

Day 11 ★ July 1, 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.

Furthermore, society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on pretext of freedom of religion. It is the special duty of government to provide this protection. However, government is not to act in arbitrary fashion or in an unfair spirit of partisanship. Its action is to be controlled by juridical norms which are in conformity with the objective moral order.

These norms arise out of the need for effective safeguard of the rights of all citizens and for peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights. They flow from the need for an adequate care of genuine public peace, which comes about when men live together in good order and in true justice. They come, finally, out of the need for a proper guardianship of public morality. These matters constitute the basic component of the common welfare: they are what is meant by public order.

For the rest, the usages of society are to be the usages of freedom in their full range. These require that the freedom of man be respected as far as possible, and curtailed only when and in so far as necessary.

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

Reflection for Day Eleven

The Council Fathers are well aware that, while various religious groups are meant to live in harmony, each accepting the equal rights of others, yet, in reality, conflicts frequently arise between various religions. This may be due to what a specific religion holds concerning the nature of its own beliefs in relation to the beliefs of other religions. While each religious group has the right to profess that its religious

beliefs are true and that other religious beliefs are either inadequate or contain erroneous tenets, no religious group has the right to persecute or seek to suppress other religious groups. Similar conflict may arise within a religion, in which case, the cause of the conflict does not reside in the religious belief as such, but in a misinterpretation of those beliefs that prompts misguided attacks on other religious groups.

Given the reality of such religious conflicts, the Council Fathers acknowledge that the government is responsible for keeping public order, not by taking sides, but by enacting just laws and guarding the equal rights of all.

What causes religious conflicts today? Do governments always adequately respond to such conflicts? What distinguishes “public order” (which limits religious freedom) from an ordinary policy preference of government (which does not)?



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