

Day 2 ★ June 22, 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.

It is in accordance with their dignity as persons—that is, being endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility—that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth.

However, men cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore, the right to religious freedom has its foundation, not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it. Nor is the exercise of this right to be impeded, provided that the just requirements of public order are observed.

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

Reflection for Day Two

The Council Fathers note that it is precisely because human beings are “endowed with reason and free will” that they naturally seek what is true and good and also, then, have “a moral obligation” to search for the truth. This is especially the case of seeking religious truth. Moreover, the truth they believe they have come to know binds them to that truth. Even if the “truth” they believe is not actually true,

yet, because they believe it is true, they are bound to follow their conscience. As long as what they believe does not infringe the just rights of others, they cannot be coerced into giving up or changing what they believe.

Moreover, the Council states that in order for human beings to fulfill their obligation to seek the truth and live by it, they must be free to do so. No one or no authority is to force them to believe something to which they themselves have not freely given their consent.

Why does the Council stress the need to seek freely religious truth? Why do those who believe what is actually false still possess religious freedom?



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