



Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 3, 2016 C

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Current Threats to Religious Liberty

The following piece is by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In his speech to the European Parliament in November 2014, Pope Francis asked, "In the end, what kind of dignity is there without the possibility of freely expressing one's thought or professing one's religious faith?"

Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized that it is incomprehensible and alarming that people continue to suffer discrimination, restriction of their rights and even persecution for publicly professing their faith. Undeniably, "Serious violations inflicted on this basic right [religious freedom] are causes of serious concern," and all people must work to defend "the intangible dignity of the human person against every attack." Yet, religious liberty continues to be under threat, even in the United States:

HHS mandate for sterilization, contraception, and abortion-inducing drugs. The mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services forces religious institutions to facilitate and/or fund a product contrary to their own moral teaching. Further, the federal government tries to define which religious institutions are "religious enough" to merit protection of their religious liberty.

Catholic foster care and adoption services. Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia, and the State of Illinois have driven local Catholic Charities out of the business of providing adoption or foster care services—by revoking their licenses, by ending their government contracts, or both—because those Charities refused to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit.

State immigration laws. Several states have passed laws that forbid what they deem as "harboring" of undocumented immigrants—and what the Church deems Christian charity and pastoral care to these immigrants.

Discrimination against small church congregations. New York City adopted a policy that barred the Bronx Household of Faith and other churches from renting public schools on weekends for worship services, even though non-religious groups could rent the same schools for many other uses.

Discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services. After years of excellent performance by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its contract specifications to require MRS to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching.

Christian students on campus. In its over-100-year history, the University of California Hastings College of Law has denied student organization status to only one group, the Christian Legal Society, because it required its leaders to be Christian and to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis clearly outlined the importance of preserving a robust sense of religious freedom. He argued that a "healthy pluralism...does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques." Therefore, it is essential that a proper sense of religious pluralism be fostered and defended not just in the United States, but throughout the world.

Other Reflections on Religious Liberties

The following reflections were written by Wayne Laugesen for the National Catholic Register.

Catholics and other Christian faithful live in challenging times that require them to defend their religious liberties while maintaining attitudes of joy, said Baltimore Archbishop William Lori who heads the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“Look at the Little Sisters of the Poor,” Archbishop Lori told the Register. “They are certainly defending themselves, but they are also joyful. They are not just trying to win a lawsuit. They are bearing witness to the Gospel, and doing so joyfully.”

The Little Sisters, along with other Catholic and non-Catholic Christian organizations, have fought a mandate of the federal government’s Affordable Care Act that requires employers to pay for health insurance that covers birth control and abortion—in direct conflict with Catholic teaching. Fines ordered against the sisters, for declining to pay for birth control, were overturned in May, when the Supreme Court of the United States declined to hear the case and asked lower courts to resolve the matter without penalizing the nuns.

Archbishop Lori paraphrased Pope Francis in describing religious persecution in the United States and other Western countries as rampant but “polite.” Elsewhere internationally, he explained, “millions of people around the world live with some restrictions on their rights of worship and their freedom of religious expression, and many live under actual physical persecution.”

“We have only to think about those who have lost their lives in Iraq, Iran, Syria and places in Africa,” Archbishop Lori said. “So we begin there, and then we look at the erosions to religious liberty in the West, particularly in the United States, where we see restrictions on religious speech on college campuses, efforts to remove religious symbols from public space, the undermining of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and a long list of other abuses.”

He said none of it should surprise Catholics familiar with the Bible.

“The Lord promised us we would experience not only challenges in expressing and exercising our faith, but true persecution,” Archbishop Lori said. “It is really part of being a disciple and is something we should bear with courage and even a certain amount of joy. In being criticized or challenged or harmed, we have the privilege of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. That is the perspective of the early Church, and one we should retain.”

In the Middle East, militant factions of Islam punish, torture and kill Christian believers. In the West, a rise of secular and atheistic culture seeks to counter American traditions rooted in Christianity.

“The movement to deconstruct our culture and reconstruct a new one hinges on a view of the human person that is very different from what is embodied in Church teaching and natural law,” the archbishop said. “It’s taking form in the deconstruction of marriage, the redefinition of human sexuality and the imposition of new forms of secular orthodoxy.”

The baker who refused to bake a cake for a gay marriage

Jeremy Tedesco, senior counsel for the Arizona-based Alliance Defending Freedom, says: “The state of religious liberty is getting worse,” Tedesco told the Register. “We are going to see exponentially increasing attacks. A cultural tide is turning, as we witness the establishment of same-sex marriage and the very aggressive push for changes to gender-identity law. These are things that have very significant consequences for religious persons, communities and organizations.”

Tedesco’s clients include Jack Phillips, a Colorado baker who was punished by the courts for declining to design a cake that graphically celebrated the “marriage” of two men. At that time, Colorado law defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Phillips lost every hearing in the state court system before the Colorado Supreme Court refused April 26 to hear his appeal. Along the way, he was ordered by the state to re-educate his staff about the need to decorate cakes for same-sex weddings. The state also ordered him to file reports for two years, proving that he abides by anti-discrimination laws.

“My client was ordered to go to his employees and say his beliefs are illegal. The state ordered him to say things he does not agree with or believe,” Tedesco said. “The state has been violating his rights over and over again.”

Tedesco said the U.S. tradition of respecting free speech and freedom of religion is being trounced by the popularity of accepting same-sex “marriage” and other non-traditional relationships and lifestyles.

“It is now so unpopular to oppose same-sex marriage that people cannot see compulsive speech for what it really is,” Tedesco said. “They do not understand how

this ultimately gets turned around on them. The First Amendment's most important role has always been to protect unpopular views. It now seems the view of marriage as a union of one man and one woman is the minority view. The First Amendment should protect that minority view, but culturally there is more emphasis on ensuring that everyone is on board with celebrating same-sex marriage."

Some False Narratives

Ignorance of fundamental U.S. law is a key component to the erosion of religious liberty, said Barbara Samuells, president of Catholics for Freedom of Religion. Samuells, who lives in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., said Catholics and other Christians have fallen for false narratives regarding "separation of church and state" — a phrase not in the Constitution.

The result, says Samuells: countless daily episodes of public-school officials telling children they cannot mention God, pray before lunch, write "Jesus" in essays or wear religious symbols.

She said the vast majority of violations against the liberties of public-school children never generate lawsuits or headlines.

"This has happened because of the tremendous respect Christian parents have for schools, teachers and what they believe is the law," Samuells said. "Parents hear the law prevents their children from saying God, praying or singing Christian tunes. So, out of an abundance of respect, they acquiesce."

Samuells' organization distributes a pamphlet titled "Free to Speak," which contains guidelines produced by the Department of Education at the insistence of former President Bill Clinton.

"Free to Speak" explains seven basic rights of schoolchildren:

- 1. Students can pray, read their Bibles or other religious material and talk about their faith at school.*
- 2. Students can organize prayer groups and religious clubs and announce their meetings like any other clubs.*
- 3. Students can express their faith in their classwork and homework.*
- 4. Teachers can organize prayer groups with other teachers.*

5. Students may be able to go off campus to have religious studies during school hours.

6. Students can express their faith at a school event.

7. Students can express their faith at a graduation ceremony.

Seven attacks on Religious Liberty

The U.S. bishops' 2012 statement "Our First, Most Cherished Liberty," issued in conjunction with the first Fortnight for Freedom, lists seven "concrete examples" (see: goo.gl/nWj9EM) of recent attacks on religious liberty:

- The HHS mandate for contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs.*
 - State immigration laws that forbid practices of Christian charity and pastoral care to undocumented immigrants.*
 - A proposal by the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut Legislature to alter church structure and governance.*
 - The denial of "student organization status" to the Christian Legal Society at the University of California Hastings College of Law, because the group requires leaders to be Christian and abstain from sex outside of marriage.*
 - Laws driving Catholic foster care and adoption services out of business for declining to arrange adoptions for same-sex couples.*
 - A New York City law that barred religious organizations from renting space in public schools on weekends, while allowing secular organizations to rent the same space.*
 - A federal government contractual requirement that the U.S. bishops' Migration and Refugee Services provide or refer contraceptive and abortion services, in violation of Catholic teaching.*
- "Nobody has set out to assault religious freedom as such, aside from a few committed atheists," Archbishop Lori said. "These assaults relate to an overall cultural movement, and religious bodies like the Catholic Church are getting in the way of it. For that reason, our religious freedom is under assault."*
- He said the Fortnight for Freedom is a good way for Catholics to defend their liberties while maintaining joy and an acceptance of the persecution Jesus promised.*

“Whether or not there is an official celebration of Fortnight for Freedom in one’s locality, Catholics can participate by praying for religious freedom for our country and by praying for our leaders,” Archbishop Lori said. “These are things we can all do.”

America’s Greatness

After his visit to America, French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville [July 29, 1805 - April 16, 1859] wrote the following:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample river, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless constitution, and it was not there.

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

A Prayer for the Nation

Father, you have made us a nation of dreamers cradling in our hearts a fragile future.

*We are a people, Father,
Chosen no more than any other nation or people.
Yet together with every other nation
we belong to you.
One in you, we are one with them.
In our efforts to be united
help us to trust in you, Father,
and not in the work of our hands.*

*Help us to trust
even when fear threatens to corrode our
dreams of peace,
for we earnestly seek that day
when the world will find bread
in our arsenals and war shattered by peace.
We are a people, Father, who long to be free.
May our poor be free from hunger,
and our wealthy free from indifference.
May those who grow old
know days free of loneliness,
and those who grow young
live years free of selfishness.
May the weak live free of oppression,
and the strong free of the power that enslaves.
Grant us the vision of your dreams, Father,
lest, blindly bound to our own dreams,
we find ourselves allowing no one to live free.*

*We are a people, Father, in quest of justice for all,
struggling to unravel injustice
while striving to weave your justice.
Our hearts are not one
despite the laws that proclaim us so.
Our destinies are not one
despite the opportunities promised.
Our wealth is not one
despite a land both generous and fruitful.
Yet we are dreamers, Father,
seeking justice by law
not in spite of it,
striving to shape a common destiny
because we believe in the power of love.*

*Be with us, Father, as we seek our dreams of justice
and drive us on by your presence
lest patience dilute our pursuit.*

*Yes, Father, you have made us a nation of dreamers
cradling in our hearts a fragile future.
May your spirit bring new hope to that future
and new vision to those dreams.*

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Saran