

Day 6 ★ June 26, 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 freedom or immunity from coercion in matters religious which is the endowment of persons as individuals is also to be recognized as their right when they act in community. Religious bodies are a requirement of the social nature both of man and of religion itself.

Provided the just requirements of public order are observed, religious bodies rightfully claim freedom in order that they may govern themselves according to their own norms, honor the Supreme Being in public worship, assist their members in the practice of the religious life, strengthen them by instruction, and promote institutions in which they may join together for the purpose of ordering their lives in accordance with their religious principles.

Religious bodies also have the right not to be hindered, either by legal measures or by administrative action on the part of government, in the selection, training, appointment, and transferral of their own ministers, in communicating with religious authorities and communities abroad, in erecting buildings for religious purposes, and in the acquisition and use of suitable funds or properties.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 4
December 7, 1965*

Reflection for Day Six

The Council once more addresses the public nature of religious belief. Religious communities have a right to act as a community of faith, for this is inherent within the social nature of human beings and religious belief itself. Provided that the just civil and religious rights of others are not transgressed, religious bodies must possess the freedom to live out publicly what they

believe. They must be free to gather for worship, to instruct their members, and to develop institutions that further the religious life of their members. From within the Catholic tradition this would include religious institutes and orders, schools, fraternities and sodalities, prayer groups, and Bible study groups.

Likewise, religious bodies must be free to appoint and train their own ministers. For Catholics, that means the Church's freedom at least to appoint bishops and ordain priests. It also means that Catholics are free to be loyal to their church and its leaders while also being loyal to their country and its leaders. Religious bodies should also be free to govern themselves financially.

Consider examples in contemporary life where governments—federal, state, or local—fail to respect the above rights? What is the relationship between the religious freedom of individuals and institutions?



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