

Day 4 ★ June 24, 2016

Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

These reflections and readings from the Vatican II document Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae) are intended for daily use during the Fortnight for Freedom, a national campaign designated by the U.S. Catholic bishops for teaching and witness in support of religious liberty. The readings and the questions that follow can be used for group discussion or for personal reflection.

On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious.

For, of its very nature, the exercise of religion consists before all else in those internal, voluntary, and free acts whereby man sets the course of life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.

However, the social nature of man itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion; that he should participate with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community. Injury, therefore, is done to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life, if the free exercise of religion is denied in society when the just requirements of public order do not so require.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 3
December 7, 1965*

Reflection for Day Four

It is through their consciences that human beings perceive the requirements of the divine law. Human beings must follow faithfully their conscience if they are to grow in their knowledge of and union with God. Again, the Council restates that, because of this, no one should either be forced to act contrary to his or her conscience or be forbidden to act in accordance with his or her conscience. This is especially

the case when it involves one's religious beliefs. The Council Fathers note that this applies not only to one's internal private religious acts but also to public communal religious acts. Human beings hold religious beliefs within a community of like-minded believers and so have the right to publicly live out their beliefs. To forbid the just and proper public expressions of religious belief would be contrary to the order that God has established for human beings as social and religious beings.

The Council Fathers want to ensure that religious liberty is understood to be both private and public. It cannot be limited to what takes place in houses of worship. Rather, since religion is by its nature a social phenomenon, its presence within the broader society and culture should not be hindered or forbidden.

In what ways is religion being reduced to the merely personal and private? Why should religion have a voice in the public square?



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