

Day 9 ★ June 29, 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 protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government. Therefore, government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means. Government is also to help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties, and also in order that society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in men's faithfulness to God and to His holy will.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 6
December 7, 1965*

Reflection for Day Nine

Once again, the Council Fathers turn to what they consider a very important issue. It is not simply that governments should not deny or impede the religious freedom of their citizens, it is also of the utmost importance that they positively, through just laws, be the guardians of religious freedom, so that no constituency—religious or secular—within society would seek to undermine the religious freedom of all. While few today would consider this, the next point that the Council Fathers make is also very significant. Governments should actually “help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life.” While governments do not control religions, they should recognize their value and so promote their well-being. This allows all religious bodies and their members to exercise their religious rights and “fulfill their religious

duties.” The government's fostering the religious life of its citizens not only benefits those citizens but also, the Council states, contributes to the good of society as a whole. It helps society grow in its understanding and implementation of what contributes to justice and peace. This justice and peace find their origin in God, who desires the good of all.

How do governments protect and promote the religious life of their citizens? Do governments take this into consideration today? In the U.S., how does the government foster religious life while respecting the principle of separation of church and state?



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