventure’s Medieval Theory of Doctrinal Development,” *Church Life Journal* (June 24, 2024): <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/st-bonaventures-medieval-theory-of-doctrinal-development/>; see also James T. Keane, “Yves Congar, Vatican II’s Greatest Theologian,” *America: The Jesuit Review* (Dec. 5, 2023): <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2023/12/05/cbc-column-yves-congar-246645>.

39 John XXIII, “Opening Address to the Council (October 11, 1962),” Catholic Culture, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3233>.

D. *Fraternal pluralism is voiced by Fratelli Tutti*

Fratelli Tutti articulates the essence and thickness of fraternal pluralism. Pope Francis writes that fraternity requires more than civil toleration and political equality.⁴⁰ Fraternity “enhances” these norms through education, dialogue, and mutual relationship.⁴¹ Such practices orient freedom to love, rather than letting it be the mere condition for individual autonomy or even exploitation.⁴²

Fraternal pluralism does not merely recognize differences—it rejoices in them. Communication involves finding gifts and opportunities for growth in cultural and experiential variation.⁴³ Constructive dialogue means “readiness to give and receive.”⁴⁴ It requires respect for differing opinions and recognition that even conflicting ones may reflect “legitimate convictions and concerns.”⁴⁵ People should be encouraged to contribute to public debate, as society benefits from reasoned deliberation.⁴⁶ These benefits extend to listeners, who can come to understand others’ positions, “to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together.”⁴⁷ Frank and inclusive public discourse furthers the cause of truth and keeps groups from pursuing only their own interests.⁴⁸

Society should be thought of as a polyhedron, not a set of separate groups or one neat form.⁴⁹ Every position, including those on the edges, forms the shape of the whole, and no person’s perspective is superfluous to society.⁵⁰ No one person or group should claim to have the whole truth, as this “would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights.”⁵¹ People should live out fraternal pluralism by internalizing different perspectives and being “passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone.”⁵²

40 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 103.

41 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 103.

42 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 103.

43 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 117 (citation omitted).

44 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 199 (citation omitted).

45 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 203.

46 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 203.

47 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 203. (citation omitted).

48 *Fratelli Tutti*, paras. 203, 211.

49 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 215.

50 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 215.

51 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 221.

52 *Fratelli Tutti*, paras. 216, 221.

Pope Francis indicates as a model for all social encounters the fraternal pluralism developed by Vatican II and in recent lived examples. It has already been present in how the Church approaches non-Christians, non-Catholics, and Catholic dissenters. The sections below turn to fraternal pluralism in these contexts.

II. Fraternal pluralism means appreciating non-Christian religions

The Church has always held doctrinally that no one can be coerced into becoming Christian. At Vatican II, this blossomed into a positive appreciation for non-Christian religions. Fraternal pluralism toward non-Christians is illustrated well by the last will and testament of the 1990s martyr Dom Christian de Chergé.

A. The Church has always doctrinally rejected coerced conversion

To be sure, Catholics have committed brutal attacks and intense persecutions against followers of other religions.⁵³ However, these have frequently been opposed by other Catholics.⁵⁴ Formal Church doctrine has consistently rejected coerced conversion to Christianity.⁵⁵

The earliest Christian history foreshadowed fraternal pluralism. Jesus taught that the day was coming when Jews and non-Jews would unite to

53 See, e.g., Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2018); Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard A. Wiegers eds., *The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain: A Mediterranean Diaspora* (Brill, 2014); Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); cf. Matthew P. Cavedon, *From the Pope's Hand to Indigenous Lands: Alexander VI in Spanish Imperialism* (Brill, 2023), 39–44. The last source describes how the Spanish ordered Indigenous peoples to submit to their papally granted imperial authority or be conquered.

54 See, e.g., Cavedon, *From the Pope's Hand*, 33–35 and 63–72; Kopstein and Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence*, 8, 103; David Berger, *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Academic Studies Press, 2010), 247–48 and 259–60. Berger discusses Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's opposition to anti-Jewish violence.

55 See David M. Lantigua, *Infidels and Empires in a New World Order: Early Modern Spanish Contributions to International Legal Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 32–33.

worship God “in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23).⁵⁶ He also said that though listeners of his who refused to repent had “no excuse for their sin,” this would not have been so had he not “come and spoken to them” (John 15:22). Jesus rejected missionary violence. After being turned away from a Samaritan village, two of the apostles asked Jesus, “do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” (Luke 9:54). Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:55). The Apostle Paul, who condemned idolatry, delivered an address at the Areopagus in Athens going even further toward fraternity. He recognized in the Athenians implicit faith in the one God, saying non-Jews might “even perhaps grope for [God] and find him,” citing as evidence Hellenic literature and a pagan altar dedicated to “an Unknown God” (Acts 17:22-31).

Later generations of Christians were more hostile to other religions. Judaism occupied an ambivalent position. Both Jesus and Paul engaged in polemic against some Jews—but they did so *as Jews*.⁵⁷ Early Christian writers, like many Jewish ones of the time, were quick to condemn religious diversity, but these critiques implicitly reveal that diversity was common.⁵⁸ So does archaeological evidence of religiously mixed neighborhoods and families.⁵⁹ This changed as the Roman Empire formally adopted Christianity. In the fourth and early-fifth centuries, Saint John Chrysostom described Jews as “beasts unfit for work, they are fit for killing.”⁶⁰ He wanted to “stitch shut the mouths of the Jews,” though apparently he did not endorse literal murder and, besides, these comments targeted Judaizing Christians.⁶¹

Chrysostom’s contemporary, Saint Augustine, showed greater tolerance, proposing that God willed for Jews to survive (albeit not thrive) until the end-times so that they would unintentionally bear witness to Christianity’s truth.⁶²

56 All biblical quotations are from the *New American Bible*, Revised Edition (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2011), which is approved by the U.S. Catholic bishops.

57 Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (Yale University Press, 2010), xiv.

58 Fredriksen, *Augustine*, xiv.

59 Fredriksen, *Augustine*, xviii.

60 Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Llewelyn Price, “Introduction,” in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: “Slay Them Not,”* eds. Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Brill, 2013), 2.

61 Utterback and Price, “Introduction,” 2; see also Chance Bonar, “John Chrysostom’s *Homily against the Jews* 8 as a Response to Antiochene Jewish Healthcare,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 16, no. 2 (2023): 378–406, at 378–379.

62 Utterback and Price, “Introduction,” 3.

Augustine understood Judaism as originating in divine revelation, enjoying divine protection from violence, and aiding the Church by proclaiming the prophecies Jesus fulfilled.⁶³ This approach was far from fraternal pluralism, but it did inspire some later Christians to reject violence against Jews.⁶⁴

However, other Romans did not have the right to practice their religions at all. Augustine backed the suppression of paganism.⁶⁵ Still, forced conversion remained condemned—if not out of direct respect for non-Christians, then out of the need for sincerity in Christian conversions.⁶⁶

The writings of the medieval theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas combined respect for other religions with a rejection of forced conversion. He believed God can be known through human reason.⁶⁷ Ignorance of Christianity is culpable only if people reject faith due to intellectual pride, and if non-believers are damned, this is because they lack the faith that would let them avoid other sins.⁶⁸ Aquinas recognized the “implicit faith” of those who await “fuller instruction” in religion.⁶⁹ Conscious faith had to be accepted voluntarily. Non-Christians were “by no means to be compelled to the faith,” as belief “depends on the will.”⁷⁰ Nor could Christians punish non-believers for spiritual crimes.⁷¹

For all this, Aquinas did not extend fraternal pluralism to non-Christians. He believed religious disputes should ideally be undertaken only by well-formed Christians, as less-confident ones could succumb to error by listening to others’ perspectives or befriending them.⁷² Civil authorities should protect Christians’ faith by restraining blasphemies and “evil persuasions.”⁷³ Non-Christian and non-Jewish rites should be suppressed where doing so

63 Fredriksen, *Augustine*, xii.

64 Fredriksen, *Augustine*, xi (discussing Bernard of Clairvaux, whom a contemporary rabbi called “a decent priest”).

65 Fredriksen, *Augustine*, xii.

66 See Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800* (Yale University Press, 1995), 31.

67 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, art. 12, resp.

68 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 1, resp., ad 3.

69 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 4, ad 3 (discussing the Roman centurion Cornelius’s encounter with Saint Peter, narrated in Acts 10).

70 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 8, resp.

71 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 9, resp.

72 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 7, resp.

73 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 8, resp.

is not civilly disruptive or harmful to evangelization.⁷⁴ Aquinas justified Christians going to war where necessary to prevent others from hindering the faith.⁷⁵ However, he affirmed that war captives should not be coerced into converting and rejected the baptism of Jewish children without parental consent.⁷⁶

Insisting that no one could be forced to become Christian while calling for the suppression of other religions' practices, and even for some religious wars, may seem contradictory. One synthesis was proposed by the medieval Pope Innocent III, who rejected *direct* but approved of *indirect* religious coercion, like using “the force of law and fear of punishment” to “remove obstacles” to conversion.⁷⁷ Indirect coercion remained an influential doctrine in the centuries that followed.⁷⁸

So did hostility toward other religions and endorsement of civil restrictions on them. Pope Pius IX's 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* condemned the ideas that: every person “is free to embrace and profess that religion which, led by the light of reason, he may have thought true”; people “may in the practice of any religion whatever ... attain eternal salvation”; and “good hopes should be entertained concerning the salvation” of non-Catholics.⁷⁹ Granted, even pre-Vatican II commentators understood these condemnations as contextually limited. In 1912, the *Catholic Encyclopedia*—noteworthily, an American publication—observed that in context, the first idea above rejected an argument that human reason *unaided by God* could lead to right religious judgment.⁸⁰ That source also anticipated Vatican II's recognition that different religions address similar questions and may have a “civilizing influence.”⁸¹ The same era even saw some strides toward fraternal pluralism. In 1927, Americans established the anti-bigotry Permanent

74 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 11, resp.

75 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 8, resp.; cf. Berger, *Persecution*, 247 (noting that Bernard of Clairvaux likewise taught that Jews and “subjugated pagans” should be tolerated).

76 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 12, resp.

77 Cavedon, *From the Pope's Hand*, 16 (citing Lantigua, *Infidels*, 40).

78 Cavedon, *From the Pope's Hand*, 65, 69, 71 (noting early criticism of indirect coercion by the sixteenth-century bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas).

79 Pius IX, *The Syllabus*, in *The Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius IX and the Syllabus of Modern Errors* (James Miller, 1864), paras. XV–XVII.

80 Anthony Haag, “Syllabus,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14 (Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14368b.htm>.

81 Charles Francis Aiken, “Religion,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12738a.htm>.

Commission for Better Understanding Between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.⁸²

However, after Catholic participation in the 1893 Parliament of World's Religions, discussed in Part I.B above, the Church stayed away from fraternal pluralism. Though it always treated consent as necessary for conversion, it narrowly cabined this doctrine. While it at times backed some tolerance for non-Christians, it was hostile toward their religions. These attitudes prevented fraternal pluralism from truly flowering, despite some scriptural and other warrants for it. The doctrinal obstacles were not cleared away until Vatican II.

B. *Vatican II positively appreciated non-Christian religions*

Vatican II evaluated other religions positively and rejected indirect coercion. Religious liberty is discussed in Part IV below. The key Council document concerning appreciation for other religions is *Nostra Aetate*.⁸³ *Nostra Aetate* did not emerge from a vacuum. Congar saw God's hand in historical affairs that affect the development of Christian doctrine.⁸⁴ As discussed above, American and French thinkers before the Council tested thicker versions of pluralism, while Pope Pius XII invited all people of good will to help rebuild world order. In 1960, two years before the Council, John XXIII befriended Jules Isaac, a prominent French Jewish scholar.⁸⁵

Another influence on *Nostra Aetate* was Boston's Cardinal Richard James Cushing, discussed more in Part IV.C below. He flew across the Atlantic to confront the Council: "How many [Jews] have suffered in our own time? How many died because Christians were indifferent or kept silent? If in recent years, not many Christian voices were raised against those injustices,

82 "Isaac Landman," Jewish Virtual Library, 2007, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/landman-isaac>.

83 Second Vatican Council, *On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* *Nostra Aetate* (hereinafter *Nostra Aetate*), declaration, Vatican website, October 28, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

84 Haddad, "St. Bonaventure's Medieval Theory."

85 Anthony J. Cernera, "The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University: An Example of Fostering Dialogue and Understanding," in *Examining Nostra Aetate After 40 Years: Catholic-Jewish Relations in Our Time*, Anthony J. Cernera, ed. (Sacred Heart University Press, 2007), 143–4.

at least let ours now be heard in humility.”⁸⁶ Cushing, too, was moved toward fraternal pluralism partly by historical contingencies: his own brother-in-law was Jewish.⁸⁷

Inspired by Cushing, Maritain, Aquinas, and others, the Council promoted positive appreciation for other religions. While *Nostra Aetate* did so most thoroughly, the Council’s dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, is also important. The latter document teaches that the Jewish people remain “most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.”⁸⁸ It continues that Muslims “along with us adore the one and merciful God,” while God is also near “those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God.”⁸⁹ *Lumen Gentium* says people can be saved who “sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.”⁹⁰ Even those lacking “an explicit knowledge of God” can receive salvific aid when they “strive to live a good life.”⁹¹

Lumen Gentium does not endorse theological pluralism. It laments that “often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator.”⁹² It affirms that the Church “snatches” people “from the slavery of error and of idols and incorporates them in Christ”—embracing “whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples” so that this “is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man.”⁹³ At the same time, the Church does appreciate all goodness and truth as given by God to prepare people for the fullness of religious truth.⁹⁴

86 A. James Rudin, “55 Years Ago, a Cardinal’s ‘Special Reverence’ for the Jews Redeemed ‘*Nostra Aetate*,’” *Religion News Service*, Oct. 28, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/10/28/55-years-ago-a-cardinals-special-reverence-for-the-jews-redeemed-nostra-aetate/>.

87 Eugene J. Fisher, “Brief Notice,” *Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (2012): 842.

88 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 16; cf. Romans 9:1–11:36.

89 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 16; cf. Acts 17:22–31.

90 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 16; cf. Matthew 5:10, 25:31–46; Romans 2:14–16.

91 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 16.

92 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 17.

93 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 17.

94 *Lumen Gentium*, para. 17.

Nostra Aetate's fraternal pluralism prioritizes common ground and fellowship among religions with greater emphasis.⁹⁵ God extends his goodness to all people, and all religions seek answers to the ultimate questions of human existence.⁹⁶ Throughout history, people have discerned a supernatural power, and sometimes even God.⁹⁷ Religions arising within "an advanced culture" have addressed divine matters in sophisticated ways.⁹⁸ These include Hinduism's "inexhaustible myths," "thorough searching philosophical inquiry," asceticism, and devotionalism; Buddhism's awareness of the world's transience and inadequacy; and other religions' efforts to "counter the restlessness of the human heart."⁹⁹

The Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions," and "regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."¹⁰⁰ Catholics should engage in interfaith dialogue and collaboration, as well as "recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values," cherished by adherents to other religions.¹⁰¹

Nostra Aetate singles out for special closeness Muslims and Jews. In addition to the shared monotheism noted by *Lumen Gentium*, *Nostra Aetate* recognizes Muslims' reverence for Jesus and honor toward the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁰² The Council asks Catholics and Muslims to "forget" past hostilities and "work sincerely for mutual understanding," social justice, morality, peace, and freedom.¹⁰³ Regarding Jews, *Nostra Aetate* says the Church "cannot forget" that she received revelation through them—God's covenantal people—and even now "draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles."¹⁰⁴ In order to cultivate "mutual understanding and respect," the Council encouraged careful study and "fraternal dialogues."¹⁰⁵ It also

95 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 1.
 96 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 1.
 97 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.
 98 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.
 99 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.
 100 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.
 101 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 2.
 102 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 3.
 103 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 3.
 104 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 4.
 105 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 4.

rejected any categorical condemnation of Jews based on Jesus's crucifixion.¹⁰⁶ *Nostra Aetate* closed with explicit fraternal pluralism, saying Catholics "cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man."¹⁰⁷

Nostra Aetate has borne fruit. The Vatican now has an office dedicated to interfaith dialogue.¹⁰⁸ In 1986, Pope Saint John Paul II went to the Synagogue of Rome and blessed the Jewish people, part of a lifetime of working to strengthen ties.¹⁰⁹ The same year, he convened leaders of different religions for a "world day of prayer."¹¹⁰ In 2001, he became the first pope to visit a mosque.¹¹¹ More recently, *Fratelli Tutti* recalled how the medieval friar Saint Francis of Assisi went to Islamic Egypt, seeking to avoid "arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake."¹¹² The encyclical ends with interfaith and ecumenical prayers, as does Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*.¹¹³ In 1993 and 2023, the Parliament of World's Religions returned to Chicago, both times featuring heavy participation from Catholic hierarchs.¹¹⁴ The Church has shown fraternal pluralism to non-religious people, too. In 2011, Pope Benedict

106 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 4.

107 *Nostra Aetate*, para. 5 (citing 1 John 4:8).

108 "Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue," Roman Curia, Vatican website, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/dicasteri/dicastero-dialogo-interreligioso.index.html>.

109 Harold Kasimow, "Pope John Paul II: A Jewish Perspective on a Polish Catholic Saint," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 3 (2013): 410–416, at 410 and 413.

110 Peter Admirand, "Rifts, Trust, and Openness: Pope John Paul II's Legacy in Catholic Intra- and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 4 (2012): 555–574, at 555 and 565; see also John Paul II, "Address to the Representatives of the World Religions (Assisi, Italy, Jan. 24, 2002)," https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020124_discorso-assisi.html; Benedict XVI, "For the 20th Anniversary: Interreligious Prayer Meeting for Peace, Assisi," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 September 2006, 3, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/for-the-20th-anniversary-interreligious-prayer-meeting-for-peace-assisi-6150>.

111 Alessandra Stanley, "Pope, in Damascus, Goes to a Mosque in Move for Unity," *New York Times*, May 7, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/07/world/pope-in-damascus-goes-to-a-mosque-in-move-for-unity.html>.

112 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 3.

113 *Fratelli Tutti*, para. 3; Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (hereinafter *Laudato Si'*), encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 24, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

114 Blase Cupich, "Address to the Conscience Plenary," (speech, Chicago, IL, August 13, 2023), Parliament of the World's Religions, <https://parliamentofreligions.org>.

XVI's Vatican opened the "Courtyard of the Gentiles," a forum for dialogue with non-believers.¹¹⁵ Before he became pope, he published a dialogue with Frankfurt School philosopher Jürgen Habermas.¹¹⁶ Fraternal pluralism toward non-Christians is now common.

C. Dom Christian de Chergé showed Muslims fraternal pluralism

Another example comes from a much quieter corner of the Church. In 1996, Algerian Islamist militants declared that they had killed seven French Trappist monks they had taken captive two months earlier.¹¹⁷ Controversy remains as to whether another party, possibly the Algerian military or even the French government, caused their deaths.¹¹⁸ Either way, the brothers' superior, Dom Christian de Chergé, left behind a last testament.¹¹⁹ His words embody fraternal pluralism. Chergé wrote that it was "important to state" certain things in the event of his killing, because he could not "rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder" and so viewed with "scorn."¹²⁰ He recognized that were he murdered, it could be by someone who "says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam."¹²¹ "For me," he continued, "Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul."¹²² Chergé found "so often" among Muslims "that

org/2023-chicago/cardinal-blase-cupich-addresses-the-conscience-plenary/; Parra-Pirela, "Toward Religious Pluralism," 45–69.

115 John L. Allen Jr., "Courtyard of the Gentiles' Promises Boost to Catholic Pride," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 18, 2011, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/courtyard-gentiles-promises-boost-catholic-pride>.

116 Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, English ed. (Ignatius Press, 2006).

117 Christian de Chergé, "Last Testament," *First Things*, August 1, 1996, foreword, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/last-testament>.

118 Margot Patterson, "The Last Monk of Tibhirine: 'God Drove that History,'" *National Catholic Reporter*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/last-monk-tibhirine-god-drove-history>; "Execution of French Monks in Algeria, the Details," *Middle East Monitor*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180329-execution-of-french-monks-in-algeria-the-details/>; Pierre Longerey, "Official Version of Events Leading to 1996 Beheading of French Monks Challenged," *Vice*, July 3, 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/d3988a/official-version-of-events-leading-to-1996-beheading-of-french-monks-challenged>.

119 Chergé, "Last Testament," foreword.

120 Chergé, "Last Testament."

121 Chergé, "Last Testament."

122 Chergé, "Last Testament."

true strand of the Gospel I learned at my mother’s knee, my very first Church.”¹²³ To those who would treat his martyrdom as proof that he was “naive or idealistic,” Chergé said it would instead allow him, “if God wills,” to “immerse my gaze in that of the Father.”¹²⁴ This would fulfill his fraternal pluralism—letting him “contemplate with [God] his children of Islam just as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, delighting in the differences.”¹²⁵ Chergé ended his words with an appeal to his foreseen killer, whom he called “the friend of my final moment”: “Yes, for you also I wish this ‘thank you’—and this *adieu*—to commend you to the God whose face I see in yours. And may we find each other, happy ‘good thieves,’ in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen.”¹²⁶

Chergé gave his last testament to fraternal pluralism. In 2018, he and his companions were beatified by the Church, the next-to-final step before canonization as saints.¹²⁷ The men were commemorated in the award-winning 2010 film *Of Gods and Men*.¹²⁸ The two surviving monks relocated to Morocco.¹²⁹ One of them, Father Jean-Pierre Schumacher, later recalled that the monks had gone to Algeria to live alongside the local Muslims, not proselytize them, and had called the army and the Islamist rebels alike their “brothers.”¹³⁰ He remembered their monastery as a divinely consecrated “image of reconciliation” and inspiration for dialogue.¹³¹ An icon, as it were, of the Church’s fraternal pluralism toward non-Christians.

123 Chergé, “Last Testament.”

124 Chergé, “Last Testament.”

125 Chergé, “Last Testament.”

126 Chergé, “Last Testament.” For a translation of Chergé’s spiritual writings, see *Christian de Chergé: Spiritual Writings*, trans. and eds. Christian Krokus and Habib Zanzana, (Orbis, 2025).

127 Patterson, “Last Monk.”

128 Étienne Comar and Xavier Beauvois, *Of Gods and Men*, directed by Xavier Beauvois (2010; Why Not Productions, Armada Films, and France 3 Cinéma), film.

129 Patterson, “Last Monk.”

130 Patterson, “Last Monk.”

131 Patterson, “Last Monk.”

III. Fraternal pluralism means seeking Christian unity

Catholics historically understood other Christians as fellow believers, but suppressing heresy took precedence over tolerating differences. Vatican II shifted the priority to unity and reconciliation. Unique commemorations of saints promoted by Pope Francis illustrate fraternal pluralism toward fellow Christians.

A. *Suppressing heresy took precedence over toleration*

Divisions among Christians are as old as the faith. Saint Luke's Gospel recounts Saint John the Apostle telling Jesus he saw an exorcist "casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company" (Luke 9:49). Jesus criticized John, because "whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:50). John's Gospel, meanwhile, has one of Jesus's last prayers on earth being a petition that believers "may all be one ... that the world may believe that [God the Father] sent me" (John 17:21).

Early Catholics did see other Christians fraternally in some regards. Augustine wrote: "Whether *they* like it or not, those who are outside the church are our brothers."¹³² He urged Catholics to have charity for all, especially those "joined with us in professing faith in Christ, our head," yet "divided from the unity of his body."¹³³ True Christian fraternity would cease only "when *they* no longer say our Father."¹³⁴ *They* say Catholics "are pagans" and try to baptize them anew, but the Church acknowledges *their* baptisms and marriages.¹³⁵ Whenever other Christians seek distance, Catholics reply, "we have everything to do with you, for we are one in our belief."¹³⁶ Augustine hoped that God would someday grant non-Catholic Christians repentance, but until then, Catholics must "show them great love and abundant compassion," praying for them ardently.¹³⁷

However, Augustine also wrote against tolerance. In a letter, he explained that he saw many former Donatist Christians become ardent

132 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*, <https://www.reason2bcatholic.com/2024/07/09/divine-office-whether-they-like-it-or-not-those-who-are-outside-the-church-are-our-brothers-2/> (emphasis added).

133 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*.

134 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*.

135 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*.

136 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*.

137 Augustine, *Discourse on Psalm 32*.

Catholics thanks to legal measures against heresy.¹³⁸ This caused him to stop thinking coercion would result only in insincere conversions.¹³⁹ It could set heretics free from social pressure, unexamined customs, and other causes of religious complacency.¹⁴⁰ Christian rulers should “serve Christ by making laws for Him and for His cause.”¹⁴¹ As for those killed by Catholic coercion, the Church “soothes and cures the sorrow of her maternal heart by the thoughts of the deliverance of” others, “especially when she considers that those who are lost perish by a death which they brought upon themselves.”¹⁴²

Augustine accused the Donatists of violence, which may be important context for this teaching, but it was ultimately understood more globally.¹⁴³ Centuries later, Aquinas described how the Church ostracized those who corrupt Christianity (heretics) or abandon it (apostates).¹⁴⁴ They should “be submitted even to bodily compulsion.”¹⁴⁵ Their very nearness to the Church justified intolerance—they could justly be forced to “fulfil what they have promised” through baptism and “hold what they, at one time, received.”¹⁴⁶ Whenever heresy could be suppressed without harm to believers, this should be done.¹⁴⁷ Heresy objectively deserves death.¹⁴⁸ The Church did extend heretics two warnings, but afterward, the need to protect other Catholics from them was paramount.¹⁴⁹ Aquinas rejects fraternal pluralism here: whatever benefit Catholics receive from dialogue with heretics is insignificant compared to the harm this can do.¹⁵⁰

138 Augustine, *Letter 93*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, trans. J.G. Cunningham, (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887), paras. 16–17, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102093.htm>.

139 Augustine, *Letter 93*, para. 17.

140 Augustine, *Letter 93*, paras. 17–18.

141 Augustine, *Letter 93*, para. 19.

142 Augustine, *Letter 185*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, trans. J.R. King, (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887), para. 32, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102185.htm>.

143 See Peter Iver Kaufman, “Donatism Revisited: Moderates and Militants in Late Antique North Africa,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 1 (2009): 131–142, at 131, 133.

144 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 21, art. 9, resp.

145 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 21, art. 8, resp.

146 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 21, art. 8, resp. and q. 12, art. 2, resp.

147 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 8, ad 1 and ad 4 (citing Augustine, *Letter 185*, para. 32).

148 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 11, art. 3, resp.

149 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 11, art. 3, resp. and art. 4, resp.

150 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 11, art. 3, ad 2.

Augustine and Aquinas wrote long before the Protestant Reformation. Conflicts following it killed many people and reshaped European politics.¹⁵¹ The resulting 1648 Peace of Westphalia let civil rulers decide what kind of Christianity would be practiced in their realms.¹⁵² Despite this norm of homogeneity, coexistence remained a reality in many places, and even an occasional ideal.¹⁵³ Fraternal pluralism, though, remained far off, and the Church's priority remained suppressing heresy.¹⁵⁴ Animosity toward other Christians predominated into the twentieth century.¹⁵⁵

B. Unitatis Redintegratio *centered the search for unity*

This began to change before Vatican II. Catholics in Belgium and the United States undertook political activities with Protestants.¹⁵⁶ Saint Maria Elisabetta Hesselblad, a convert from Swedish Lutheranism, dedicated her vocation as a nun to Christian unity and defended the rights of Protestants, as well as sheltering Jews during the Holocaust.¹⁵⁷ The Second World War ironically again proved a catalyst for fraternal pluralism, though this time, the development came inside the Axis. A concentrated effort at Catholic-Protestant reconciliation began in the 1930s among sympathizers of the

151 See generally Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires, and International Change* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

152 Nexon, *Struggle for Power*, 265, 280–81.

153 David M. Luebke, *Hometown Religion: Regimes of Coexistence in Early Modern Westphalia* (University of Virginia Press, 2016), 5; Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 48–67.

154 Udi Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants, and the Violent Birth of European Religious Pluralism,” *American Historical Review* 124, no. 3 (2019): 511–538, at 511, 516; Lehner, *Catholic Enlightenment*, 68; Leo XIII, *Libertas*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, June 20, 1888, para. 35, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html; Pius IX, *Syllabus*, paras. LXXVIII–LXXIX.

155 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 514, 525; Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage toward World Christianity,” *Theological Studies Journal* 76 (2015): 503–530, at 515–16.

156 Henry Haag, “The Political Ideals of Belgian Catholics (1789–1914),” in *Church and Society: Catholic Social and Political Thought and Movements, 1789–1950*, ed. Joseph N. Moody (Arts, Incorporated, 1953), 281–98; Francis Downing, *American Catholicism and the Socio-Economic Evolution in the U.S.A.*, in *Church and Society*, 843–904.

157 Patty Knapp, “St. Maria Elizabeth Hesselblad Witnessed to the Power of the Resurrection,” *National Catholic Register*, August 17, 2016, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/st-maria-elizabeth-hesselblad-witnessed-to-the-power-of-the-resurrection>.

Third Reich who sought a united Christian front against liberal and Jewish influence.¹⁵⁸ Several Catholic theologians thought an ecumenically united Nazi Germany could mirror the Church's search for Christian unity.¹⁵⁹ Ecumenism and anti-Semitism were connected.¹⁶⁰

Some early Catholic ecumenists, including Congar, were anti-Nazis.¹⁶¹ After the war, though, he worked alongside former Nazis and collaborationists.¹⁶² Ecumenists set aside their wartime hostilities to build anti-communist, conservative political organizations, including Christian Democratic parties.¹⁶³ Christian unity became a powerful response to decolonization in mission territories and the perceived threats of resurgent Islam, indigeneity, and dharmic religions.¹⁶⁴ Ecumenism at times aimed at “dismantling some hierarchies in order to bolster others.”¹⁶⁵ In a less defensive posture, ecumenism was also seen as a way of making Christianity more credible (recalling Jesus's prayer in John 17:21 linking unity to persuasiveness) and adapting to a changing world.¹⁶⁶ Senegalese Catholic Alioune Diop opposed colonialism, but saw Christian unity as a move toward fellowship among people of different cultures and religions.¹⁶⁷

Vatican II adopted fraternal pluralism toward non-Catholic Christians. Pope John XXIII invited them to observe the Council.¹⁶⁸ Its key document concerning Christian unity is *Unitatis Redintegratio* (“The Restoration of Unity”).¹⁶⁹ It describes divisions among Christians as unholy, scandalous, and harmful.¹⁷⁰ It credits God for moving believers toward unity.¹⁷¹ *Unitatis*

158 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 512, 520.

159 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 520.

160 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 522.

161 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 523.

162 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 524. For other contemporary Catholic efforts at ecumenism, see Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage,” 516–17.

163 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 512.

164 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 513, 530–31.

165 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 513.

166 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 528, 532–33.

167 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 531.

168 Chia, Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage” 518.

169 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism* *Unitatis Redintegratio* (hereinafter *Unitatis Redintegratio*), Decree, Vatican Library, November 21, 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

170 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 1.

171 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 1.

Redintegratio confirmed the Catholic Church’s special role.¹⁷² However, it also accepted partial responsibility for divisions and decreed that Christians who are not born Catholic are not culpable for the fractures.¹⁷³ The Church recognized that Catholic failures have done harm.¹⁷⁴ The Council cited Augustine to say Catholics love “as brothers” their fellow Christians, who are in imperfect communion with the Church through baptism.¹⁷⁵

Vatican II then turned to the gifts other Christians hold. They share in the Scriptures, God’s grace, the Holy Spirit’s gifts, and liturgical rites that foster holiness and salvation.¹⁷⁶ The Council urged that “Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage” found in other communities.¹⁷⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio* said anything “truly Christian” can aid Catholics’ own faith.¹⁷⁸ It identified as preconditions for fraternal pluralism Catholic self-denial, humility, gentleness, and “brotherly generosity.”¹⁷⁹ Catholics should “get to know the outlook,” beliefs, history, and lives of other Christians.¹⁸⁰ Bishops should authorize suitable people to engage in formal ecumenical dialogue.¹⁸¹ Foreshadowing the move by Pope Francis discussed below, the document also invited the Church to honor the martyrdoms of non-Catholics.¹⁸²

Unitatis Redintegratio has proven influential. At the end of Vatican II, Pope Saint Paul VI invalidated the 1054 ruling declaring Eastern Orthodox Christians to be in schism from the Catholic Church.¹⁸³ His pressure led Spain, Portugal, and Italy to broaden religious liberty.¹⁸⁴ Vatican appointees now work at the World Council of Churches, and Catholics have held formal international dialogues with most other large Christian communities.¹⁸⁵

172 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 2.

173 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 3.

174 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4.

175 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 3 (citing Augustine, *Letter 93*).

176 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 3.

177 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4.

178 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4.

179 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 7.

180 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 9.

181 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 9.

182 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4.

183 Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage,” 518.

184 Greenberg, “Catholics, Protestants,” 535–36.

185 Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage,” 519–20; see generally Lutheran World Federation and Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 20th Anniversary ed., (Lutheran World Federation, 2019); John Long, “A

C. Pope Francis showed fraternal pluralism by commemorating saints

Fraternal pluralism has also inspired spiritual developments.¹⁸⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio* said other Christians' patrimony could aid Catholic spirituality, and it specifically invited commemoration of saints across Christian divides. Pope Francis took both calls seriously. Much of his focus was on martyrs. In his homily concluding 2015's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, he preached on fraternal pluralism, recalling that Jesus had "no problem dealing with Samaritans, who were considered by the Jews to be heretics, schismatics, others."¹⁸⁷ Christians should likewise welcome encounters with people who are different from them.¹⁸⁸ Jesus said God must be worshipped in "spirit and truth," so Christians must set aside divisions.¹⁸⁹ Christian unity does not come from debate and "subtle theological discussions"; believers will still be "discussing" these matters when Jesus returns at the end of time.¹⁹⁰ Instead, Christians should trust the Holy Spirit to lead them to mutual encounter and even "challenge."¹⁹¹ The mystery of divine love is the ultimate ground of Christian unity, and it is stronger than any divisions.¹⁹² Echoing twentieth-century missionary ecumenism, Pope Francis also said "proselytism and competition" weaken Christian evangelization and witness.¹⁹³

He closed by turning to "our martyrs, the martyrs of today."¹⁹⁴ They are "killed because they are Christians."¹⁹⁵ Those who kill them "make no distinction" between Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and others.¹⁹⁶ Christians would do well to recognize "the ecumenism of blood."¹⁹⁷ In 2023, Pope Francis made that recognition concrete. He placed on the Catholic

Century of Catholic-Orthodox Relations," *One*, July 2005, <https://cnewa.org/magazine/a-century-of-catholic-orthodox-relations/>.

- 186 See Matthew P. Cavedon, "How Is Eastern Christianity Affecting Pope Francis's Priorities?," *Canopy Forum*, January 26, 2023, <https://canopyforum.org/2023/01/26/how-is-eastern-christianity-affecting-pope-franciss-priorities/>.
- 187 Francis, "An Ecumenism of Blood," *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 30, 2015, 8, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/ecumenism-of-blood-7277>.
- 188 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 189 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 190 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 191 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 192 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 193 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 194 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 195 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 196 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.
- 197 Francis, "Ecumenism of Blood," 8.

liturgical calendar a commemoration of twenty-one Egyptian Christians martyred by Islamic State militants in Libya.¹⁹⁸ These martyrs were not Catholic, but Coptic Orthodox.¹⁹⁹ Pope Francis added their names during a meeting with their own Pope Tawadros II, “as a sign of the spiritual communion that unites our two churches.”²⁰⁰

Pope Francis has acknowledged other Christians as models for Catholics, too. He named as a doctor of the Church—the highest theological honor—a medieval Armenian Apostolic Christian, Saint Gregory of Narek.²⁰¹ Addressing the U.S. Congress, he commended Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.²⁰² As Vatican II invited, fraternal pluralism toward other Christians is stimulating Catholic spirituality.

IV. Fraternal pluralism means honoring personal conscience

Fraternal pluralism applies even when the Church approaches Catholics who reject its teachings. This article’s next section addresses the more complicated issue of perceived internal dissent, but the present section explores a different issue, politics. Historically, the Church accepted limits on the coercion of those who disagreed with its teachings and taught that even an incorrect conscience must be respected. Vatican II strengthened these doctrines by rejecting all civil coercion in religious matters. This had an immediate impact in Massachusetts, as Cardinal Cushing endorsed liberalization of birth-control laws. Fraternal pluralism means respect for the conscience of Catholics who part ways with the Church.

198 Cindy Wooden, “United in Prayer: Pope Adds Coptic Orthodox Martyrs to Catholic Calendar,” *Catholic News Service*, May 11, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/united-prayer-pope-adds-coptic-orthodox-martyrs-catholic-calendar>.

199 Wooden, “United in Prayer.”

200 Wooden, “United in Prayer.”

201 Kevin J. Jones and Ann Schneible, “Meet St. Gregory of Narek, the Newest Doctor of the Church,” *National Catholic Register*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/meet-st-gregory-of-narek-the-newest-doctor-of-the-church>.

202 “Read the Full Text of Pope Francis’ Address to US Congress,” *Catholic News Agency*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/32682/read-the-full-text-of-pope-francis-address-to-us-congress>.

A. *The Church accepted limited government and the primacy of conscience*

Catholicism has long supported limits on government coercion and insisted that conscience is binding, even if it goes astray. The earliest Christians assumed division between the Church's spiritual jurisdiction and the state's ability to use physical coercion. Jesus taught that a sinner who refused to obey the Church's judgment should be treated like a non-believer or civil servant—which assumes room in civil society for dissidents (Matthew 18:15-17). He told people to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but to God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21). Likewise, Paul ordered that a man guilty of incest be handed over to pagan Roman authorities “for the destruction of his flesh” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The first Christians were persecuted by the state—they were not its sovereigns.

Catholics eventually gained political power, of course. Even at the height of the Middle Ages, though, intellectuals continued to endorse limits on government force. Aquinas supported bans on blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy, as discussed above in Part III.A. However, he also favored other personal freedoms. He understood governments as imitating God's divine rule of the universe, but God tolerates some evils for the sake of greater goods and to prevent greater evils.²⁰³ He cited Augustine for the idea that outlawing prostitution would lead only to more dangerous lust.²⁰⁴ Human laws should refrain from attacking every vice and acknowledge that most people are imperfect.²⁰⁵ Human laws should “chiefly” prohibit vices that harm other people and would destroy society, like murder and theft.²⁰⁶ Doing more than this may make people resent the law altogether.²⁰⁷ Aquinas also accepted good-faith disagreements among Catholics as normal when not concerning “things necessary to salvation” or arising from “undue obstinacy.”²⁰⁸ Governments should quell civil strife and sedition, as well as outright heresy, but avoid undue paternalism.²⁰⁹

While not accepting civil religious liberty, Aquinas held conscience in great respect, even where it led Catholics into error. Human reason is

203 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 11, resp.

204 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 11, resp.

205 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 96, art. 2, resp.

206 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 96, art. 2, resp.

207 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 96, art. 2, ad 2.

208 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 37, art. 1, resp.

209 See Matthew P. Cavedon, “Early Stirrings of Modern Liberty in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 4 (2023): 567–584, at 572–73.

fallible.²¹⁰ Still, it puts judgments forward as required by truth, and God is true.²¹¹ Therefore, “to scorn the dictate of reason”—even where it is objectively wrong—“is to scorn the commandment of God.”²¹² If people are negligent in forming their consciences, they are liable for that.²¹³ However, innocent ignorance is also possible, and someone who honestly follows a mistaken conscience is morally excused.²¹⁴

Jesus rejected violence, set the outer bounds of Christian dispute as treating someone like an outsider—and modeled radical love for outsiders. Paul urged Christians to accept civil government, not impose physical coercion through the Church itself. Aquinas respected civil liberty in some regards and revered conscience. Vatican II wove these strands into an endorsement of religious and conscientious civil liberty.

B. *Dignitas Humanae confirmed respect for dissenting conscience*

One important contributor to the Council’s key text, *Dignitatis Humanae*, was Father John Courtney Murray.²¹⁵ An American Jesuit, Murray loved his country’s religious freedom, believing it to be deeply consistent with Catholic thought.²¹⁶ Although the American Founders were mostly Protestants and Deists, they drew on the Western tradition of freedom, which was itself inspired by Catholicism.²¹⁷ America recovered that tradition in enshrining religious liberty, and Murray worked to recover it for the Church.²¹⁸ His role

210 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, I-II, q. 19, art. 5.

211 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, I-II, q. 19, art. 5, ad 1.

212 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, I-II, q. 19, art. 5, ad 2.

213 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, I-II, q. 19, art. 6, resp.

214 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, I-II, q. 19, art. 6, resp.

215 See generally Joseph A. Komonchak, “The American Contribution to *Dignitatis Humanae*: The Role of John Courtney Murray, S.J.,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 1 (2006): 1–20.

216 See John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Sheed & Ward, 1960).

217 Kenneth L. Grasso, “‘Building Better Than They Knew’: John Courtney Murray on Catholicism, Modernity, and the American Proposition,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 4, no. 1 (2007): 163–198, at 190–91.

218 Komonchak, “American Contribution,” 18; see also Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia Offering them His Christmas Greetings,” address, Vatican website, December 22, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html (“The Second Vatican Council ... has recovered the deepest patrimony of

is more evidence of Congar’s theory that doctrinal development is driven partly by “historical contingencies.”²¹⁹

Dignitatis Humanae prized conscience. It described people as able to “act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty.”²²⁰ In turn, people demand freedom concerning “the quest for the values proper to the human spirit,” especially in religious matters.²²¹ This reflects conscience’s duty “to embrace the truth . . . and to hold fast to it.”²²² This obligation comes only as the truth “makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.”²²³ People have an inviolable right to immunity from human religious coercion.²²⁴ This divinely granted liberty protects beliefs and actions, both individual and collective.²²⁵

Reason and conscience are formed for right judgments through fraternal pluralism—“with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.”²²⁶ Once people believe they have discovered truth, they must personally commit to it and integrate it into their lives through their consciences.²²⁷ This duty further justifies fraternal pluralism, as people naturally seek to share their religious beliefs with others.²²⁸ Further, governments should foster fraternal pluralism by favoring religion.²²⁹ This can only properly be done while recognizing human freedom and equality.²³⁰

the Church. By so doing she can be conscious of being in full harmony with the teaching of Jesus himself as well as with the Church of the martyrs of all time.”).

219 Haddad, “St. Bonaventure’s Medieval Theory.”

220 Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae: On the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (hereinafter *Dignitatis Humanae*), Declaration on Religious Freedom, Vatican Library, December 7, 1965, para. 1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

221 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 1.

222 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 1.

223 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 1.

224 *Dignitatis Humanae*, paras. 1–2.

225 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 2.

226 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 3.

227 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 3.

228 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 3.

229 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 3.

230 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 6.

Responsibility for fraternal pluralism falls to “the whole citizenry, upon social groups ... and upon the Church and other religious communities.”²³¹

Fraternal pluralism extends even to those who dissent from the Church. No one can be socially coerced into remaining in a religious community.²³² Catholicism involves “reasonable and free submission of faith.”²³³ Because God wants service “in spirit and in truth,” people are “bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion.”²³⁴ Fraternal pluralism and respect for conscience are divinely ordered, even though Catholics have sometimes forgotten this.²³⁵ Religious liberty is a necessary foundation for the growing fraternity of people of different nations, religions, and cultures, and it is required out of respect for conscience.²³⁶

C. Cardinal Cushing showed dissenters fraternal pluralism

Dignitatis Humanae had a direct and immediate impact on Massachusetts’s legalization of artificial birth control. In 1948, Cardinal Cushing persuaded voters to reject a contraception-legalization referendum.²³⁷ In 1962, he reiterated his stance.²³⁸ A year later, though, he began to move toward fraternal pluralism. He granted that there was “much that is good” in criticism of Church doctrine by the Catholic physician John Rock, who invented hormonal birth control.²³⁹ The Cardinal disagreed with Rock’s theological arguments, but expressed hope that his policy proposals “could contribute to the establishment of peace in our pluralistic society.”²⁴⁰ Instead of condemning Rock, Cushing said people like him could help the Church develop its own thinking through dialogue.²⁴¹

231 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 6.

232 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 6.

233 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 10.

234 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 11.

235 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 12.

236 *Dignitatis Humanae*, para. 15.

237 Seth Meehan, “From Patriotism to Pluralism: How Catholics Initiated the Repeal of Birth Control Restrictions in Massachusetts,” *Catholic Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (2010): 470–498, at 475–76.

238 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 477.

239 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 479.

240 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 479 (citation omitted); see also John Rock, *The Time Has Come: A Catholic Doctor’s Proposals to End the Battle over Birth Control* (Knopf, 1963).

241 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 479.

Cushing stopped fighting liberalization.²⁴² He said he would not “enter into a political phase of this subject” because he respected “individual religious consciences.”²⁴³ Other Catholics also urged the Church to take this stance for the sake of pluralism.²⁴⁴ At the end of 1964, Cushing advised Massachusetts’s other bishops that the Church would accept legalization, based on “respect for the varied consciences present in a pluralistic society.”²⁴⁵

Cushing publicly endorsed legalization starting in 1965.²⁴⁶ The following year, a Catholic professor at Boston College led the Planned Parenthood League’s successful legislative lobbying.²⁴⁷ Cushing concluded that Catholics “do not seek to impose by law their moral views on other members of society,” recognizing that the modern Christian “lives in a society of differing beliefs, a pluralist society,” and so he “must be prepared and ready for friendly discussion with those whose views of life and its meaning are different than his own.”²⁴⁸ Once *Dignitatis Humanae* was released, Cushing backed a specific legalization bill.²⁴⁹ He had Murray draft the Archdiocese’s language on the issue.²⁵⁰

Was this episode only the crescendo of 1960s liberalism? To be sure, the consensus that legalized birth control in Massachusetts did not last long. Internally, the Church reaffirmed the immorality of birth control in 1968.²⁵¹ Cushing died in 1970.²⁵² Three years later, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized

242 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 482.

243 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 481 (citation omitted).

244 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 484, 486–87.

245 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 487.

246 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 470–71, 476, 497.

247 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 470–71, 476, 497.

248 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 471, 476, 494 (citations omitted).

249 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 476.

250 Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 476.

251 Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae* on the Regulation of Birth,” encyclical letter, Vatican library, July 25, 1968, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html; see also James T. Bretzke, “Moral Theology and the Paradigm Shift of Vatican II,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, eds. Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (Oxford University Press, 2023), 421–22. Bretzke notes Pope Paul VI’s rejection of the contrary recommendation of a papal study commission.

252 See Violet Hurst, “The Life of Cardinal Richard Cushing,” *The Pilot*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.thebostonpilot.com/article.php?ID=188790>.

abortion nationwide in *Roe v. Wade*.²⁵³ This catalyzed the pro-life movement. While the movement did not argue for the liberalization of laws governing a perceived private vice, neither did it retreat from fraternal pluralism. The movement was itself made up of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Jews, and other Americans, representing different religious commitments and political persuasions.²⁵⁴ It also argued from grounds compatible with pluralism, asserting that fighting abortion was a matter of defending human rights, not of restricting conscience for the sake of exclusive Catholic concerns.²⁵⁵

Catholics did not abandon their commitment to civil respect for religious and conscientious liberty. In a context the Church considers more similar to contraception than to abortion, homosexual activity—a private sin, rather than violence against another—the Vatican has criticized government bans since 2008.²⁵⁶ The Church has also condemned “unjust discrimination” on the basis of sexual orientation since the time of Pope John Paul II.²⁵⁷ Theological dissent can meet with dialogue and encounter

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- 253 *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), overruled by *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022).
- 254 Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before Roe v. Wade* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–4, 8.
- 255 Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 4–9; see also Matthew P. Cavedon, “The Admissibility of Christian Pro-Life Politics,” *Canopy Forum*, October 19, 2022, <https://canopyforum.org/2022/10/19/the-admissibility-of-christian-pro-life-politics/>.
- 256 “Pope Francis Says Homosexuality Is a Sin But Not a Crime and Criticizes ‘Unjust’ Anti-Gay Laws,” *Associated Press*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/pope-francis-homosexuality-not-crime-criticizes-unjust-anti-gay-laws-rcna67352>; Celso Perez, “Zero Tolerance: Why Catholics Must Condemn Anti-Gay Violence,” *America*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/zero-tolerance> (Celso surveys bishops’ worldwide advocacy on such laws—some of it in favor, but much of it opposed); compare “Conference President Criticizes Supreme Court Decision,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 23, 2003, <https://www.usccb.org/news/2003/conference-president-criticizes-supreme-court-decision> (noting criticism of U.S. legalization by then-Bishop Wilton Gregory) with David Crary, “Social Issues a Priority for Cardinal-to-Be Wilton Gregory,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 30, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/religion-race-and-ethnicity-slavery-social-issues-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-6c0f6e6db26050f7499229557ebf9b6a> (noting, decades later, that Gregory has “drawn notice for his relatively inclusive approach for LGBT Catholics”).
- 257 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita: On Human Dignity*, Declaration, Vatican website, April 2, 2024, para. 55, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddd_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html (quoting *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), para. 2358); cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the

as well. As archbishop of Munich, Joseph Ratzinger reportedly agreed with the Vatican's decision to condemn the theologian Hans Küng.²⁵⁸ As Pope Benedict XVI, he dined with Küng, and the two issued a joint statement about ethics, science, and faith.²⁵⁹

Fraternal pluralism has proven possible even in the context of blasphemy. After terrorists killed a provocative group of French satirists in the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Paris archbishop Cardinal André Vingt-Trois affirmed the right to criticize the Church.²⁶⁰ (Regrettably, Pope Francis both condemned the attack and said there is no right to “make fun of faith,” implying that those who do so may “get a punch in the nose.”²⁶¹) French Catholic commentator Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry quipped: “A century ago, the cardinal’s predecessor would undoubtedly have thought that *Charlie Hebdo* should be shut down as a measure of public safety. And a few centuries before that, his predecessor might have put [its authors] on the rack.”²⁶² Gobry continued that he appreciated some of *Charlie Hebdo*’s humor and, because of *Dignitatis Humanae*,

as much as I am a man of Christ and a man of the church—
because I am these things—I am also a man of Enlightenment
liberalism. That is why I see an attack against people with
whom I disagree on almost everything as an attack on my
values, on what I believe in and cherish.²⁶³

Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” letter, Vatican website, October 1, 1986, para. 10, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html (“The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.”).

- 258 Richard McBrien, “Pope’s Meeting with Father Küng Is Significant,” *Catholic Courier*, December 21, 2009, <https://catholiccourier.com/articles/popes-meeting-with-father-kung-is-significant/>.
- 259 McBrien, “Pope’s Meeting.”
- 260 See Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry, “How the Catholic Church Made its Peace with Charlie Hebdo,” *The Week*, January 11, 2015, <https://theweek.com/articles/532003/how-catholic-church-made-peace-charlie-hebdo>.
- 261 Elizabeth Dias, “Pope Francis Speaks Out on Charlie Hebdo: ‘One Cannot Make Fun of Faith,’” *Time*, January 15, 2015, <https://time.com/3668875/pope-francis-charlie-hebdo/>.
- 262 Gobry, “How the Catholic Church.”
- 263 Gobry, “How the Catholic Church”; see also Rhonheimer, *Common Good*, 307–08. Rhonheimer writes: “Christian secularity, as I understand it, means to develop one’s Christian identity and to realize one’s Christian vocation ... by fully accepting—informed and enlightened by historical experience—this secularity as a

Yes, fraternal pluralism is more than mere civil tolerance, but politics is one way of encountering others and so part of the “Christian struggle to learn to love.”²⁶⁴ Love fails when politics devolves into bullying, demonization, exclusion, destruction, and arrogance.²⁶⁵ Fraternal pluralism means dialogue, self-examination, and solidarity across differences.²⁶⁶ It requires a “modern Christian citizen for whom . . . pluralism is not simply nuisance or even outrage, but who feels at home in it.”²⁶⁷ It happens when the Church does not merely acquiesce to changes in society, but defends legitimate freedom for those who differ from its teachings. Catholics respect dissenters’ religious liberty and conscientious rights.²⁶⁸ They practice fraternal pluralism within society as a whole.

V. How might fraternal pluralism grow?

How might fraternal pluralism develop going forward? Retreat from it is unlikely. So is its translation into a model for internal Church governance. However, Pope Francis used it as a model for rethinking humanity’s place in creation.

A. Retreat from fraternal pluralism is unlikely

Some believe Vatican II must be reinterpreted in a radically narrower way, but this is unlikely. Several antiliberal Catholic “integralists” read *Dignitatis Humanae* as letting governments forbid the preaching and public practice of

political value and considering this acceptance as a [sic] integral part of one’s self-understanding as a Christian.”

264 Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 197; Rhonheimer, *Common Good*, 290–91 (urging that Catholics offer politics “the wisdom of our faith and tradition” in a way that respects moral pluralism).

265 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 198.

266 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 198; Rhonheimer, *Common Good*, 335 (“[The political value of autonomy . . . also includes a moral substance, of precisely a *political* morality. It is moreover the expression of an ideal of social life, of coexistence, and of cooperation among citizens, and even, especially in the case of religious freedom, of a specific conception of the human being and of the relation of his freedom to truth.”).

267 Rhonheimer, *Common Good*, 314.

268 See Tom Bailey and Michael D. Driessen, “Engaging Post-Secularism: Rethinking Catholic Politics in Italy,” *Constellations* 24, no. 2 (2017): 232–244, at 238–39.

non-Catholic religions.²⁶⁹ Others support civil bans on heresy and restricting citizenship to baptized Christians.²⁷⁰ Still others endorse religious liberty for non-Christians as a matter of principle, but religious toleration among baptized Christians only as a matter of practicality.²⁷¹ Integralists may rely on Vatican II's focus on *governmental* limits, seeing them as implying that *the Church* retains coercive power in reserve.²⁷² They also emphasize history.²⁷³ Contrary interpretations of Vatican II—including by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI—have focused instead on freedom, human dignity, and the Gospel, as well as the “combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels” undergirding doctrinal development.²⁷⁴

Which side of this sometimes-esoteric debate is stronger textually is moot.²⁷⁵ As leading integralist Pater Edmund Waldstein has noted, *Dignitatis Humanae*'s straightforward text has caused the Church to enthusiastically support religious liberty.²⁷⁶ For seven papacies over the course of six decades, the Church has practiced fraternal pluralism. As Aquinas argued in addressing non-Christians' rights: “The custom of the Church has very great authority and ought to be jealously observed in all things,” and “we ought to abide by the authority of the Church rather than by that of an Augustine or a Jerome or of any doctor whatever.”²⁷⁷ The Church boasts of its fraternal

269 Thomas Storck, “Recent Discussions of Religious Liberty,” *The Josias*, June 3, 2021, <https://thejosias.com/2021/06/03/recent-discussions-of-religious-liberty/>.

270 Xavier Focroulle Ménard and Anna Su, “Liberalism, Catholic Integralism, and the Question of Religious Freedom,” *BYU Law Review* 47, no. 4 (2022): 1171–1219, at 1207 (citing Thomas Crean and Alan Fimister, *Integralism: A Manual of Political Philosophy* (Editiones Scholasticae, 2020), 116–17).

271 Thomas Pink, “The Right to Religious Liberty and the Coercion of Belief: A Note on *Dignitatis Humanae*,” in *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis*, eds. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford University Press, 2013), 435, 441.

272 Thomas Pink, “*Dignitatis Humanae*: Continuity after Leo XIII,” in *Dignitatis Humanae Colloquium* (Dialogos Institute, 2017), 144–5.

273 See generally Edmund Waldstein, “Religious Liberty in the Light of Tradition,” in *Integralism and the Common Good: Selected Essays from The Josias: The Two Powers*, vol. 2, ed. P. Edmund Waldstein (Angelico Press, 2022), 255–89.

274 Benedict XVI, “Address”: John Paul II, “Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization,” address, Vatican website, October 5, 1995, paras. 12, 15, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html.

275 Contrast Kevin Vallier, *All the Kingdoms of the World: On Radical Religious Alternatives to Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 31 (assuming the integralist reading to be plausible) with Rhonheimer, *Common Good*, 429–54 (criticizing it).

276 Vallier, *All the Kingdoms*, 289.

277 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 10, art. 12, resp.

pluralism and practices it across different settings. Fraternal pluralism represents the approach of the Gospels, and it has foundations in leading Catholic authorities. The Church adopted it after long experience with more hostile approaches. It is here to stay.

B. Adoption of fraternal pluralism internally is unlikely

Some critics would have the Church embrace fraternal pluralism as an internal model.²⁷⁸ This is unlikely, too. The most prominent effort is Germany’s Synodal Way, an attempted form of power-sharing where the laity can override bishops’ decisions.²⁷⁹ Established in 2019, the Synodal Way has sought to redefine Catholic approaches to doctrine, sexuality, and the sacraments.²⁸⁰ It has endorsed women’s ordination, blessings for same-sex unions, and the reexamination of priestly celibacy.²⁸¹

Pope Francis opposed the Synodal Way, describing it as elitist, divisive, and counterfeit Protestantism.²⁸² He approved a ruling that it lacks governing authority.²⁸³ He also rejected other varieties of internal pluralism. In 2021, he ended fourteen years of widespread availability of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass.²⁸⁴ His rationale was “to promote the concord and unity of the

278 Gerald A. Arbuckle, “The Synodal Way: Catholic Identity or Identities?,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 101 (2024): 86–103, at 100–2.

279 Jonathan Liedl, “German Synodal Way Approves Same-Sex Blessings, Lay Preaching, and Reexamination of Priestly Celibacy,” *Catholic News Agency*, March 10, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253842/german-synodal-way-approves-same-sex-blessings-lay-preaching-and-reexamination-of-priestly-celibacy>.

280 “The German Synodal Way: A CNA Explainer,” *Catholic News Agency*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/247992/the-german-synodal-way-a-cna-explainer>.

281 Liedl, “German Synodal Way.”

282 Hannah Brockhaus, “The Vatican’s Statements on the German Synodal Way: a Timeline,” *Catholic News Agency*, November 21, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/256069/the-vatican-s-statements-on-the-german-synodal-way-a-timeline>.

283 AC Wimmer, “Pope Francis Decries German Synodal Way as ‘Neither Helpful Nor Serious,’” *National Catholic Register*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.ncregister.com/cna/pope-francis-decries-german-synodal-way-as-neither-helpful-nor-serious>.

284 “Traditional Latin Mass Restrictions: Here’s What You Need to Know,” *Catholic News Agency*, December 18, 2021, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249927/pope-francis-traditional-latin-mass-restrictions>.

Church.”²⁸⁵ There was irony in this—Pope Benedict XVI made that liturgy available precisely for the sake of “avoiding discord and favouring the unity of the whole Church.”²⁸⁶ Commenting on U.S. critics of his papacy, Pope Francis said there “is a very strong reactionary attitude” in the American Church, one that lives “by ideologies” and not Catholic doctrine.²⁸⁷

Pope Francis showed more openness to internal pluralism he deemed inclusive. He oversaw a “Synod on Synodality,” which urged “openness to listening and accompanying all.”²⁸⁸ The Synod noted the need to listen to “people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of their marriage status, identity or sexuality,” and help them “feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged.”²⁸⁹ It warned against governing in a way that is “oppressive rather than liberating.”²⁹⁰ Fraternity was central to the Synod. Additionally, moral and philosophical difference was a setting where Pope Francis seemed more comfortable with internal pluralism. He did not criticize American Jesuit James Martin’s promotion of LGBT acceptance.²⁹¹ He wrote that Catholics “are capable of carrying out

285 Francis, *Traditionis Custodes: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970*, Apostolic Letter Issued *Motu Proprio*, Vatican website, July 16, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20210716-motu-proprio-traditionis-custodes.html.

286 Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificium: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970*, Apostolic Letter Issued *Motu Proprio*, Vatican website, July 7, 2007, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html; see also Francis X. Rocca, “The Pope Lets a Thousand Liturgies Bloom,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 2009, electronic edition, W13 (noting that Benedict XVI let converts from Anglicanism keep “many of their traditional prayers and hymns in their own specially designed dioceses”).

287 Cindy Wooden, “Pope Says There Is a ‘Strong Reactionary’ Element in U.S. Catholic Church,” *Catholic News Service*, August 28, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/pope-says-there-strong-reactionary-element-us-catholic-church>.

288 XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report* (hereinafter *Synodal Church in Mission*), report, Vatican Website, October 4–29, 2023, pt. 1, sec. 1, para. (e), <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

289 *Synodal Church in Mission*, pt. 3, sec. 16, para. (h).

290 *Synodal Church in Mission*, pt. 3, sec. 16, para. (k).

291 “Pope Sends Letter to Fr. James Martin on Homosexuality and Sin,” *Vatican News*, January 28, 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-01/pope-francis-letter-james-martin-homosexuality-sin-lgbtq.html>; cf. Damiano Migliorini, “LGBT Catholics: A Paradigmatic Case of Intra-Confessional Pluralism,” *Theology and Sexuality* 25 (2019): 111–130, at 112 (noting “the often-underestimated diversity

their own discernment in complex situations,” whereas the Church is “called to form consciences, not to replace them.”²⁹² Pope Francis appeared to want openness to difference, but not as to differing opinions on openness itself.

How Pope Leo XIV will receive and transform this legacy remains to be seen. Pope John XXIII affirmed that within the Church, the rule should be “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.”²⁹³ This is easier posited than defined, but it will evidently remain the Church’s rule.²⁹⁴ Fraternity toward outsiders means generosity, but within a family, it implies more discipline, unity, and correction (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1).²⁹⁵

C. *Development of fraternal pluralism toward other creatures is underway*

Fraternal pluralism has already developed outward to yet remoter margins. Pope Francis was well-known for his particularly close association with the margins of *human* society.²⁹⁶ He took fraternal pluralism even further

and pluralism that exist within every religion, confession, and community (not to mention theological faculties”).

- 292 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vatican website, March 19, 2016, para. 37, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.
- 293 John XXIII, Ad Petri Cathedram: *On Truth, Unity and Peace, in a Spirit of Charity*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, June 29, 1959, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_29061959_ad-petri.html, accord *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4 (“All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail.”).
- 294 Cf. Meehan, “Patriotism to Pluralism,” 494. Meehan quotes Murray, “Preface,” in *We Hold These Truths*, x (writing that pluralism “implies a disagreement and dissension within a community. But it also implies a community within which there must be agreement and consensus”).
- 295 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, June 29, 2009, para. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (“[C]harity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning, with the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, detached from ethical living and, in any event, undervalued ... Hence the need to link charity with truth ...”).
- 296 See, e.g., Andrea Riccardi, *To the Margins: Pope Francis and the Mission of the Church* (Orbis, 2018).

than this. In *Laudato Si'*, he noted how his namesake, Francis of Assisi, believed “each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.”²⁹⁷ Fraternity is feeling “intimately united with all that exists,” and it inspires “sobriety and care” toward other beings and created things.²⁹⁸ Every creature is “the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world.”²⁹⁹ Humans should contemplate “how everything is interconnected.”³⁰⁰ Holiness develops when a person “enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures”—including “brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”³⁰¹

Fraternal pluralism possibly stretches still further. Jesuit José Funes, then-director of the Vatican Observatory, said an alien might well qualify as an “extraterrestrial brother.”³⁰²

Conclusion

Every norm is built on narratives.³⁰³ Fraternal pluralism has grown from Catholic tradition as interpreted authoritatively by Vatican II and in lived examples.³⁰⁴ It has supplanted earlier hostility and coercion. While the Church is unlikely to adopt it as a rule for internal governance, it remains a resource for more radical encounters with humans—maybe even non-humans. Catholics are taught by the Church to rejoice that others are brothers and sisters all.

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297 *Laudato Si'*, para. 11.

298 *Laudato Si'*, para. 11.

299 *Laudato Si'*, para. 77.

300 *Laudato Si'*, para. 138.

301 *Laudato Si'*, paras. 92, 240; cf. Matthew P. Cavedon, “Dominion and Stewardship: Imaging God in Creation,” *Canopy Forum*, May 22, 2025, <https://canopyforum.org/2025/05/22/dominion-and-stewardship-imaging-god-in-creation/>.

302 “Vatican Astronomer Says If Aliens Exist, They May Not Need Redemption,” *Catholic News Service*, May 22, 2008, <https://catholicreview.org/vatican-astronomer-says-if-aliens-exist-they-may-not-need-redemption/>.

303 Robert M. Cover, “Foreword to the Supreme Court 1982 Term: *Nomos* and *Narrative*,” *Harvard Law Review* 97, no. 1 (1983): 4–68, at 4.

304 Haddad, “St. Bonaventure’s Medieval Theory.”



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