



YEAR OF FAITH 2012 2013

LIVING OUR Relationship WITH JESUS CHRIST



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

(Declaration on Religious Freedom, 15)

07/2013

Vatican II | *What Difference Does it Make?*

DOCUMENT: **DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ** *Declaration on Religious Freedom*

Is there a more urgent contemporary problem throughout the world than that of religious freedom and the relations between Church and state? The Declaration on Religious Freedom defines the essential duty of government as the protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of the person. It calls on governments "to assume the safeguarding of religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means."

The Council Fathers declare the basic human right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person. People should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power... "so that no one is forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."

The document defends the social nature of people and the need to give external expression to internal acts of religion. It upholds the basic human need to profess religious beliefs in community. The inability to do so "causes injury to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life." There is never a justification to deny the free exercise of religion in a society.

The Council Fathers warn against governments acting in an arbitrary fashion or in an unfair spirit of partisanship. They uphold the right of society to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom and religion.

Currently the U.S. Bishops have taken a stand against one such infringement on religious liberty. The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Preventive Service Rule (commonly called the HHS mandate) requires employers by August 1, 2013 to provide through their employee benefits plans procedures and pharmaceuticals that the religious employers have judged to be immoral thereby mandating services contrary to Catholic teachings. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to vigorously oppose this mandate. These decisions could drastically alter the conscience protection and religious liberty Americans have safeguarded since the country was founded.

The Declaration on Religious Freedom upholds the most fundamental principle between the Church and the whole civil order and that is the freedom of the Church to uphold its doctrines. We are all called to faithfully proclaim this freedom and vigorously defend it.

Sr. Kathleen M. Ryan, SND

Reflection Questions

1. The State Department 2012 International Religious Freedom Report chronicles discriminations and violence that "continue to detain, imprison, torture, and even kill people for their religious beliefs." Why is it important to defend the right the practice and proclaim religious beliefs?
2. In this Year of Faith, what might you do to defend religious freedom as a basic human right?
3. For more information about the impact of the HHS mandate on religious freedom and how you can get involved, check the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website: www.usccb.org

Read more...www.dioceseofcleveland.org/yearoffaith

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