

Day 1 ★ June 21, 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.

The Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs. Nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publically, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The Synod further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed. Thus it is to become a civil right.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 2
December 7, 1965*

Reflection for Day One

In the opening chapter of *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, the Council Fathers at Vatican II forthrightly declared that “the human person has a right to religious freedom.” This right is founded upon the intrinsic dignity of the human person. From God’s revelation we know that the dignity of human beings resides in their being created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27). Like God we are intelligent beings with free will. Because of this we can know the truth and perform God-like actions, such as being loving, kind, forgiving, etc. Reason itself, in knowing what a human being is, confirms that we possess

a dignity and worth that exceeds the rest of creation and that cannot be violated, but rather needs to be protected and fostered.

What human beings believe concerning God is of supreme importance. Religious belief lies at the very center of who we are in relation to what is most central and cherished in our lives. Therefore, the Council insists that the religious convictions of individuals or groups should never be coerced but must be held freely, protected by a civil constitutional right.

What challenges to religious liberty do you see within our contemporary world? When the Council says that religious liberty must be upheld “within due limits,” what would fall outside of “due limits”? What religious belief would seriously offend the moral order or a just law?



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