

**Day 1 ★ June 21, 2013**

# 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 Vatican Synod declares** that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs. Nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publically, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The Synod further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed. Thus it is to become a civil right.

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

## Reflection for Day One

In the opening chapter of *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, the Council Fathers at Vatican II forthrightly declared that “the human person has a right to religious freedom.” This right is founded upon the intrinsic dignity of the human person. From God’s revelation we know that the dignity of human beings resides in their being created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27). Like God we are intelligent beings with free will. Because of this we can know the truth and perform God-like actions, such as being loving, kind, forgiving, etc. Reason itself, in knowing what a human being is, confirms that we possess

a dignity and worth that exceeds the rest of creation and that cannot be violated, but rather needs to be protected and fostered.

What human beings believe concerning God is of supreme importance. Religious belief lies at the very center of who we are in relation to what is most central and cherished in our lives. Therefore, the Council insists that the religious convictions of individuals or groups should never be coerced but must be held freely, protected by a civil constitutional right.

What challenges to religious liberty do you see within our contemporary world? When the Council says that religious liberty must be upheld “within due limits,” what would fall outside of “due limits”? What religious belief would seriously offend the moral order or a just law?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



**FORTNIGHT4FREEDOM★ORG**

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**Day 2 ★ June 22, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**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?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 3 ★ June 23, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**Further light is shed** on the subject if one considers that the highest norm of human life is the divine law—eternal, objective, and universal—whereby God orders, directs, and governs the entire universe and all the ways of human community, by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever increasingly the unchanging truth. Hence every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious, in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience, with the use of all suitable means.

Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication, and dialogue. In the course of these, men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 3  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Three

God is the author of all truth and all good. All of what is true and good in our world and cosmos finds its source in God, the Creator of all. Moreover, what is true and good about ourselves as human beings finds its source in God in that he created us in his image and likeness. Thus, for the Council Fathers, all that exists is in conformity with the divine law, the providential plan of God.

Because of this, the Council emphasizes that truth must be “sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature.” This means that human beings must be free to seek the truth. However, human beings do not seek the truth as isolated individuals. The search for the truth is common to all, and so all share in the finding of truth and all share in the receiving of truth from others. Because the search for truth, the finding of truth, and the sharing of truth is a social exercise, human beings must not only be free to search for truth in the hope of finding it, they must also be free to communicate and discuss together the truth they believe they have found. It is through our free assent that we each personally lay hold of the truth.

What are the contemporary means of seeking, finding, and sharing truth? In what ways can this freedom to seek, to find, and to share be inhibited?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 4 ★ June 24, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**On his part, man** perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious.

For, of its very nature, the exercise of religion consists before all else in those internal, voluntary, and free acts whereby man sets the course of life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.

However, the social nature of man itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion; that he should participate with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community. Injury, therefore, is done to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life, if the free exercise of religion is denied in society when the just requirements of public order do not so require.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 3  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Four

It is through their consciences that human beings perceive the requirements of the divine law. Human beings must follow faithfully their conscience if they are to grow in their knowledge of and union with God. Again, the Council restates that, because of this, no one should either be forced to act contrary to his or her conscience or be forbidden to act in

accordance with his or her conscience. This is especially the case when it involves one's religious beliefs. The Council Fathers note that this applies not only to one's internal private religious acts but also to public communal religious acts. Human beings hold religious beliefs within a community of like-minded believers and so have the right to publicly live out their beliefs. To forbid the just and proper public expressions of religious belief would be contrary to the order that God has established for human beings as social and religious beings.

The Council Fathers want to ensure that religious liberty is understood to be both private and public. It cannot be limited to what takes place in houses of worship. Rather, since religion is by its nature a social phenomenon, its presence within the broader society and culture should not be hindered or forbidden.

In what ways is religion being reduced to the merely personal and private? Why should religion have a voice in the public square?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 5 ★ June 25, 2013**

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# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**There is a further** consideration. The religious acts whereby men, in private and in public and out of a sense of personal conviction, direct their lives to God transcend by their very nature the order of terrestrial and temporal affairs. Government, therefore, ought indeed to take account of the religious life of the people and show it favor, since the function of government is to make provision for the common welfare. However, it would clearly transgress the limits set to its power were it to presume to direct or inhibit acts that are religious.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 3  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Five

What the Council Fathers teach in this short paragraph is very important. They previously stated that governments should not deny religious liberty. Here they state what governments should positively do with regards to religion. Since people, through their religious beliefs, direct their lives toward God, governments are positively to take this into account. Not only should governments not hinder religious life, they should also “show it favor.” Since religious belief is a good within culture and society, governments should foster and aid the good that religion brings to the commonwealth. This does not mean that a government should favor one religion over another or that it should attempt to direct what religions should believe or do. Rather, governments are to create an environment in which religious life flourishes for the good of all. In providing such an environment where religious life prospers, governments contribute to the

good of individuals as well as to the good of society as a whole.

How does religion contribute to the good of society? In what ways might it hinder the good of society? Do contemporary Western governments view religion in a positive or negative light? How can governments today foster or aid the good of religious belief?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 6 ★ June 26, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**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?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 7 ★ June 27, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**Religious bodies also have** the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word. However, in spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices, everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonorable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's own right and a violation of the rights of others.

In addition, it comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious bodies should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity. Finally, the social nature of man and the very nature of religion afford the foundation of the right of men freely to hold meetings and to establish educational, cultural, charitable, and social organizations, under the impulse of their own religious sense.

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

## Reflection for Day Seven

While the Council Fathers insist that religious bodies must be free to teach and bear witness to their faith, they equally stress that this freedom must never be abused. It is not only governments that can deny their freedom; in attempting to spread their own beliefs, religions should not force others, physically or psychologically, to convert. Rather, each person's dignity

and freedom must be maintained. The accepting of religious beliefs must be an act of freedom, otherwise it is done not because it is believed to be true but rather out of fear and force. The right to profess and proclaim one's own faith cannot violate the same right of another.

That being said, religious bodies should be free to provide reasons as to why their beliefs are true and why it would be of value for others to believe what they believe. They should also be free to address how their beliefs contribute to the good of society.

What contemporary examples are there of religious bodies using coercion in an attempt to spread their faith or hindering others from exercising their faith? What contributions does the Catholic Church make to society and culture?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 8 ★ June 28, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**Since the family is** a society in its own original right, it has the right freely to live its own domestic religious life under the guidance of parents. Parents, moreover, have the right to determine, in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of religious education that their children are to receive.

Government, in consequence, must acknowledge the right of parents to make a genuinely free choice of schools and of other means of education. The use of this freedom of choice is not to be made a reason for imposing unjust burdens on parents, whether directly or indirectly. Besides, the rights of parents are violated if their children are forced to attend lessons or instructions which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs. The same is true if a single system of education, from which all religious formation is excluded, is imposed upon all.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 5  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Eight

The Council Fathers now address the religious freedom that is enjoyed by the family. Families have the right to live out their faith within the family. Moreover, parents have a natural right to religiously guide their families. They are the ones who have primary responsibility for the care and education of their children, and this is especially true of the religious education of their children. Thus, while parents are primarily responsible for the religious education, they are also free to choose the kind of religious education their children receive.

From within the Catholic tradition, Vatican II stated that the family is a “domestic church,” that is,

it is within the family that children are first taught the Gospel, are taught to pray and to keep the Commandments. Together the members of a family live out the Gospel life of love. In keeping with this, the Council states that parents must be free to choose their children’s schooling. The exercise of this freedom should not be the cause of undue financial burdens upon the family. Likewise, children should not be forced to attend instruction that is contrary to the religious belief of their families. Lastly, if there is only one form of education within a country, this does not mean that all religious instruction should be forbidden. Accommodation is to be made. What we see here is the Church ardently wanting to assure a broad and extensive scope for families to live out their faith as families, and this extends to the education of children.

Why is the above important for parents and their families? Are the above aspects of domestic religious freedom jeopardized today?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 9 ★ June 29, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**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?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 10 ★ June 30, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**Finally, government is to** see to it that the equality of citizens before the law, which is itself an element of the common welfare, is never violated for religious reasons whether openly or covertly. Nor is there to be discrimination among citizens.

It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or fear or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders men from joining or leaving a religious body. All the more is it a violation of the will of God and of the sacred rights of the person and the family of nations, when force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion, either in the whole of mankind or in a particular country or in a specific community.

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

## Reflection for Day Ten

Because all human beings possess equal dignity, value, and worth, the government is to ensure that this equality is maintained both for the good of the individual and for the good of society as a whole. This equality specifically should not be violated on religious grounds. Each religious body and the members of that body have equal rights to religious liberty. This equality demands that there be no discrimination based upon one's religious beliefs.

The Council Fathers now stress that, based upon this equality among its citizens, no government is permitted to impose in any way "the profession or repudiation of any religion." Such an imposition is a violation of the right to be true to one's conscience.

Because of the freedom of conscience, the government is also not permitted to deny a person the right to join or leave a religious body. The government has no right to stipulate what a person can or cannot believe.

If the above is true, then the Council states that it is all the more wrong when "force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion." This not only applies to governments but also to religious bodies themselves. No religious body is permitted to harass or seek to eliminate another religious group.

Within our contemporary world, where is religious equality denied or religious discrimination tolerated? Are there instances where one religion violates the rights of other religions?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 11 ★ July 1, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**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)?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



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**Day 12 ★ July 2, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**Among the things which** concern the good of the Church and indeed the welfare of society here on earth—things therefore which are always and everywhere to be kept secure and defended against all injury—this certainly is preeminent, namely, that the Church should enjoy that full measure of freedom which her care for salvation of men requires. This freedom is sacred, because the only-begotten Son endowed with it the Church which He purchased with His blood. It is so much the property of the Church that to act against it is to act against the will of God. The freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations between the Church and governments and the whole civil order.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 13  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Twelve

In Chapter I, the Council Fathers considered the nature of religious freedom from a rational and philosophical perspective—the dignity and equality of human beings and the natural right to religious liberty. In Chapter II, they turn to examining religious liberty in the light of Christian Revelation.

In this context, the Council Fathers forthrightly insist that the Church must “enjoy that full measure of freedom which her care for salvation of men requires.” Jesus became man, died, and rose from the dead so that all men and women would come to salvation—to know the fullness of truth and the fullness of the Father’s love. This is why the Church’s religious freedom is “sacred.” Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, founded the Church as the means by which his saving

message and presence would go forth to all the world. Only then would Jesus’ Gospel be lived out among all nations and peoples. Only if the Church is free can she rightly fulfill her divine commission. This is why the Church jealously guards her freedom while simultaneously fostering harmonious, appropriate, and just relations with various governments throughout the world.

What present circumstances threaten the freedom of the Catholic Church particularly? Are threats to the Church’s freedom always from without, or do threats arise from within the Church itself? What threats in the past has the Church in our country had to contend with?

**JUNE 21 to JULY 4, 2013**



**FORTNIGHT4FREEDOM★ORG**

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**Day 13 ★ July 3, 2013**

# 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.*

**In turn, where the** principle of religious freedom is not only proclaimed in words or simply incorporated in law but also given sincere and practical application, there the Church succeeds in achieving a stable situation of right as well as of fact and the independence which is necessary for the fulfillment of her divine mission. This independence is precisely what the authorities of the Church claim in society.

At the same time, the Christian faithful, in common with all other men, possess the civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their conscience. Therefore, a harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all men and communities and sanctioned by constitutional law.

*Declaration on Religious Liberty  
(Dignitatis Humanae), no. 13  
December 7, 1965*

## Reflection for Day Thirteen

While insisting upon the religious freedom of the Church, the Council Fathers do not wish to give the impression that in some manner the Catholic Church is special when it comes to religious liberty. Thus, the Council first states above that where the principle of religious liberty is present, the Church is able to peaceably fulfill her divine mission. It is this amicable relationship between herself and civil authorities that the Church always wishes to pursue and ensure.

In the light of this, the Church also champions the religious and civil rights of all so that all people can live “their lives in accordance with their conscience.” In this way there is no conflict with what the Church demands for herself and what she

demands for others—the freedom to follow one’s conscience in matters religious. This religious freedom for all is what the Council once more believes should be acknowledged and sanctioned within the constitutional law of countries.

In the United States, religious freedom is protected in the Constitution, as the Council desires. Are those constitutional protections enough? Are they growing stronger or weaker in our society today? What else, apart from the law, can strengthen or weaken religious liberty? What should Catholics do to defend and foster religious liberty in America today? What have Catholics done in the past when religious liberty was threatened?

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**Day 14 ★ July 4, 2013**

# Reflections for the FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

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**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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