

MORAL METHODOLOGY OF THE VATICAN II ACCORDING TO LOUIS JANSSENS

Albertus Sujoko

| Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat
Pineleng Seminary
Manado, North Celebes, Indonesia

Abstract:

By moral methodology of Vatican II, I mean the way of moral thinking or moral approach used in the documents of Vatican II. Louis Janssens is of the opinion that Vatican II documents are characterized by a personalistic way of moral thinking. This way of doing moral theology bases itself on the human person adequately considered in all of his/her dimensions which build up his/her dignity as the human person. This article explains some characters of personalistic moral methodology, namely that dynamic and dialogical aspect of moral approach which characterizes both Janssens's moral theology and Vatican II way of thinking. Moral theology must be dynamic as is life from which it derives. One cannot just repeat moral norms to every situation. Life situation is always changing and causing new moral questions which needs new and correct moral solutions. The most important criterion is whether or not the moral answers to new moral problem are promotive for the real good of the person, that is making the person better and better as human being. The council of Vatican II and the moral theologian Louis Janssens are the examples of how to deal with a new changing modern world with such a creative and dynamic engagement in making dialog with new situations.

Keywords:

Human person • personalist moral • dynamic and dialogical approach • learning and listening Church • historical approach • openness to new situations • the role of conscience • learning process of conscience

Introduction

Louis Canon Janssens was one of the leading catholic moral theologians during the Second Vatican Council. He was the moral theologian of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. His role at the Vatican II is explained by Jan Jans as follows, “Janssens was not official *peritus* at the Council. However, by his connections with Cardinal Léon Suenens, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussel he has a major force in the drafting and reworking of the multiple versions of what would eventually become *Gaudium et Spes*...”¹ In a certain degree much easier to locate Janssens' contribution to another major text of Vatican II, that is the *Dignitatis Humanae*. The history of this declaration is very well documented by Jérôm Hamer.² The first pre-councilary preparatory meeting took place on December 27, 1960, at Fribourg. Can it be ascertained that Janssens was the author of the so-called “Document Fribourg”? We do have the direct witness of the man who forwarded the text in Fribourg, that is Bishop de Smedt. He wrote by way of dedication that the first fundamental “Document Fribourg” was from the hand of Janssens. When Janssens was asked, he confirmed this, and added that in his personal opinion, this text was the most important thing he ever wrote.³

In the field of fundamental moral theology, Janssens elaborates what so-called personalist moral argument. This moral approach stands in between what so called, if you wish, legalistic moral based on natural law theory and teleological moral based on human reason. Natural Law theory has been so dominant in catholic moral reasoning as well as moral theories based on rationalistic approaches such as deontological, theological, casuistic arguments, ect. The essential difference between the two approaches stands in the point of departure (*terminus a quo*). All of the conventional moral theories focus on the moral actions, whereas the personalist moral argument starts from the agent, namely, the human person who takes particular moral acts.

In this article I would like to outline the basic methodology of moral reasoning or moral argumentation developed by Louis Janssens which is so relevant and inspiring even for our situation today. Mostly because it is also congruent with the moral methodology of Vatican II which becomes more and more important documents because Pope Francis stresses the implementation of the teaching of the historic ecumenical Council into the practice of Christian everyday lives.

“Gaudium et Spes” Nr. 51

According to Louis Janssens, there is a crucial moral guideline in the text of GS nr. 51 which goes as follow: “the moral aspect of any procedure... must be determined by objective standards which are based upon the nature of the person and his/her acts. (Latin text: *obiectivis criteriis ex personae eiusdemque actuum natura desumptis*). Janssens interprets the human nature (*natura personae* or *natura humana*) as the specific character of the person. The shift from the term “natural law” to “human nature” and is interpreted as “the specific character” of the human person are of paramount importance in moral methodology. This keyterm invokes different approaches in fundamental moral theology.

Janssens explains that the Vatican II document must be taken seriously as the new foundation of doing moral theology. He notices also that the Vatican II process by which the official document has been produced and the scope for which it can be applied. Janssens says that the text of GS nr. 51 was brought to a vote in general session on 16 November 1965 and approved by the overwhelming majority of the council's fathers.⁴ According to the rules of the council, no changes could be allowed which would alter the essence (*substantia*) of the teaching already ratified by the majority. This means that to define an objective criterion of the morality, they have to listen attentively to one another. The majority opinion or the *sensus catholicus* of the council's fathers would express their conscience on this matter. Coming together to arrive at one conclusion from different opinions by listening and learning each other is also part of the new way of teaching of the Vatican II. Janssens is of the opinion that the reciprocity of conscience is a good and correct method to discern the will of God and to find the truth in the spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration. Official commentary of Gaudium et Spes number 51 affirms: (1) that in this expression a general principle of morality is formulated (*agitur de principio generali*) for the entire domain of human activity; (2) that it is affirmed through the choice of this expression that human activity must be judged insofar as it refers to the human person integrally and adequately considered.

New Way of Doing Moral Theology

Ladislav Orsy is one of the last surviving participants of Vatican II. As the 91-year-old Jesuit canon lawyer looks back the experiences of his time as a *peritus*, he remains convinced that the Church will not abandon the vision of

the council Vatican II. Robert Mickens got the information from him how the prepared document for the Council swept out of the table and the council's fathers decided to start discussion right in the council itself. Father Orsy explains this by returning to the council's very first session in 1962 when Pope John XXIII allowed the bishops to reject nearly all the preparatory documents that the Roman Curia had written and then authorized them to "elect their own committees" to draft new texts. Father Orsy said: "I call it the conversion of John XXIII, because he was much more of a complex person than he's usually presented. Pope John XXIII quickly became a "learning Pope" that put Vatican II on course to becoming a "learning council". Fr Orsy believes it was at this turn that the bishops transformed Vatican II into a "learning council", making their classroom the entire human family and the wider world. He points to *Dignitatis Humanae*, the conciliar declaration on religious freedom, as "one of the most important documents" that brought this forth. "The council recognizes that somehow the Spirit of God is hovering over the whole human family from which the Church can learn a lot and develop," he said.⁵ Vatican II has become "learning council" and the council's fathers were learning from the real situation of modern world and pastoral experiences of local churches in the world as well as their own personal experiences of bishops from all over the world. They decided to make the council as the process of learning together and open their heart and mind for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If we see the preparatory document by Curia Romana as an old way "the teaching church" and the decision of the council's fathers to left aside the document and began to discuss openly and making dialog frankly as the new way "the learning church", and so we can understand that is precisely what Janssens means by personalistic approach. Louis Janssens singles out some of the characteristic of the way of thinking used by the Vatican II as a methodology to come into the truth and formulate its teachings: (1) Historical approach to morality and (2) The role of conscience in the search of moral truth.

Historical Approach to Morality

Vatican II outlines the foundation of moral truth is the human person. One of the dimensions of the human person is a historical subject. Each person lives in a certain period of human history with his/her contemporary people. From the historical perspective each person learns from the past, to respond to the present and to foresee the future. The person is part of an objective culture in which he/she is inserted and with their gifted talents and

capacities they contribute for the benefit of society. Society is always changing into new situations thanks to the good and personal contributions of its members. Morality deals with human activities in the course of history and this facts have consequences for moral norms. Janssens has a deep awareness of the historical aspect of morality based upon the experiences of ordinary people according the changing situations. He is apt to new situations and tries to respond them in a responsible manner. He says, “In virtue of this historicity – by which all the essential aspects of the person are affected – an ethics of responsibility on a personalist foundation must necessarily be a dynamic ethics.”⁶

An Example of the historical approach to morality showed by Janssens himself in making moral formulations considering new progress of human situations. He does it by making dialogue with the past, especially with the fathers of the Church and St. Thomas Aquinas, and with the present, namely the contemporary progress of human sciences. Janssens is of the opinion that St. Thomas Aquinas, even before him St. Paul the Apostle himself have accomplished their task to construct moral arguments and to find out moral norms according to the demands of their contemporary situations. As a theologian who was already fully active in academic activities before Vatican II, Janssens has a solid Patristic and Thomistic back ground of theology. He wrote his dissertation on the teaching of Fathers of the Church entitled *La filiation divine par grâce d'après saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, Louvain: Faculté de Théologie, 1937.⁷ Janssens also makes interpretations of the St. Thomas Aquinas' teaching carefully to put it at the service of the search for truth.⁸ Commenting on the teaching of St. Thomas on “natural law” as the will of God, he states, “St. Thomas said that divine intentions are reflected and expressed so clearly in the biological reality of men and animal that it suffices to study them to discern immediately the finality determined by God in the order of nature. Our affirmations regarding the clear finality of nature have become more prudent.” Dolores L. Christie who made a dissertation on the thought of Louis Janssens formulates Janssens' historical approach as follows:

Modern anthropology and the natural sciences have made us suspicious of the clarity and certainty of human knowledge. We see it in a more historical perspective, that is, we know only bit by bit over the course of time what God has placed in nature. As we learn, our conclusions and consequently our formulation of norms must change in response to new insights. In effect Janssens parenthesized of the past to the horizon of the future.¹⁰

I discern three points of Janssens' historical approach in doing moral

theology which can be formulated as follows: (a). Reinterpretation of the traditional terms (b). Openness to the experience of the people and (c). Openness to new progress in sciences and technologies.

a. Reinterpretation of Traditional Terms

The meaning of the term 'traditional' is not always clear. It can be meant a fix term of moral truth which is handed down from one generation to the next one. A traditional moral term must be taken for granted. However, one also may say that there is no real 'traditional term' in the proper sense of the word. Even the so-called most traditionalist term as 'natural law' is a product of a certain way of thinking of a particular community of people living a certain period of time in history. The term 'natural law' did not exist before, and then it comes to be common with a certain meaning, and it continues to exist in virtue of the tradition of thinking. The concept has been used to indicate the law of God in moral theology. Nature is seen as the bearer of God's will because it is easily associated with the law which governs the nature constantly even without the intervention of human being. For example, the human body, that is, the reproductive organs of male and female bring imperative moral in sexual morality and family life. So do the natural law that governs animals and plants brings the same imperative moral to respect them. Morality has to take into account that kind of law because it expresses the will of God. Brian Johnstone calls it 'the physicalism of natural law theory'. This moral theory interprets natural law from the physical and biological point of view.¹¹

There is another kind of interpretation called rationalistic point of view. The will of God is discerned not in the order of nature, but in the order of reason. God has created human being as the rationalistic person so that what is rational is also in the scope of natural law of the human being. Imperative morals can be seen not only in the biological structure of creation, but also in the rational capacity of human person. Janssens moves away from physicalistic and reasonalistic interpretation of natural law to the personalistic one. For him the natural law of objective moral norm is the human person adequately considered in all of his or her dimensions. The will of God is to be found not only in the biological and rational structure, but in the human person and the human dignity. In the contemporary people of our time the term the human dignity is the dear one to be the universal natural moral law. People of our time is very sensitive in the issues of human rights and the equality of the human person regardless the race, age, gender, and the affiliation of any political and religious groups. Respect for the dignity of

the human person and human rights are the new names of the traditional term of natural law.

b. Openness to the Experiences of People

It is very encouraging experience to discern Janssens' way of doing moral theology which is so dynamic and optimistic because his openness to real experiences of people. Morality is not only the question of tradition, but also the problem of everyday life experiences of concrete persons or groups of persons. Such morality must be in a constant dialog with various experiences of people in different situations of life.

Janssens indicates how the process of Vatican II has been undergone intense dialog in elaborating a document. He reports, for example, that in the chapter on marriage and the family (GS part II, chapter I), we read in the text as it was brought to a vote in general session on November 16, 1965 and approved by the overwhelming majority of the council fathers, that the spouse must determine the moral character of their activity according to 'objective criteria based upon the dignity of the human person.'¹² According to the rule of the council, no changes could be allowed which would alter the essence of a teaching already ratified by the majority. Janssens reported the result of the voting are: "entitled to vote: 2157 council fathers; voted *placet*: 1596; voted *placet in xta modum*: 484; *non placet*: 72; spoiled votes: 5."¹³ By respecting and accepting the opinion of others and of majority votes the council fathers learn to come to know the will of God. In listening to the experience of others we put ourselves in a learning process humbly to seek the truth.

c. Openness to New Progress in Science and Technology

It seems that morally speaking the church is not always ready to accept new progress in science and technology. Science and technology are seen very often as cotradiction to faith. However, Janssens believes that moral theology must be ready to recognize and to make dialog with new development of human sciences. He said, "Morality must be dynamic, as is the life from which it derives, if it is to be faithful to the demands of history. Today, according to sociology, the rapid evolution of human science (psychology, economics, anthropology, medicine, sexology, etc.) is causing a rapid increase in available experiential data."¹⁴ Moral theology has to face new progress and new situation and give a new proposal to answer the challenge. Janssens mentions some odd examples of how moral authority is not ready to face new situation of life. "When people began to use the umbrella (a very

simple tool) there were thundering sermons delivered in misty England because one should not prevent God from letting His rain fall upon the just and the unjust.”¹⁵ Even vaccination against smallpox was not accepted openmindedly, as appears from the declaration of Pope Leo XII in 1829: “Whoever allows him/herself to be vaccinated ceases to be a child of God. Smallpox is a judgment of God, vaccination is a challenge against heaven.”¹⁶

The progress of human science and technologies in our time has been so sophisticated causing moral dilemmas which are not so easy to deal with. We have moral problems before our eyes, for example: the use of artificial contraception to regulate or control birth-rate; technique of artificial insemination to help infertile couples have their biological babies; organ transplant from death body to living human and the definition of death. We have to deal with moral problems of what so-called genetic engineering; cloning and many other new developments in science and technologies. Louis Janssens has dedicated a serious reflection to deal with one of the new moral problems, namely: Is artificial insemination allowed to help infertile couples? He wrote an article for this topic entitled “Artificial Insemination: Ethical Considerations,” published by *Louvain Studies* nr. 8 (1980-81). Janssens gives an example how a moral theologian is ready to deal with a new challenge and give a new solution for a confusing situation. He gives a guideline in dealing with new moral problems due to new progress which has no precedent before. We cannot reject something new only because it is new; on the other hand we cannot also accept something new only because it is new. We do need a serious reflection to elaborate the new situation and give space for human experiences, before we can take a position to give a moral judgement.

The Role of Conscience in the Search of Moral Truth

Conscience (Latin: *conscientia*) is meant literally “knowing together”, that is, as if I were made up of two persons who know something together. One may say that conscience is a moral awareness. From a moral personalistic point of view, conscience or moral awareness is part of the dimension of the human person who is a subject entitled with reason, free will and moral conscience. Janssens puts it in this way, “A person is normally called to be conscious, to act according to his/her conscience, in freedom and in responsible manner.”¹⁷ The term “normally” is added to remind us that there must be no pathological disease or any grave psychic disorder otherwise he/she cannot be a moral subject. Lack of this “normality” will cause a significant defect of free will and consciousness of the person which

would decrease his/her responsibility as well.

The role of conscience is pivotal in moral discourse. It seems that conscience is just the only candle light we have to guide us through the dark path of our journey to find the truth. "Following your conscience and do not take any action against its dictate" is a general moral norm which could be followed safely. Vatican II teaches on conscience with the following words:

"In the depths of his/her conscience, the person detects a law which he/she does not impose upon him/herself, but which holds him/her to obedience. Always summoning him/her to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his/her heart: do this, shun that. For the person has in his/her heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of the human person; according to it he/she will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There he/she is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his/her depths".¹⁸

One may say that conscience is the voice of God which can be heard in one's heart. One has moral obligation always to follow one's conscience. Janssens believes in the role of conscience as a way of finding truth in a dialogical process to listen to each other. I discern some of his thoughts regarding the role of conscience to find the truth in these three points: (a) Learning process of Conscience (b) Freedom of Conscience (c) Religious freedom based on freedom of Conscience.

a. Learning Process of Conscience

In the final analysis, the ultimate practical moral norm, according to Janssens, is a conscience which is duly enlightened.¹⁹ The conscience is formed and enlightened in the process of listening and expressing itself through social interactions. Conscience is, thus, the result of continuing dialog between persons who are open to their own new experiences and those of others. Vatican II teaches that "the more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct."²⁰ The content of our conscience will determine our moral disposition and our moral conduct. There is inevitably a serious obligation incumbent upon us to form our conscience honestly. This task cannot be accomplished individually, but must be done in collaboration within a community life of groups of people. Janssens said that "an individualistic notion of moral conscience, consequently, must be rejected."²¹

In his article *The Foundation for Freedom of Conscience* (1964), Janssens

explains what he means by conscience. Conscience is the source of the person's acts and responsibilities. He holds the opinion on conscience which seems to be adopted in the *Dignitatis Humanae* of Vatican II a year later. He says, "It is the human being's privilege, in as much as he/she has interior conscience, to be the source of his/her own acts, that is, to posit them consciously and freely, and as a result, to assume responsibility."²² The central point is that the person is the source, the cause and the origin of his/her own moral acts. But how can he/she possess such a good and correct conscience if not from the learning process in an openness and relationship with others during his/her span of life? Nobody is capable to know the truth without a process of learning in contact with others. Normally the processes happen naturally or by design in the family education, in schools and in the society. Every person receives from his/her social environment what Janssens calls *objective culture*. He makes a distinction between an objective and subjective culture. Objective culture is a culture in which every person is born and inserted. It is a given situation of life which prepares a set of socio-cultural, religious, political, economic and scientific environment for every new comer of members of society or new born generation of humanity. Subjective culture, on the contrary, is the subjective talent and capacity to absorb the objective culture, making it his/her own subjective capability and develop it, and in turn, to contribute it back for the progress the objective culture. The dynamic interaction between the objective and subjective cultures are the central point of every development.

Janssens explains further the reasons for learning process of conscience. There are two factors that must be considered, namely, the limitation of our human knowledge and the changing situations of life. On the one hand, the person always faces new situation and new developments in society which raise moral questions. On the other hand, the person has to learn everything bit by bit with many limitations and obstacles, before he/she is able to get the necessary knowledge of handling the moral problems. On human limitation, Janssens said, "Indeed our knowledge of truth is defective. We can consider one aspect of reality at a time. We will never exhaust the richness of truth. Although we do not possess truth, we are constantly searching for it. This implies that our knowledge is subject to limitations."²³ An awareness of the limitation of our knowledge is the very reason for our obligation to make dialog with others. We never have the whole truth; therefore, we have to search for it in continuous effort by listening to both our own conscience and those of others. And on the new ever changing situations Janssens states that as moral subjects we have, in each new situation, the duty to formulate and to

follow our judgement of conscience.²⁴ Therefore we are always ready to open our mind and heart, listen carefully, to the new development of society and progress in science that we can make dialog with them who are competence on the field that are morally relevant. Only by so doing can we show our responsibility in forming our correct and true conscience.

b. Freedom of Conscience

Respect for the dignity of the human person and human rights are such a very welcome and ardent universal aspirations of the people in our contemporary world. And this respect consists, in the first place, in respect of the conscience. So do respect for human rights means, first of all, respect for the freedom of conscience. Because conscience stands firm in the inner depth of the person. Conscience is the sanctuary in which the person stands alone *vis-à-vis* God. Conscience is the most holy and secret part of the mystery of being a person. Violating conscience would be a grave crime against the very dignity of the person. Violation of the person's conscience means an attack on the whole existence of the person as moral subject. For these reasons, respect for freedom of conscience is a grave duty. Because of his/her conscience, the person is the original cause or the very source of his/her own moral acts. Nobody else can replace one's position in this matter. Every person is responsible of his/her own moral conducts. But what is really the human conscience? In the ultimate analysis, conscience involves, intellect (*ratio*), will (*vontulas*) feeling (*desiderium*) and emotion or passion (*passio*) which have their dynamism in the inner-depth experience of the person. It is a dynamic process of the person mentally, psychologically and spiritually. Janssens prefers to speak of the person as a total living being (*une totalité vivante*).²⁵ The whole person who is capable of thinking, willing, feeling, sensing and having passions or drives is the foundation of his/her freedom and autonomy. In virtues of these capacities the person enjoys such great and high dignity which is at the same time a privilege and an obligation. However it is precisely in this dignity consists the immeasurable value of his/her existence.

Freedom of conscience springs out from the human dignity. As said above, conscience is the sanctuary of the person in which he/she stand alone face to face before God. However, conscience is not a obscure awareness, but rather a clear understanding of the intellect and a firm decision of the will as well a strong self control of drives and passions. Conscience calls the person to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. Following the conscience is the most sacred obligation for the person. We are never allowed to act

against it. An erroneous conscience maintains its demanding function, and the obligations to follow it remains too. Janssens reminds that “subjected to the limitations of ignorance, we continually run the risk of forming erroneous judgments of conscience in good faith”.²⁶ Respect for freedom of conscience even in the cost of its limitation and error in good faith expresses the most high value of the human freedom. It is said that even God cannot save the human person against his/her own free will. God had created us without our permission, but God cannot save us without our agreement.

c. Religious Freedom

The Vatican II council's fathers choose the Latin word *Dignitatis Humanae* (the human dignity) to name the declaration on religious liberty. This is a clear example of the personalistic approach of Vatican II which bases its theology on the human person adequately considered. This approach has been the core of Janssens' reflection in his moral theology. “The conclusion of the council on the question of religious liberty are drawn from the same wells that Janssens uses in establishing his position.”²⁷ The document on religious liberty was ultimately carried overwhelmingly on 7 December 1965 with 2.308 in favour (*placet*), 70 opposed (*non placet*), and eight votes being invalid.²⁸ Janssens published his book on freedom of conscience and religious freedom in 1964, that is during the time of serious debate on religious liberty in the Second Vatican Council. Jan Jans remarks, “During the Council and amidst the sometimes fierce debates on the dogmatic implications of personal freedom of conscience and religion a book to show once again how the dynamic of a personalist morality itself – with full weight given to the moral importance of the fundamental option of every human person – leads to the value of religious freedom while maintaining the proper balance between tradition and freedom.”²⁹ In his book *Liberté de Conscience et Liberté Religieuse*, Janssens explains that the right to freedom of religion flows from the inalienable right of the human person to freedom of conscience. The most basic aspect of freedom of conscience is the right to pursue one's destiny, that is, the relationship with a union with God.³⁰

Janssens explains further that respect for freedom of conscience and religious liberty is not contradiction with Catholic doctrine on the human person and the essence of faith. According to Catholic doctrine, the act of faith is first of all the grace of God. Jesus says, “Nobody can come to me unless he/she is drawn by the Father” (Jn. 6:44). He also says, “No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him/her by my Father” (Jn. 6:65). The conclusion is that nobody thus can impose faith on others by force. We

can only proclaim the truth of our faith to others by way of our lives and witnesses, but we cannot replace the grace of God that works mysteriously in the heart of the human person. Janssens also quotes St. Paul who says, "I urge you that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be offered for all people; for sovereigns and all in high office, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in full observance of religion and a high standard of morality. Such prayer is right, and approved by God our Savior, whose will it is that all people should find salvation and come to know the truth" (I Tim. 2:1-4). According to Janssens this text is the foundation of our respect for religious freedom in society. This teaching stresses both the right of people to live a tranquil life in full observance of religion and the freedom of every person, members of society to find the salvation and come to know the truth.

Janssens also reminds that our respect for religious freedom should not be confused and understood as relativism of faith or toward the revealed truth. On the contrary, it is based on the very revealed truth of the dignity of conscience and the mystery of God's grace working in the heart of the person. If the essence of faith is a free act of the will moved by God's grace, we have, consequently, a grave duty to respect such faith. Religious liberty means that the person enjoys freedom to live according to his/her religious conviction. Janssens concludes that it is not only a question of social tolerance because we have to love our neighbours and to live together in peace within multi-religious society, but it is also a matter of following the revealed truth on the essence of faith itself.³¹

Freedom of Conscience and the "Dignitatis Humanae"

Even Pope Benedict XVI himself recognizes the great role of the *Dignitatis Humanae* as the great door opened to dialog with the conscience of today's people in the multi-culture society. The Pope hails the document on religious freedom and on relations with other faiths as Vatican II's greatest moments. On the document the Pope comments, "A theme is opened up whose importance could not be foreseen. Unexpectedly, the encounter with the great themes of the modern epoch did not happen in *Gaudium et Spes*, the great Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, but instead in two minor documents, whose importance has only gradually come to light in the context of the reception of the council. First, there is the *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty and secondly, the *Nostra Aetate*; the declaration on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions".³² In the *Dignitatis Humanae*, the council declared as follows.

“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all people are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his/her own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”³³

The Council Fathers conceded that those exercising religious freedom had to pay due regard to public order. The state maintaining public order could constrain freedom of religion so as to safeguard the rights of all citizens, to maintain the public peace, and to preserve public morality.

Conclusion

There are many reflections on the Documents of Vatican II during the Year of Faith that was announced by Pope Benedict XVI starting on October 11, 2012 and will be concluded on November 24, 2013 of the Solemnity of Christ the King. I quote here from *The Tablet* the task we still have to overcome in the future regarding the implementation of the principle of freedom of conscience.

Most thinking Catholics today find themselves struggling to live authentically along a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum are truth, authority, idealised tradition, hierarchy and papal primacy; at the other end are freedom, conscience, historical consciousness, community and due process. The Church, like all social institutions, falls short in charity and in truth, seeking to respect the full human dignity of those persons who hold differing beliefs as they live and move along the spectrum. Church leaders understandably tend to inhabit one end of the spectrum. But the Church is the earthenware jar that holds the treasure – the truth that sets us free. The 50-year-old *Dignitatis Humanae* provides the belated spring board for this evangelization of freedom speak of two other great religions – Hinduism and Buddhism – as well as the theme of religion in general. Then, following naturally, came a brief indication regarding dialogue and collaboration with the religions, whose spiritual, moral and socio-cultural values were to be respected, protected and encouraged. Thus, in a precise and extraordinarily dense document, a theme is opened up whose importance could not be foreseen at the time. The task that it involves and the efforts that are still necessary in order to distinguish, clarify and understand, are appearing ever more clearly. In the process of active reception, a weakness of this otherwise extra ordinary text has gradually emerged: it speaks of religion solely in a

positive way and it disregards the sick and distorted forms of religion which, from the historical and theological viewpoints, are of far-reaching importance; for this reason the Christian faith, from the outset, adopted a critical stance towards religion, both internally and externally.

If at the beginning of the council the dominant groups were the Central European episcopates with their theologians, during the council sessions the scope of the common endeavour and responsibility constantly broadened. The bishops considered themselves apprentices at the school of the Holy Spirit and at the school of reciprocal collaboration, but at the same time servants of the word of God who were living and working in faith. The Council Fathers neither could nor wished to create a new or different Church. They had neither the authority nor the mandate to do so. It was only in their capacity as bishops that they were now Council Fathers with a vote and decision-making powers, that is to say, on the basis of the Sacrament and in the Church of the Sacrament. For this reason they neither could nor wished to create a different faith or a new Church, but rather to understand these more deeply and hence truly to “renew them”.³⁴

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- ¹² Louis Janssens, *op.cit.*, 4.
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³³ The *Dignitatis Humanae*, Nr. 2.

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