



the Pontifical Academy of Sciences

Secularism, Faith and Freedom



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... I shall be arguing that 'secular' freedom is not enough; that this account of the liberal society dangerously simplifies the notion of freedom and ends up diminishing our understanding of the human person. The tempting idea that there is always an adequate definition of what everyone will recognise as public and reasonable argument needs to be looked at hard, not in order to re-establish the dominance of some unchallengeable ruling discourse, religious or ideological, but to focus the question of how a society deals with the actual variety and potential collision of understandings of what is properly human. A debate about, for example, the status of the embryo in relation to genetic research, or the legalisation of assisted dying, or the legal support given to marriage will inevitably bring into play arguments that are not restricted to pragmatic assessments of individual or group benefit. While there can be no assumption that a government will or should assume that such arguments must be followed, there must equally be no assumption that these arguments may not be heard and weighed, that an issue has to be decided solely on arguments that can be owned by no particular group. ...