

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate the ways in which the Roman Catholic vision concerning ‘public reason’ presents some pertinent perspectives in contemporary political theory and debate. As part of this overarching objective, the dissertation presents an in-depth theoretical discussion and analysis of Rawls’ political theory on Public Reason, particularly in the context of contemporary political problems within Western societies regarding the issue of religion in the public sphere. In this broad context, the relationship between religion and politics will serve as a central focus of this dissertation, particularly in terms of civil society and the public sphere. The dissertation then establishes linkages between these theoretical concepts and Catholic Social Teaching, underpinned by the aim of proposing a substantial interpretation of Catholicism as a ‘reasonable comprehensive doctrine’. The purpose is to offer a delineation of the essential elements of Catholic Social Teaching that are relevant for the issue of the public participation of the church in the public-political square. This is done with the view to address questions of how the Church can theoretically and practically participate in this sphere, offering publicly-acceptable ‘justifying reasons’: namely a ‘Catholic Public Reason’.

The dissertation will explicitly confirm the possibility of religious support for Rawlsian liberalism and demonstrate that Catholicism is not necessarily incompatible with it. Nevertheless, the dissertation will conclude by arguing that Catholicism generally is not compatible with liberalism from an ideological perspective, evidenced by ideological tensions. Thus, although it is suggested that some dialectical tensions remain, political liberalism, at least in its Rawlsian form, is neither hostile or unfriendly to the presence of religion in the public sphere, as many have traditionally assumed, and Rawls’ public reason – whose aim is not to exclude religion – is actually more welcoming than it is considered by its critics.