

**Day 14 ★ July 4, 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 fact is that** men of the present day want to be able freely to profess their religion in private and in public. Religious freedom has already been declared to be a civil right in most constitutions, and it is solemnly recognized in international documents. The further fact is that forms of government still exist under which, even though freedom of religious worship receives constitutional recognition, the powers of government are engaged in the effort to deter citizens from the profession of religion and to make life difficult and dangerous for religious Communities.

This sacred Synod greets with joy the first of these two facts, as among the signs of the times. With sorrow, however, it denounces the other fact, as only to be deplored. The Synod exhorts Catholics, and it directs a plea to all men, most carefully to consider how greatly necessary religious freedom is, especially in the present condition of the human family.

All nations are coming into even closer unity. Men of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationships. There is a growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that weighs upon every man. All this is evident.

Consequently, in order that relationships of peace and harmony may be established and maintained within the whole of mankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee, and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 15  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Fourteen

In concluding its Declaration of Religious Freedom, the Council rejoices in the fact that religious freedom has been enshrined in the constitutions of many countries as well as in international statements. However, the Council Fathers are well aware that religious freedom is not guaranteed merely when it is stated on a piece of paper. It must be exercised by a living body of people. Moreover, there are actual governments that act against religious communities, sometime in the name of religion. The Council Fathers find such situations appalling and ask that Catholics and all people of goodwill work to rectify this injustice.

Since the Vatican Council, has religious freedom improved or deteriorated throughout the world? What is the relationship between growing religious diversity, as well as growing interactions among people of different faiths, and religious liberty?



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