

Cor Session Guide

Freedom and Faithfulness: *A Catholic Guide to Religious Liberty*



The Knights of Columbus is grateful to have partnered with the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI) on these *Cor* Session Guides.

RFI is committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a driver of national and international security. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., RFI defends religious freedom in law and culture, in America and around the world, by:

Equipping students, parents, policymakers, scholars, faith-based organizations, and religious communities to defend and exercise religious freedom in full.

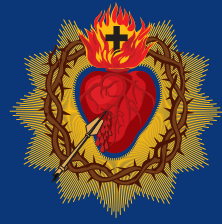
Educating current and future leaders to understand and support the indispensable contributions of religious freedom to the common good.

Engaging broad audiences in America, and key countries abroad, to advance the true meaning and value of religious freedom through media, higher education, K-12 schools, professional training, public policy, and other key arenas.





Freedom and Faithfulness: *A Catholic Guide to Religious Liberty*



INTRODUCTION

For Catholics, religious freedom is ultimately grounded in the Church's teaching that "man's response to God in faith must be free."¹ Religious freedom is for Catholics, therefore, not a matter of compromise but conviction.

American Catholics can rightly celebrate the unique way that the "free exercise" of religion has been prioritized in the United States. Religious freedom is embedded in the nation's founding documents and reflects America's longstanding commitment to core freedoms rooted in natural rights and natural law. And yet, just as it took many years to secure other freedoms, the free exercise of religion has not always been enjoyed by all Americans. Periods of anti-Catholic bigotry (including the late 19th century when nearly 40 states enacted the discriminatory Blaine Amendments to prevent public funds going to "sectarian" – i.e., Catholic – schools), repression of other religious minorities, and secular animus toward public expressions of faith are a tragic part of the American story.

And today, false "rights" claims, often rooted in extreme notions of individual autonomy and identity, are increasingly used to force people of faith to compromise their convictions. Catholics are among those most at risk, especially on matters of human sexuality, natural male-female distinctions, marriage, family, and life. While Catholic identity alone may not invite hostility today, as it did in past eras, Catholic *faithfulness* increasingly will.

Freedom and Faithfulness: A Catholic Guide to Religious Liberty is designed to help college Knights explore the meaning and value of religious freedom, recognize how this constitutional freedom is protected in America, and identify ways to exercise it – as Catholics, Knights, and citizens. Most importantly, you will be equipped to ground your commitment to religious freedom for all people in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Defending religious liberty for all is not a concession for Catholics but an act of faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His Church.

This Guide includes 9 sessions for *Cor* which can be run by a Knights of Columbus College Council or any Knights Council. Each session includes an opening prayer, a reading, a faith reflection, questions for discussion, and closing prayer. Many sessions also contain an action challenge, offering an opportunity to further enrich your understanding of and appreciation for religious freedom through a group activity. These action challenges involve varying levels of commitment and are optional as you proceed through the guide. Each subsequent section is not dependent on having completed the action challenge in the previous section. See guidance for running *Cor* in the Appendix or visit www.kofc.org/cor for more information.

You will need:

- A copy of each session for each participant
- Volunteers to read aloud the selections
- Anything necessary for prayer and fraternity parts of *Cor* (e.g. Rosary beads, food, etc.)

Now, gather with a group of your fellow Knights. Deepen your understanding of religious freedom. And grow in your Catholic formation.

¹ *Dignitatis Humanae* is the Second Vatican Council's final major document, which Pope Paul VI signed and promulgated on December 7, 1965. This document draws together the Church's defense of religious freedom through the ages. See section 10.



SESSION I. WHAT IS RELIGION?










Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Can you define religion? People tend to define religion through the lens of their own beliefs and practices. However, social scientists have identified hundreds of different faith perspectives that have been practiced throughout history. Is it possible, then, to arrive at a single definition to describe hundreds of different traditions practiced across thousands of years of human history?

William Alston, a 20th century philosopher, tried to answer that question using a concept called the “family resemblance” approach. This approach looks for common characteristics as a way of defining a complex issue or idea. The most famous example is the topic of games. For example, football and chess have numerous differences including the field of play, rules governing each opponent, and required equipment. However, both involve competitors trying to defeat their opponents within each game’s parameters, which makes it possible to refer to both as a game. Relatedly, religious people might disagree on whether there is one deity, two deities, or millions of deities, but they can agree that there is something supernatural or greater than human that is real. Perhaps that is what Alston had in mind in his list of “religion-making” characteristics illustrated in the chart below.²

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGION		
THE SUPERNATURAL  Belief in supernatural being or beings (God or gods)	SACRED OBJECTS  A distinction between sacred and profane objects	RITUALS  Ritual acts focused on sacred objects
MORALITY  A moral code believed to be sanctioned by God or gods	EMOTION  Feelings like awe, guilt or love that connect to God or gods	COMMUNICATION  Prayer and other forms of communication with God or gods
PURPOSE  A world view that contains a purpose or point of the world	PRAXIS  An organization of one’s life based on that world view	FELLOWSHIP  A social group bound together by the other characteristics

² Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 7, 141-142.



Let's focus on religion's supernatural (greater-than-human) aspect. Many religious people pray to a divine being they cannot see, and anticipate a future life in that divine being's presence, but this does not imply that religion speaks only to supernatural things. Religion, of course, also speaks to the material and practical realities that make up our lives as family members, neighbors, citizens, consumers, and more. It guides the daily decisions we make as we discern right from wrong, and helps us connect with like-minded people who believe and act similarly. Religion is about both ultimate *and* mundane things, things that are both sacred *and* secular.

So, while significant religious variety across human societies can make it challenging to define religion, the family resemblance approach can help us get at the meaning of religion for the purposes of understanding what religious freedom is:

Re·li·gion

The human *search* for truths about a greater-than-human source of being and ultimate meaning, and the *ordering* of one's life in accord with those truths once found.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

The Church professes that there is "one true religion" while also acknowledging that religion, as a category, points to a natural human response to the reality in which we find ourselves. As to the nature of religion, in both its internal dimensions and outward expressions, the Church teaches: "In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life...the exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God...The social nature of man, however, itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community." (3)

For Discussion

1. What are the two key aspects of religion as it is represented in our definition? What are some recent questions or controversies (e.g., legal, public health, etc.) that are best dealt with when both are prioritized?
2. What are a few examples of "religion-making" characteristics in the Catholic faith?
3. *Dignitatis Humanae* teaches that there is "one true religion" while also teaching that "the exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in...free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God..." How is it that these teachings are deeply compatible rather than contradictory?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.



SESSION II. WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND HUMAN IDENTITY?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Is religion natural to human beings? Is there evidence that religion is common to human beings and their societies across space and time?

Many academic disciplines, including history and archaeology, suggest this to be the case. From ancient times to the present, human beings have been searching for some higher reality that is greater than the natural world they see around them. They have consistently contemplated the distinction between the material and immaterial, or the natural and supernatural. In fact, the anthropologist Robert Winzeler notes that to his knowledge, no anthropologist or other reliable observer has ever found a society that was completely unaware of this distinction.³ In other words, every society seems to have independently concluded that there is something “real” beyond the natural world.

Of course, this is not to say that every person in every society is equally convinced. In fact, there was a growing movement in the 20th century that claimed religion to be a “primitive form of human behavior” that would soon fade into the shadow of modern science.⁴ However, many contemporary scholars now embrace the opposite view, observing that religion is deeply embedded in human behavior and identity.⁵

A recent study by the Pew organization found that approximately 84% of the world’s population affiliated with a specific religion. Presumably many others consider themselves spiritual seekers, individuals who believe in a greater-than-human reality but choose not to affiliate with a formal religion. The Pew-Templeton Religious Futures Project suggests that religion is not wilting in modern life, estimating that by 2050, the global population of religiously affiliated people will remain at 83%.⁶

In addition to social sciences such as history, anthropology, and demographics, there is growing evidence from the field of cognitive science suggesting that the human desire to seek an unseen order—particularly a transcendent or divine being—is deeply rooted in our nature as human beings. For example, there is a growing awareness that it is natural for children to seek not only design in the physical world, but also purpose. As developmental psychologist Justin Barrett has written, “because of the nature of human minds, religious expression in beliefs and practices is nearly inevitable in most people.”⁷

³ Robert. L. Winzeler, *Anthropology and Religion* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 7.

⁴ Nicholas Croce, ed., *Anthropology* (Rosen Publishing Group, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also: Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Doubleday, 1967).

⁶ <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/>

⁷ Justin L. Barrett, “The Naturalness and Freedom of Religion” (paper prepared for Witherspoon Institute Consultation on International Religious Freedom, May 6, 2011). See also: Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (AltaMira Press, 2004).



Thus, to deny human beings the freedom to investigate ultimate things for themselves and act upon their conclusions is to deny a basic aspect of human identity.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

Dignitatis Humanae acknowledges the natural, distinctly human search for religious truth, and grounds that search in human dignity: “It is in accordance with their dignity as persons – that is, beings 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.” (2)

For Discussion

1. Evidence suggests that “every society seems to have independently concluded that there is something ‘real’ beyond the natural world” and that “the human desire to seek an unseen order...is deeply rooted in our nature as human beings”? What might this tell us about the importance of upholding religious freedom in society?
2. In *Dignitatis Humanae* the Church teaches that human persons are “impelled by nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek *the truth*, especially religious truth” and “to *adhere to the truth*, once it is known...”
 - a. What are some examples within the Knights of Columbus of exercising both of these aspects of religion?
 - b. Reflecting on these examples, why is it so important for religious freedom to protect the exercise of both aspects of religion?
3. In recent years, some skeptics have maintained that the expansion of scientific knowledge will eventually make religion obsolete. What do demographics suggest about this claim?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

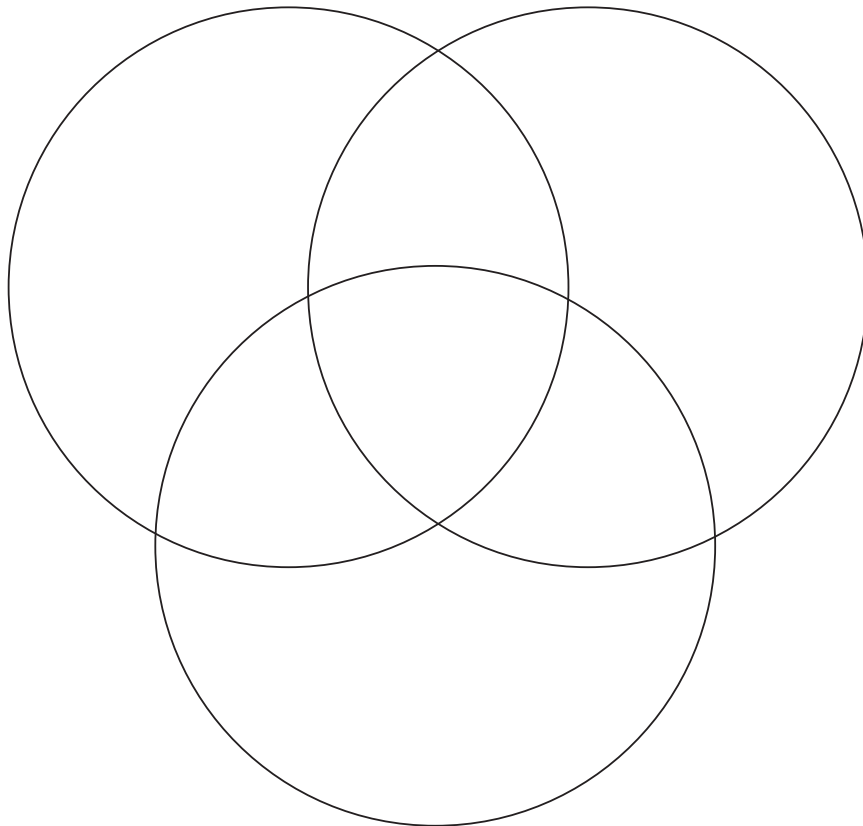
This challenge builds upon sections I and II. The “family resemblance” approach described in section I directs us to look for similarities between different things to identify important connections. This approach encourages us to ask two related questions: How do we define religion *and* what does one religion have in common with another? Fr. John Hardon, S.J. defined religion in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary* as, “The moral virtue by which a person is disposed to render to God the worship and service he deserves... Religion is also a composite of all the virtues that arise from a human being’s relationship to God as the author of his being...” (p. 461)

Fr. Hardon’s definition alludes to several of Alston’s common characteristics of religion; for example, the supernatural, morality, emotion, communication, and purpose. Although not explicitly mentioned in this definition, someone only needs to look at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to realize



Catholicism's inclusion of sacred objects, rituals, practices, and fellowship. With the family resemblance approach in mind, interview three students on campus, asking them how they would define religion. What characteristics do they describe? Then map their definitions onto the Venn diagram below to identify similarities (midsection) and differences (outer sections).

As you review the responses you receive, pay special attention to whether any of them describe religion as a core part of human identity, as outlined in Section II? What are the implications for religious freedom of recognizing, or missing, that point?



Interview Notes: _____



SESSION III. WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND HUMAN DIGNITY?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

A commitment to universal human dignity is foundational to the concept of human rights. What is sometimes overlooked is the vital connection between religion and human dignity. Human dignity is not the result of social status or personal merit—no one can earn human dignity. Each person possesses dignity and is thus worthy of respect simply by virtue of being (existing). It is, therefore, obvious that human dignity is not granted by government or any other human authority. Like religious freedom itself, human dignity stems from a proper understanding of the human person and the connections human beings have to the transcendent source of all being and ultimate meaning. In other words, human dignity is rooted in and inseparable from religion. If there is no transcendent, greater-than-human source from which all humanity can draw a common dignity, then concepts like equality and justice begin to break down.

What would be the foundation of ethics in a purely materialistic framework? Is it possible to examine “equality” under a microscope or grow “kindness” in a petri dish? The fact that these questions seem nonsensical highlights the fact that moral virtues such as these demand transcendent or immaterial evidence and consideration. A philosophy of life based on an exclusively materialistic point of view would find it difficult to justify, much less defend, the concept of universal human dignity.

Faith Reflection | *Christifideles Laici* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

In 1988, St. John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, rooting universal human dignity in God’s acts of creation, incarnation, and redemption. He writes: “The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person’s origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a ‘child in the Son’ and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for eternal life of blessed communion with God.” (37)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way:

- “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God... [and] it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude...” (n. 1700)
- “It is in Christ, ‘the image of the invisible God,’ that man has been created ‘in the image and likeness’ of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.” (n. 1701)



For Discussion

1. Does the defense of universal human dignity, an extraordinary idea by any historical standard, demand a greater-than-human or transcendent grounding?
2. Or, is it possible to defend universal human dignity on purely materialistic grounds?
3. Reflect for a moment on the Church's teaching that universal human dignity is rooted in God's acts of creation, incarnation, and redemption. How might this expansive grounding for human dignity shape faithful Catholics in thinking about human dignity?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

For a timeframe decided in advance (e.g., 1 month, 3 months, a semester, etc.), gather with your fellow Knights to serve on a regular basis (1) at a neonatal intensive care unit holding newborn infants addicted to drugs, or suffering other serious ailments, who need person-to-person contact that their parents cannot currently provide, (2) at an elderly care facility compassionately interacting with dementia patients or other needy residents, or (3) a similar setting where the persons to be cared for possess none of the physical or intellectual capacities commonly valued in our society for their productive or creative potential.

During this time, consider also gathering weekly to pray for those you are serving and, based on your experiences with them, to discuss what it means for them to possess a God-given dignity that remains undiminished by their lack of ability.



SESSION IV. HOW THEN SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Religious freedom allows every person the opportunity to live a fully human life. It does not depend on the idea that all truth claims are equal or even valid. Religious freedom does not require individuals to make endless ideological concessions to one another, despite their differences. Religious liberty, however, does assume that everyone has a natural right to be religious, and to be free from coercion, violence, or intimidation when living out their faith. It allows each of us to search for truths about a greater-than-human source of being and ultimate meaning and to act on what we find. A helpful way to summarize this natural right is to recognize that every person must be free to:

1. *Explore* life's ultimate questions.
2. *Embrace* what one's conscience discerns to be true.
3. *Express* these truths in both private and public life.

This “explore, embrace, express” paradigm⁸ nicely summarizes the scope of true religious liberty. It is also worth noting that this expansive conception of religious freedom is controversial in most places around the world. In some countries, apostasy laws and honor killings prevent individuals even from exploring life's great questions and certainly restrict their open embrace of anything that runs afoul of some prescribed, coercive orthodoxy. In the United States, religious individuals and communities are typically free to explore and embrace without fear of recrimination, but a growing chorus of voices demand that they confine those ideas to the four walls of their home or house of worship. According to these voices, bringing one's religious convictions into the courtroom, classroom, legislature, or marketplace is an offense. Make no mistake, however, there is no such thing as an entirely neutral public space. Any agenda that seeks to silence religious voices in public life is a clear violation of religious freedom and creates a society where secularism reigns unopposed.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

The Church declares:

- “Religious freedom...which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.” (1)
- “[Religious freedom] means that...no one is to be 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...provided that just public order is observed.”(2)

⁸ For a fuller examination of the Explore, Embrace, Express paradigm, see *Religious Freedom: Why Now? Defending an Embattled Human Right* by Witherspoon Institute Task Force on International Religious Freedom Witherspoon Institute Inc., 2012), 28-31.



For Discussion

1. Does defending religious freedom for everyone require defending all religions as equally true?
2. This section speaks of religious freedom as including the freedom to express religious truths in private and public life. What are some examples in which you and your fellow Knights are called to exercise your Catholic faith in the classroom, commerce, politics and law, or other areas of public life?
3. In this section of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Church proclaims that religious freedom “has to do with immunity from coercion.” Put another way, religious freedom means not being “forced to act” contrary to your religious convictions. How does this emphasis on freedom from coercion help to enable the Church’s defense of religious freedom for all to remain in deep harmony with her claim to offer “true religion” to the world?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for your brothers’ intentions. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

Consider identifying a non-Catholic religious student group with which you might enter into a dialogue about common challenges and opportunities on your campus or in your local community concerning laws, policies, or practices that hinder the pursuit of some facet of your respective missions.

While remaining steadfast in affirming the unparalleled truth of the Catholic faith, look for common ground as civic neighbors who are called to seek the common good of all. Discuss one another’s mission, membership guidelines, programs, and activities, and how your respective faith convictions shape them. Discuss institutional, legal, or cultural pressures to compromise your convictions and mission that each of you have encountered in recent months or years and how you have dealt with them.

If applicable, pursue common areas of advocacy on your campus. Taking the principles set forth in *Dignitatis Humanae* a step further, consider whether your dialogue partner is facing challenges or hostilities you are not and whether you might be called to defend their religious freedom as, in itself, an act of Catholic faithfulness.



SESSION V. HOW DOES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PROMOTE HUMAN FLOURISHING?

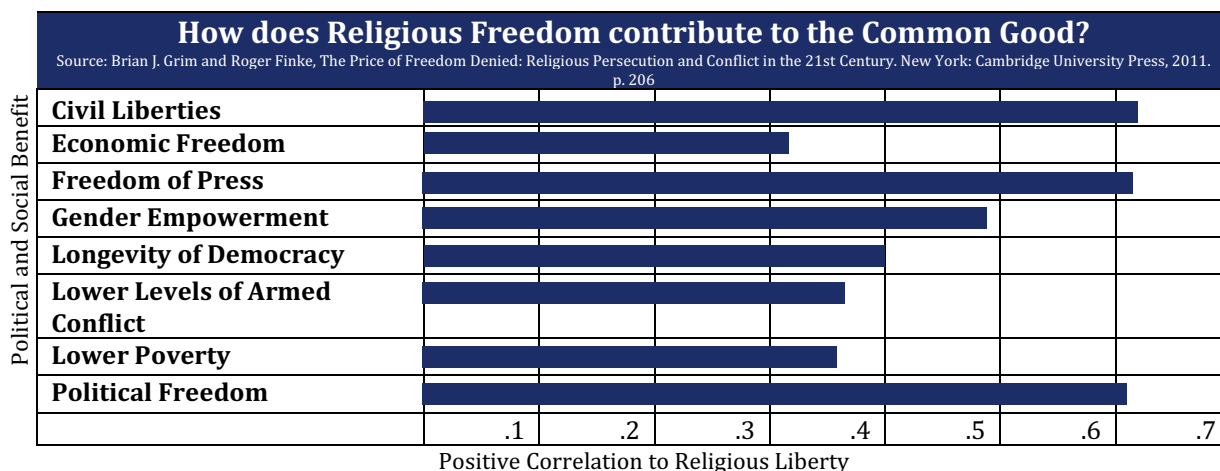
Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

The historical benefit of religious freedom is well-established. The ability to exercise one's faith freely brings great personal meaning and satisfaction. Beyond that, when allowed to exercise religion freely, people of faith and their communities often establish initiatives and institutions that benefit everyone in society. They develop hospitals and homeless shelters. They offer help to the poor and destitute. They create educational institutions and addiction recovery services. In other words, religious freedom encourages people to exercise their religious beliefs in private and public life, bringing an immense benefit to their neighbors and society as a whole.

In addition to the social goods it promotes, religious freedom also functions as the linchpin of other civil liberties. It is clear that some freedoms such as free speech and free assembly are threatened without a proper commitment to religious freedom. In fact, religious freedom helps to secure a wide range of liberties and other conditions that benefit society. Consider the chart below that illustrates an interesting study correlating religious freedom and various factors that contribute to the common good.⁹



Religion can lead human beings to deep fulfillment and a sense of well-being. It can also foster habits of virtue, such as putting others before ourselves or acting benevolently even when it is difficult. Such religion-motivated virtues benefit the individual and society. Critics may point to the historical tensions and even violence to which religion has been linked. While it is true that religion has been used at times to justify condemnable acts, as we have already seen, this fact only underscores the necessity of religious freedom.

⁹ Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).



Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

The Church proclaims that religious freedom has the potential to promote a society's overall well-being: "Government [must] 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." (6)

For Discussion

1. As you look around at your campus or surrounding community, what religious institutions stand out to you as contributing to the common good of your university or city? What might happen if they no longer served in your community?
2. Why do you think protecting religious freedom tends to have the effect of strengthening protections for freedom of speech, assembly, and press; economic freedom; and political freedom, among others?
3. How does the Knights of Columbus as an organization contribute to human flourishing in our country? How does your Knights college council promote human flourishing on your campus? How do the religious mission and calling of the Knights make these distinct contributions possible?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

Catholics serve our communities in a number of ways. One example is healthcare. The Catholic Health Association reports there are more than 600 Catholic hospitals in the United States, 74% of which are in urban areas. Additionally, there are more than 1,500 Catholic continuing care facilities. According to its data, 4.5 million Americans were admitted to Catholic health care facilities in 2023. That's 1 in 7 patients, nationally. And while that number is astounding, it is an underestimate, because it does not include all independent Catholic groups and practices. What would happen to healthcare in this country if Catholic individuals and institutions were forced to act against the moral teachings of the Church? What would happen in other areas of our society if Catholic organizations ceased to serve there?

Find a local Catholic organization in your town or city and ask if you might visit and speak with a staff member about what they do, whom they serve, and how the organization's Catholic faith inspires them. *Fill in the table on the next page with responses from your interview.*



Name of the organization: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Website (if applicable): _____

What is the mission of the organization?: _____

Whom do they serve and why?: _____

How long have they served the community?: _____

How does their Catholic faith inspire them to serve?: _____



SESSION VI. DOES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM HAVE LIMITS?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Religious freedom respects human dignity and contributes to human flourishing, but that does not mean the right to act on the basis of one's religious convictions is absolute. Religious freedom has at least two limits:

- (1) Religious freedom does not provide a legal or moral right to violate the natural rights of other human beings. For instance, religious freedom may not be used as a defense for depriving others of their right to life, or their rights to freedom of religion, to freedom of speech, or to remain secure in their property. Even here, there are important caveats. For example, speech that contradicts certain religious teachings may rightly remain off limits to employees of religious institutions that uphold those teachings if they want to remain on staff. Proper lines can be drawn, but it may take some effort to do so in a just manner.
- (2) Religious freedom does not provide a legal or moral right to commit acts of violence or otherwise cause physical harm to others. Abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, "gender transition treatments," and abuse of children, for example, may not find any refuge in religious freedom.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

The Church recognizes that religious freedom is not an absolute right and offers in *Dignitatis Humanae* some reflections on its limits:

- "The right to religious freedom is exercised in human society: hence its exercise is subject to certain regulatory norms. In the use of all freedoms the moral principle of personal and social responsibility is to be observed. In the exercise of their rights, individual men and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all." (7)
- "Furthermore, society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom of religion. It is the special duty of government to provide this protection... 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 the effective safeguard of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights, also out of the need for an adequate care of genuine public peace, which comes about when men live together in good order and in true justice, and finally out of the need for a proper guardianship of public morality." (7)



For Discussion

1. Religious freedom is not an absolute right. Why might it be important to think clearly about not only the core of religious freedom but also its limits?
2. Many controversies that have ensnared Catholic institutions in recent years – whether faithful schools, universities, adoption agencies, hospitals, pregnancy resource centers, or others – have involved claims of competing rights or conflicting government purposes.
 - a. What are some examples of legal rights or government purposes that no claim of religious freedom should override when they come into conflict?
 - b. By contrast, what are examples of rights claims or government purposes that religious freedom should rightly override when they come into conflict.
3. *Dignitatis Humanae* has a high view of government’s distinct calling in society. While safeguarding religious freedom is part of that calling, what are some of government’s other key tasks?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

Violence may never be justified, or excused, on account of religion. Yet, there are some people who claim that it is precisely the free exercise of religion that protects the “right” to commit violence against another, even when that other is still in her mother’s womb. Take, for example, the religious freedom arguments that made headlines after the U.S. Supreme Court delivered its opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health*.¹⁰ These arguments basically revolve around this claim: if a woman’s understanding of her religion permits (perhaps even encourages or mandates) her to seek an abortion in certain circumstances, then restricting access to abortion is effectively restricting her exercise of religion. How would you respond to this claim?

Write a response to the claim that religious freedom protects the “right” to abortion:

¹⁰ For example, see Arleigh Rodgers, “State lawsuits defend abortion access with religious freedom,” *Associated Press*, December 22, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/abortion-politics-health-indiana-state-government-reproductive-rights-7308b2edc8a8ac62446d821abc5fae59>.



SESSION VII. IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONSISTENT WITH MY CATHOLIC FAITH?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Dignitatis Humanae beautifully states:

[W]hen [Christ Jesus] completed on the cross the work of redemption whereby He achieved salvation and true freedom for men, He brought His revelation to completion. For He bore witness to the truth, but He refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. (11)

The Lord Jesus Christ “bore witness to the truth, but He refused to impose the truth...” Catholics are bound by the same principle: they may propose religious truth but they may not impose it. Jesus commanded his disciples to take this posture in spreading the Gospel. On this foundation, the deep compatibility between the Catholic faith and religious freedom can be explored further through the lenses of choice, freedom, and the Golden Rule.

True Faith Requires Human Choice

To begin his extraordinary book, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (Yale University Press, 2021), Catholic convert Robert Louis Wilken writes, “Religious freedom rests on the simple truth: religious faith is an inward disposition of the mind and heart and for that reason cannot be coerced by external force.” Christians discovered this “simple truth” early on. To make the point, Wilken quotes third century Christian, Tertullian of Carthage:

It is only just and a privilege inherent in human nature that every person should be able to worship according to his own convictions; the religious practice of one person neither harms nor helps another. It is not part of religion to coerce religious practice, for it is by choice not by coercion that we should be led to religion. (1)

In harmony with Tertullian, *Dignitatis Humanae* teaches:

It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man’s response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will. This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church. (10)

True Worship Requires Human Freedom

At the heart of true Catholic worship is a love for God, who is the sole object of that worship. Love can only be freely given. An expression of love for God absent such freedom fails to be love at all. Broadening the lens to consider the role of freedom in the overall human response to God, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:



By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, 'the obedience of faith'. (n. 143)

“Submits,” “gives,” “obedience” – these, too, are human acts toward God, which by their nature can only be offered freely. St. John Paul II made a similar point during a 1995 greeting in Baltimore Cathedral, stating that “God wishes to be adored by people who are free: a conviction which requires us to respect and honor the inner sanctuary of conscience in which each person meets God.” (Pope John Paul II: *His Essential Wisdom*, 102)

Religious Freedom Honors the Golden Rule

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.” (Matt. 7:12) Catholics rightfully want to proclaim the Gospel, gather for word and sacrament, educate, serve, and otherwise order our lives according to our faith, and to do so free from coercion, violence, or intimidation. Accordingly, we should seek the same freedom for our non-Catholic neighbors.

To summarize, religious freedom honors the fact that true faith requires human choice. Religious freedom respects the reality that true worship requires human freedom. And in defending religious freedom for all, Catholics embody the Golden Rule, in charity and truth, to our non-Catholic neighbors, not because all religions are equal in truth but because all persons are equal in dignity.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

The Church declares that Divine revelation – culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – bears witness to the centrality of religious freedom:

- “It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man’s response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will. This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church.” (10)
- “God calls men to serve Him in spirit and in truth, hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion...This truth appears at its height in Christ Jesus, in whom God manifested Himself and His ways...In attracting and inviting His disciples He used patience.” (11)
- “[W]hen [Christ Jesus] completed on the cross the work of redemption whereby He achieved salvation and true freedom for men, He brought His revelation to completion. For He bore witness to the truth, but He refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it. Not by force of blows does His rule assert its claims. It is established by witnessing to the truth and by hearing the truth, and it extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to Himself.” (11)



For Discussion

1. The Church declares in *Dignitatis Humanae* that “It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man’s response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will.” How should Catholics think about this tenet when the freedom it secures is used to embrace and exercise other religions?
2. In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Church teaches that “In attracting and inviting His disciples [Christ Jesus] used patience.” How should Christ’s patience inform how Catholics think about religious freedom?
3. Christ’s rule, according to *Dignitatis Humanae*, “extends its dominion by the love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws all men to Himself.” How should the nature of Christ’s sacrificial love inform how Catholics think about religious freedom?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.



SESSION VIII. WHAT DOES AMERICA'S FOUNDING SAY ABOUT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

The “American Creed”

The “American Creed” is rooted in a religious truth claim about the transcendent source of human dignity, equality, and rights. The Declaration of Independence, for example, proclaimed “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Journalist, public intellectual, and Catholic convert G.K. Chesterton stated it this way in his book, *What I saw in America*:

*America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence...It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice, and that their authority is for that reason just. It...clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights are derived.*¹¹

Admittedly, equality was not a reality for slaves, Native Americans, or women at the founding. The Declaration’s extraordinary claims, nevertheless, set the new republic on a moral trajectory toward equality, which is why such towering figures as President Abraham Lincoln and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. repeatedly appealed to it.

In addition to establishing that human beings are equal in dignity and bear “certain unalienable rights,” the Declaration also proclaimed that these truths come from God. In principle, then, their revocation or infringement was placed beyond the reach of any human authority.

Among those “unalienable rights” is religious freedom. James Madison, chief author of the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment, stated in his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (1785):

*It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation to the claims of Civil Society.*¹²

For Madison, religious freedom begins with recognizing one’s duty to God as discovered through conscience and that this duty surpasses other obligations, including ones we owe to government. Religious freedom as “America’s First Freedom” is rooted in Madison’s reasoning here.

¹¹ London: Edinburgh University Press (1922), 7.

¹² National Constitution Center, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/james-madison-memorial-and-remonstrance-against-religious-assessments-1785>.



The U.S. Constitution

A few years later, Madison penned the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Ratified December 15, 1791, the First Amendment prevents Congress from establishing a religion, which further supported the “free exercise” of religion set forth in the next clause. The founders earnestly believed that the American experiment would fail without a robust religious presence in public life. As John Adams wrote to the Massachusetts Militia in a letter dated October 11, 1798, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

There is, however, a religious freedom provision mentioned in the Constitution prior to the First Amendment. Article VI states: “... no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Which is one of the reasons why it was so unsettling when the late-Senator Diane Feinstein chided then-Notre Dame Law Professor Amy Coney Barrett with the words “the dogma lives loudly within you” during her 2017 Senate confirmation hearing. In a single phrase, Senator Feinstein vividly signaled her fear that now-Justice Barrett’s abiding Catholic faith would interfere with her work as a judge, making her unfit for the federal bench.

America’s founders agreed that securing the “free exercise of religion” for everyone and barring an “establishment of religion” were necessary for liberty and justice to prevail in their new nation. They also believed that ensuring a public role for religion via a firm commitment to religious freedom would promote a virtuous citizenry, encourage important religious voices to contribute to political life, and enable religious Americans to serve in their communities, advancing the common good.

A “Wall of Separation” between Church and State?

In his letter to the Danbury Baptists Association, dated January 1, 1802, newly elected President Thomas Jefferson wrote:

*I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building **a wall of separation between Church & State**.¹³*

Jefferson was *not* arguing that the religion clauses put an impenetrable barrier between religion and politics. Rather, he was making a political pronouncement intended to reassure this small group of Baptists that their freedom of religion would remain secure from government encroachment. In other words, Jefferson’s “Wall of Separation” was intended to protect religion, not privatize it.

In light of what Jefferson did during his tenure as president, it can be understood that for him the separation of church and state was also a way of addressing federalism. As one scholar observed:

¹³ National Archives: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-36-02-0152-0006>.



*Jefferson placed the federal government on one side of his wall and state governments and churches on the other. The wall's primary function was to delineate the constitutional jurisdictions of the national and state governments, respectively, on religious concerns...*¹⁴

The “separation of church and state” has been deployed in countless ways over the years, often to restrict religious freedom. Recently, this has involved punishing a high school football coach for praying on the field after games and withholding state education funds from families wanting to use it to send their children to religious schools.¹⁵ Regardless of how the phrase is interpreted, it is clear that the founders, including Jefferson, wanted to prevent a national church while also keeping religion in American public life.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

As to protecting religious freedom in a nation's laws, the Church teaches:

- “[R]eligious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.” (2)
- “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.” (6)
- “The council exhorts Catholics, and it directs a plea to all men, most carefully to consider how greatly necessary religious freedom is...Men of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationships. There is a growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that every man has...Consequently, in order that relationships of peace and harmony 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.” (15)

For Discussion

1. What is the basis of religious freedom according to James Madison?
2. What are some ways that Thomas Jefferson's “wall of separation between Church and State” has been and continues to be misinterpreted? How is his “wall of separation” rightly understood in its historical context?
3. To enshrine a right in a nation's constitution is to remove challenges to that right from the normal course of political deliberation. *Dignitatis Humanae* mentions multiple times that religious freedom should be constitutionally enshrined. Why might that be?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

¹⁴ Daniel L. Dreisbach, “The Mythical ‘Wall of Separation’: How a Misused Metaphor Changed Church–State Law, Policy, and Discourse,” The Heritage Foundation, June 23, 2006, https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/the-mythical-wall-separation-how-misused-metaphor-changed-church-state-law/#_ftn7.

¹⁵ Notre Dame law professor Richard Garnett wrote about these cases in the context of the “separation of church and state” in October 2021 for RFI's *Cornerstone Forum* in an article titled, “Revisiting the ‘Separation of Church and State’ in Our Time of Deep Division,” <https://religiousfreedominstitute.org/revisiting-the-separation-of-church-and-state-in-our-time-of-deep-division/>.



SESSION IX. WHAT HAS THE SUPREME COURT SAID ABOUT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

Prayer

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary OR other suitable prayer for your group.

Reading

Early Supreme Court Jurisprudence

Over time, the U.S. Supreme Court has increasingly entertained religious freedom cases. As Professor John Witte, Jr. observed, “More than 170 religious freedom cases have reached the Supreme Court since 1940 (compared with only 48 cases in the prior 150 years).” In fact, before 1940 the Supreme Court had never found a violation of the First Amendment’s religious freedom provisions. In part, this was because the “First Amendment uniquely targeted Congress,” and the Religion Clauses were limited to that domain. The majority opinion in *Permoli v Municipality No. 1 of New Orleans* (1845) was representative of this view, in which the Court found that “[t]he Constitution makes no provision for protecting the citizens of the respective states in their religious liberties; this is left to the state constitutions and laws.”¹⁶

The 1940s, however, saw a seismic shift. The Supreme Court expanded the reach of the Free Exercise Clause beyond the federal government to the states in *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) and did likewise for the Establishment Clause in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947). A new era of religious freedom jurisprudence had begun.

Strict Scrutiny and Free Exercise

Racing through the rest of the 20th century, two cases stand out in light of contemporary challenges. The Supreme Court held in *Sherbert v. Verner* (1963) that the Free Exercise Clause required that a government law restricting religious exercise be justified by a compelling interest, be narrowly tailored to meet this interest, and use the least restrictive means to achieve that interest. These three requirements, together, refer to the most rigorous judicial standard available, “strict scrutiny.”

In the other case, *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990), the high Court largely overruled *Sherbert* by holding that in cases of conflict between a “neutral law of general applicability” and religious exercise (i.e., the requirements of the Free Exercise Clause), the law’s constitutionality was not at risk. In other words, a law that does not expressly target religion but still burdens religious exercise when enforced could no longer be challenged in court on Free Exercise grounds. The *Smith* decision remains critical because the vast majority of legal threats to religious freedom in America today arise not from laws or regulations that expressly target religious people or institutions but rather from laws that seem neutral and generally applicable and yet can still infringe on religious freedom when enforced or implemented. “LGBTQ” nondiscrimination laws are a prime example.

¹⁶ John Witte, Jr., “Reclaiming the Blessings of Religious Liberty: Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, Cambridge University Press, May 30, 2023, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ecclesiastical-law-journal/article/reclaiming-the-blessings-of-religious-liberty-religion-and-the-american-constitutional-experiment/2426147177AB4411951E2B68A1E782CB>.



Nondiscrimination Law, Catholic Institutions, and the Courts

To elaborate on this point, civil rights laws – among the most powerful types of ostensibly neutral, generally applicable laws – are intended to protect against widespread, invidious (i.e., unfair and unjust) discrimination in key sectors of society. Consequently, these laws generally should not be used to advance certain understandings of sexual behavior or “gender expression” while punishing others. And, yet, that is precisely how civil rights laws that list “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” (SOGI) as protected classes end up working in practice. These laws all-too-often treat Catholic teachings on sexuality, marriage, and natural male-female distinctions as demanding punitive government action when Catholic individuals and institutions uphold those teachings in practice. In other words, these SOGI laws mandate approval of certain ways of life while claiming that all they are really doing is promoting equality.

But affirming equal human dignity – which faithful Catholics emphatically do – is not the same thing as holding in equal regard all forms of sexual conduct or “gender expression,” which faithful Catholics emphatically do not. Yet, proponents of “LGBTQ rights” tend to collapse the distinction altogether, and want the law and the rest of society to do the same. Thus, when Catholic and other religious institutions seek First Amendment protection (in the form of an exemption) from these sorts of nondiscrimination laws, and are denied it because of the precedent *Smith* set, it represents a failure to recognize how SOGI laws operate and what the free exercise of religion entails. Helen Alvare’s magnificent book *Religious Freedom After the Sexual Revolution: A Catholic Guide* covers this and similar themes.¹⁷

Supreme Court Victories Still Signal Losses

It is important to note, however, what many scholars and observers readily acknowledge: in recent years there have been more than a dozen Supreme Court victories in religious freedom cases. And they matter a lot. But even Supreme Court victories signal real losses. No matter how good the decision, or how appealing the precedent it may set, each case also represents a prior failure in two respects. First, every case that comes before the Supreme Court is preceded by years of costly litigation in lower courts – i.e., there is punishment in the process. The Little Sisters of the Poor, for example, had to fight their case in the courts for nearly a decade before it was finally resolved in 2020. Second, behind each religious freedom case are hostile cultural and political forces that gave rise to the legal dispute in the first place. Resolving the court case does not necessarily resolve these underlying problems.

Faith Reflection | *Dignitatis Humanae*

As to the significance of protecting the Church’s religious freedom in practice, the Church teaches:

- “In human society and in the face of government the Church claims freedom for herself in her character as a spiritual authority, established by Christ the Lord, upon which there rests, by divine mandate, the duty of going out into the whole world and preaching the Gospel to every creature. The Church also claims freedom for herself in her character as a society of men who have the right to live in society in accordance with the precepts of the Christian faith.” (13)
- “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

¹⁷ Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press (2022), (especially 38-41).



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.” (13)

- “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 consciences. 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.” (13)

For Discussion

1. Why is it important for religious freedom to protect Catholics and other people of faith not only from laws that target religion but also from certain laws that appear neutral toward religion?
2. Numerous Supreme Court cases in recent years have involved Catholic institutions found to be operating in violation of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” nondiscrimination laws. What do you make of cases that pit claims of *religious liberty* against claims of *individual equality*, as those cases do? Is it accurate to frame them as involving competing rights claims?
3. *Dignitatis Humanae* states that where the principle of religious freedom is “given sincere and practical application, there the Church succeeds in achieving a stable situation... necessary for the fulfillment of her divine mission.” Given the public nature of the Church’s mission, it is especially important that its right to free exercise be given its due in any legal dispute. But this principle can apply beyond the courts. How are alleged rule violations involving student groups on your campus decided? When your university reviews these matters, do you see any indication that respecting the freedom of religious student groups, including your college council, is factored into the review?

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to voice your special intentions and listen to the intentions of your brothers, and then pray for them. Consider using a consistent prayer in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity.

Action Challenge

This challenge builds upon sections VII, VIII, and IX. In the teaching document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Bishops remind us: “In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.” Knights live the call to faithful citizenship every day. This is exemplified in the fourth principle of the order—the Patriotic Degree. The U.S. Bishops continue: “Catholics have a particular duty to make sure that protections like [religious freedom] do not weaken but instead grow in strength.”

Based on these sections and your formation as Knights, write a letter to your state delegate or senator (or your U.S. representative or senator) explaining why religious freedom is important to you and your fellow Knights and implore him or her to protect it. If relevant, include reference to a specific concern regarding the freedom of a Catholic individual or organization in your community or state. Any letter sent should be signed by individual Knights and not by your college council as such.



SUMMARY

Religion is central to human identity. Religious freedom thus becomes essential to human dignity and vital for human flourishing. Religious freedom does not require compromising your Catholic convictions. You can fully embrace religious freedom and still have a bold public witness as a Catholic, and a member of the Knights of Columbus. Far from a concession for faithful Catholics, upholding religious freedom for everyone is part of what it means to be faithful to Jesus Christ and His Church. Religious freedom is not grounded in the claim that all religions are equally true but rather that all persons are equal in dignity and must be free to *explore* life's great questions, *embrace* what one's conscience discerns to be true, and *express* these truths in private and public life. Simply put, for Catholics, religious freedom is grounded in the reality that "man's response to God in faith must be free."

APPENDIX

What follows are additional guidelines¹⁸ for forming and maintaining a *Cor* group prepared to read, discuss, and take action based upon *Freedom and Faithfulness: A Catholic Guide to Religious Liberty*:

- Plan to meet weekly or bi-weekly.
- Obtain a sufficient number of copies of the Guide per the size of your group.
- Secure a meeting space that is conducive to discussion and prayer.
- Arrange for light refreshments per the time of day that you meet.
- Consistently begin and end gatherings on time.
- Structure your meetings to include key elements of *Cor* (fraternity, formation, and prayer):
 - FRATERNITY: Offer refreshments and encourage table conversation.
 - Open with a prayer.
 - Make announcements.
 - FORMATION: Introduce the relevant section of the Guide and facilitate a discussion.
 - PRAYER: Rosary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, etc.
 - Recap action items, note the next gathering, and mention upcoming council or parish events.
 - Close with a prayer (consider using a consistent prayer and asking for prayer intentions in a manner that allows for repetition and familiarity).
- For more resources from the Knights of Columbus on Religious Freedom, please visit www.kofc.org/religiousliberty

¹⁸ These guidelines are drawn from the "Cor Startup Guide," Knights of Columbus, <https://www.kofc.org/en/resources/who-we-are/our-faith/cor/11500-startup-guide.pdf>, 2-4.



Cor at a Glance

Cor Mission:

To help focus Catholic men on Jesus by building Christ-centered brotherhood through a flexible framework of prayer, formation and fraternity.

Cor Vision:

To aid in transforming the hearts of men through Christ-centered brotherhood. Rooted in prayer, formation and fraternity, men will be sharpened in faith and virtue as they cultivate authentic friendships with Christ and each other. We envision a future where Cor continuously helps sustain these men to lead their families, strengthen their parish communities and courageously evangelize the world as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Three Elements of Cor

PRAYER - LIFTING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO GOD

Through prayer, we encounter Christ and animate our faith and relationship with him. We must first know Jesus before we can share him with our families and communities.

Shared time in prayer will help men focus their minds and hearts on God and give depth and life to formation and fraternal brotherhood. Like all relationships, prayer requires commitment and consistency. Consider praying the rosary or spending time in Eucharistic Adoration.

FORMATION - BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

As disciples of Christ, the goal of Catholic formation is to become like Christ, taking on his character and virtue, his life of prayer, and his mission. He is the model of holiness.

Formation is life long and requires an intentional commitment. Alongside prayer, formation helps increase our knowledge and love of God and of neighbor. Intentional and structured times of formation help direct fraternity toward the shared pursuit of Christ, of holiness, and a life of faith and missionary discipleship. Formation requires the animation of prayer and the accountability of fraternity.

FRATERNITY - CHRIST-CENTERED BROTHERHOOD

Fraternity is not just friendship or hanging out, it is a true brotherhood centered on Christ. This type of brotherhood has depth and trust, where men sharpen one another and accompany each other as disciples of Christ.

Brotherhood made up of Christ-centered friendships is necessary for men to grow in holiness, as leaders, and as missionary disciples. Like prayer and formation, fraternity must be intentional, requires proximity and consistency, and the shared mission of evangelization.



To learn more about Cor,
visit www.kofc.org/cor



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