

**ISIS and Indiana: the Global Crisis of Religious Liberty and Catholic Responsibility**  
Remarks to the Annual Conference of the National Diocesan Attorney's Association  
Orlando, Florida, April 26, 2015  
Thomas F. Farr

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the great Catholic Declaration on Religious Liberty promulgated during the Second Vatican Council. In light of that milestone in the history of the Church and the world, I have been asked to provide some reflections on the global status of religious freedom.

In particular, I am to explore the growing phenomenon of violent religious persecution against our Christian brothers and sisters, and other religious minorities around the world. But I have also been given an additional, and I might say very intriguing task – to reflect on the connections between rising persecution abroad and the travail of religious freedom in the West, especially in our own beloved country.

I am honored to try and fulfill that daunting but important assignment.

### **Three Propositions**

I have been privileged to spend the better part of two decades reflecting, writing, and acting on the subject of religious liberty, both here and abroad. Those years have convinced me of three propositions that will frame my remarks today:

First, history, modern scholarship, and common sense converge in demonstrating that a robust system of religious liberty in both law and culture is indispensable to individual human dignity, and to the social, economic, intellectual, political, and religious flourishing of all societies. Without religious freedom no society can achieve and sustain stable self-government, social harmony, economic growth, equality, and freedom. More broadly, the world cannot achieve justice, peace, or stability without religious freedom.

Second, notwithstanding its importance, religious liberty is in global crisis. The consequences of this crisis for the world, the United States, and for the Church are staggering. They implicate the success or failure of struggling democracies, economic development and the fate of the poor, the defeat of religion-based terrorism, and international justice and peace. For all these reasons, addressing the global crisis of religious liberty is the business of U.S. foreign policy and of the Roman Catholic Church.

Third, the proposition that religious freedom is necessary for all individuals and all societies is fiercely contested in America and abroad. Although it may not always appear so, there is a “perfect storm” of opposition to religious freedom in virtually every region of the world, characterized variously by skepticism and hostility.

In non-Western nations, where religious belief and practice are for the most part widespread and growing, religious freedom in full – i.e., full equality under the law, in private and in public, for

all religious ideas and actors – has never existed. The very idea of religious liberty is highly suspect in most of these nations, including those with communist regimes such as China and Vietnam; countries where religion supports autocracy, such as Russia; and virtually all Muslim-majority countries, including those struggling to adopt their own forms of democracy.

Although most of these and other nations have signed international covenants and enacted constitutional provisions committing them to guaranteeing religious liberty, in truth almost no nation has lived up to those commitments. And they certainly are not doing so now. The consequences for them, for their neighbors, and for the national security of the United States are highly destructive.

In Europe, where the origins of religious freedom are buried deep in history, the decline of religion itself, especially Christianity, has dramatically reduced respect for any public expression of religion. The result has been the adoption of an understanding of “religious liberty” as a mere freedom to worship. This thin and impoverished view of what was once considered a fundamental and universal human right serves the contemporary European need to remove religion, or at least religions with traditional moral teachings, from the public square.

In our own country – notwithstanding the continued but diminishing vibrancy of religion, including Catholicism – the public expression of traditional religious values is under unrelenting assault. While there are many reasons for this development, the greatest single threat to religious freedom in the United States is same-sex “marriage.”

The firestorm over Indiana’s passage of a Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and the utter incapacity of its supporters to defend it, is profoundly troubling. What was once considered by Americans “the first freedom” is now seen as a front for hatred and bigotry. This view was implicitly endorsed in the 2013 Windsor decision written by Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy and joined by four others on the court. It was long ago embraced by the Obama administration and is increasingly the view taken by most members of the Democratic Party and significant elements within the Republican Party.

The implications of this phenomenon – the American abandonment of the “First Freedom” – go far beyond America’s shores. The United States is the only country in the world with a statutory requirement to advance international religious freedom in its foreign policy – the result of the 1998 International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act. This law passed because of America’s unique historic commitment to religious freedom for all. While other Western democracies are showing some interest in integrating this issue into their foreign policies, they are largely unequipped to carry out the task.

Like it or not, only the United States has the legal and cultural experience to help other nations move toward religious freedom. But, seventeen years after having implemented a policy to do so, U.S. IRF policy has had virtually no impact. There are several reasons for this failure, including the difficulty of trying to sell a product in which you no longer believe, especially to people who share your skepticism.

The stakes are high. If religious liberty is lost in America, where can it be retrieved? And if it is lost to the world, the implications for international peace and stability are significant.

As for the Catholic Church in America, I believe that some of our bishops and some of our Catholic institutions understand the dimensions of this threat. But, unfortunately, many discount it, or simply do not agree that the threat exists. In consequence, the American Church – clergy and lay -- does not speak with anything approximating a consensus about the growing threat to religious freedom and to the public witness of the Church.

As a result, we Catholics are missing an opportunity, or in some cases denying the duty, to demonstrate to all Americans the intrinsic, irreplaceable value of religious freedom for them, whether they are religious or not, and for all people everywhere. We are also missing an opportunity to provide witness for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering torture and death because of their religious beliefs and practices.

### **Empirical Evidence of a Global Crisis**

Let me give you a brief overview of the *empirical* evidence for labeling the rise of religious persecution and the decline of religious freedom “a global crisis.” The Pew Research Center presents annual reports that measure in every country of the world government restrictions on religion and social hostilities toward religion.

These reports cover the better part of the last decade. As such they give us both a reliable snapshot of the state of religious freedom in a given country or region at any one time, as well as an understanding of the trends emerging, either in a single country, a region, or internationally.

The latest report, issued early this year, confirmed a profoundly disturbing reality: some *three quarters of the world's population* lives in countries in which religious freedom is either highly or very highly restricted, either by governments or private actors. That is three out of four human beings on the planet.

Most of those people live in about 70 countries. Of those most are either Muslim-majority nations, communist regimes such as China, North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam, or large non-Muslim states such as India, Burma, and Russia.

The very highest restrictions on religious freedom tend to occur in Muslim nations, including the theocratic autocracies of Iran and Saudi Arabia, but also the nascent and struggling democracies such as Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Note that these are all countries whose fates are of great importance to the national interests of the United States. The last two – Afghanistan and Iraq -- are nations where America has spent its blood and treasure for more than a decade. At first, after the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, respectively, religious persecution seemed to subside.

But soon, like a bacterial infection that was never eliminated, persecution returned in both countries with a vengeance. In Afghanistan, the terrorist Taliban has regained power and influence and continues to plague the country. In Iraq, the terrorist group once called Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI, has reemerged in the form of ISIS and controls territory in Iraq and Syria.

Overall, and not simply because of the Middle East, the Pew Reports demonstrate that the global trends are downward – the problem is steadily getting worse. Restrictions on religious freedom are increasing. Violent religious persecution, including by religion-related terrorist groups, is growing and spreading beyond the Middle East.

According to the Pew Reports, the religious minority most subject to harassment is Christians. Muslims come in a close second. Most Muslims are harassed in Muslim-majority countries, but also in India, China and Russia.

An additional element of the global crisis is the troubling rise of anti-Semitism. This scourge is part of the landscape in the Middle East, where anti-Semitism is endemic. But we are now seeing a rapid rise of anti-Semitism in the nations of Europe – a sure sign of civilizational crisis.

I will return to Europe and the US shortly, but first let me put a few faces on these statistics.

### **The Face of Violent Persecution Outside the West**

There are scores of millions of human beings outside the West affected by the spread of violent religious persecution and extremism.

In China, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Catholics and Protestants all face periodic and sometimes brutal crackdowns by a government that fears any religion it cannot control. At a Georgetown conference last week, former Congressman Frank Wolf reminded our audience that in 1996 Congressman Chris Smith visited China and received communion from Bishop Su Zhimin. The bishop was soon arrested for “unregistered religious activity,” and has not been seen since. Tibetan Buddhists in particular are the subjects of a longstanding and vicious Chinese strategy to undermine their religion and destroy their ancient culture.

In India, the world’s largest democracy and the only Asian nation where religious freedom has existed in any significant way, the continued presence of Hindu extremism threatens religious freedom, especially the freedoms of India’s Christian and Muslim minorities.

In Russia, the continued ascendancy of autocracy and despots like Vladimir Putin has unfortunately been abetted by the Russian Orthodox Church, which seems intent on cooperating with the regime in order to maintain a religious monopoly in Russia.

In these and other non-Muslim countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea the threat to religious minorities and to religious freedom comes either from a secular, communist elite, or from a monopolist religious elite. These problems are quite serious, and result in significant human suffering, as well as political and economic instability.

But the greatest threat to Christians and other minorities outside the West comes from violent Islamist extremism. Unfortunately, the extremists are aided and abetted by the routine practices of Muslim-majority states – in particular laws against blasphemy, apostasy, and defamation of Islam. These laws and the social attitudes they reflect are a gateway to extremism. They are employed to punish unpopular religious speech and expression. They ensure that the public discourse about Islam does not include liberal Muslim voices and is dominated by extremist interpretations of the religion.

Encouraged in part by this toxic political and social milieu, terrorist groups are being incubated and spreading throughout the Muslim majority world. Although their motives and views vary, they share an understanding of Islam that boils down to this: if you offend Islam as we understand it you are deserving of punishment, including torture and death. This is true if you are a non-Muslim. It is doubly true if you are a wrong-thinking Muslim.

Those who actively practice terrorist violence on this model include ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, the Taliban, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

The intellectual “godfathers” of these groups include Saudi Wahhabism and certain strains of the Muslim Brotherhood. The extremist Shiite Iranian government actively supports Islamist terrorists in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere.

All of these groups bear responsibility for the rise in religion-based terrorist violence against Christians and other minorities in the greater Middle East and Africa.

Stories of Islamist violence and terror emerge almost daily. A recent example occurred on Holy Thursday in Kenya’s Garris College. Four al-Shabab terrorists entered the campus and began a systematic slaughter of non-Muslim students. When they discovered a Christian prayer group, they threw grenades into the chapel.

Then the terrorists moved to a women's dormitory. Women who could prove they were Muslim by reciting the *shahada*, the Islamic profession of faith, were freed. Christians were either shot or their throats were slit. By nightfall, 148 students and staff had been slaughtered.

It would be tragic enough if this were an isolated episode. But it is not. It is part of a growing Islamist crusade against Christians, and against Muslims and others who do not measure up to the religious standards the terrorists believe are required by their god.

We have just passed the one-year anniversary of Boko Haram’s kidnapping of 219 Nigerian schoolgirls, most of them Christians. Boko Haram, citing their religious obligations, have burned Christian schoolboys alive, forced Christian men to convert, destroyed churches, and terrorized anyone who opposes them.

In March of this year in Pakistan, the Taliban blew up two churches, one Catholic and one Protestant, both filled with worshippers. Fourteen died.

In Syria in March ISIS attacked 33 Assyrian Christian villages. The 5,000 defenseless residents were driven into exile, abducted, or killed.

In February ISIS beheaded 21 Coptic Christians on the shores of the Mediterranean. Last week ISIS either beheaded or shot dozens of Ethiopians, whom the terrorists condemned as “worshippers of the cross.”

In Iraq, ISIS imposed its convert-or-die policy on the 2,000-year-old Christian community of Ninevah. Christians were deported or killed, and their homes marked with an "N" for "Nazarene." More than 100,000 of them now survive on international aid in Kurdistan. Their ancient churches and monasteries are being systematically destroyed or desecrated.

Pope Francis has pointed out that Christians are being persecuted for their religion in numbers exceeding those martyred during the Roman Empire. He has also condemned the world's "complicit silence."

The Pope is right. The media reports the facts, but many refuse to acknowledge the religious nature of this crisis. The same is true of the current American administration. When the Coptic Christians were savagely decapitated by ISIS terrorists, many with the name of Jesus on their lips as they died, the Obama administration refused to call them Christians. Why is this?

Why is it that the administration actively *denies* what the terrorists tell us is the motive for their actions – that they must serve God and defend Islam by violence, that this is their religious obligation? What is the explanation for *our* motives here, especially given the broad agreement that the terrorists threaten our fundamental national interests? Can you defeat any enemy if you willfully mischaracterize its goals and what is driving it?

In order to try and answer this question, and in order to explore more fully the Church's proper role in this crisis, let's turn to the dimensions of the crisis in the West.

### **The West: Rising Religious Persecution in Europe**

The Pew Reports mentioned earlier show that both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities toward religion are growing throughout the West, including in Europe and the United States.

In Europe and America, violent religious persecution is not the norm, and, please God, will never be. But we have witnessed in recent decades a sustained, devastating march through European culture, politics, and law by aggressive, anti-religious secularism.

I recently chaired an event at Georgetown with Baroness Berridge of the UK House of Lords. She noted that in the UK an entire generation of young people had been raised without any significant exposure to Christianity or any other religion. That fundamental reality is the background to the decline of religious liberty in Europe. What was once considered a core

human right necessary to the flourishing of all human beings and all societies is now viewed as an illicit claim of privilege by a minority who still insists on being religious.

At best the “choice to be religious” is viewed with indifference. More often it is viewed with hostility, precisely because religion represents an obstacle to what some have dubbed the “expressive individualism” that now dominates the European understanding of freedom. The core of that understanding is the ideology of sexual liberation.

European Catholics and other religious people are, of course, free to worship as they please. But if they enter public life in any form – politics or government, civil society, business or the professional world -- they are not free to bring with them traditional Catholic moral teachings.

A couple of years ago our Religious Freedom Project held a conference at Magdalen College, Oxford, to examine the rising tensions between religious liberty and assertions of equality for homosexuals. In his keynote address, Philip Tartaglia -- then the Catholic bishop of Paisley, Scotland and now the archbishop of Glasgow -- noted that one of his priests had expressed fear after having watched a popular television program with audience participation. The audience was of one mind – once same sex marriage becomes law in the UK, they said (it has since become law), any dissenters should be “pursued by the law.”

I could not help recalling the anti-Catholic penal laws enacted by the English in Scotland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century – laws that criminalized the very existence of priests and the mass, let alone the public expression of Catholic teachings. I am not suggesting that Scotland is returning to practices of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it would be foolish to assume that the growing intolerance of Catholicism in Europe cannot devolve into persecutory laws and practices. Bishop Tartaglia said that he expected one day to be standing before a judge because of his public defense of Catholic teachings. Others at the conference made it clear that they simply could not, and would not, brook any “special” consideration to religious ideas, which, they argued, had no more relevance to human beings or societies than any other idea under the sun.

In short, religion in Europe is no longer seen as intrinsic to human dignity and social flourishing. It is generally understood as merely an opinion, and, as a species, a dangerous opinion at that. While it is fine to practice your religion in churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, democracy requires that you keep it there. To bring it into politics endangers society.

Is the United States on this path as well?

### **The Decline of Religious Freedom in the United States**

The malevolent idea that political expressions of religious ideas threaten democracy was most famously championed by the American political philosopher John Rawls, and has gained considerable purchase in our own country. It has contributed to the idea, most recently on display in Indiana, that religious arguments concerning marriage or other public moral issues constitute hatred – or, in the words of Justice Kennedy in *Windsor* -- “malice,” “a desire to harm,” “a desire

to injure.”“ Religious liberty, in short, is a front for bigotry – an illegitimate claim of privilege by Christians.

Mary Eberstadt has dubbed this attitude “the new intolerance.” Its goal is to silence those who would resist the new public moral consensus in favor of an understanding of freedom as the right to follow one’s appetites so long as the quest is consensual and does not restrict the freedom of another. Those whose moral or religious compunctions move in different directions are not to be tolerated.

Let me give but one example among many of how this new intolerance affects human lives and, at the same time, American democracy.

Some of you know the case of Mrs. Barronelle Stuzman, who for years has run a flower shop in Washington state. Mrs. Stuzman is a 70 year old mother of eight children and 23 grandchildren. Her flower shop has routinely served anyone who came into it, including gay people. But when a homosexual couple she had served for years asked her to participate in their wedding, she replied that she could not do so, that she was a Christian who accepted Christ’s definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

The ACLU sued on grounds of discrimination, asking the state of Washington to coerce Mrs. Stuzman to comply. In an example of social coercion backed by the threat of state coercion, the ACLU offered a “settlement” of the suit if Mrs. Stuzman publicly recanted, donated \$5000 to a local LGBT youth center, and agreed to serve in LGBT ceremonies. She refused.

Then Washington attorney general Bob Ferguson decided to sue Mrs. Stuzman under the state’s Consumer Protection Act. This case too would have settled if Mrs. Stuzman had been willing to pay several thousand dollars and issue a public recantation of her sin. Ms. Stutzman responded that she could not and would not comply, citing the state's constitutional guarantee of “freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment.”

That guarantee seems now to be null and void. In January of this year Benton County Superior Court Judge Alexander Ekstrom ruled Mrs. Stuzman was personally liable, and that she must provide full wedding support for same-sex ceremonies, including custom design work to decorate the ceremony, delivery to the forum, staying at the ceremony to touch up arrangements, and assisting the wedding party.

What is happening to Baronelle Stuzman is occurring with increasing frequency elsewhere in America. This kind of social and state coercion is rapidly becoming the norm for anyone seeking to live their public lives in accordance with their religious beliefs about marriage and sexuality. As such, it portends a dangerous turn in American law and culture.

At a minimum, it suggests that a new moral consensus in the United States is following the European path: those who support the ideology of sexual liberation are determined to remove all counter arguments, especially those of the Catholic Church, from the public square. And those who are ill equipped or unwilling to fight the ideologues of sexual freedom will, like the Governor of Indiana or some of our Catholic universities simply capitulate.

But there is something deeper at stake here. The early Christians who refused to burn incense to the Roman gods were given the choice of compliance or death. Contemporary Middle Eastern Christians are being given the choice of conversion to Islam or death. American Catholics who refuse to capitulate may well be given Mrs. Stuzman's choice: repent and comply or face punishment by the state, including the loss of livelihood and wearing the label, sanctioned by the Supreme Court, of hater and bigot.

But to give in means to abandon Catholic teachings on marriage and sexuality and their necessary role in creating a just society. To flee from this fight means abandoning the historic American commitment to religious freedom as the first freedom of the human soul, and to jettison the sacred principle that in a democracy the state may not coerce the religious conscience. To give in means, in the haunting words of Robert George, to proclaim oneself "ashamed of the gospel."

If we give up this fight we will endanger American democracy precisely by undermining the norm of equality that the ideologues of sexual freedom purport to defend. Our capitulation will place at risk *libertas ecclesiae* - the right and the duty of the Catholic Church to teach and to evangelize in the public life of the nation.

If we give in to the new intolerance in America what witness does this provide to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are experiencing torture and death because they love Jesus and will not renounce Him?

We should, in short, *not* head for the tall grass. That area of America is already crowded -- with those who are unwilling to engage in this fight. We have the tools and the arguments if we are willing to make them.

### **The Individual and Social Value of Religious Freedom: A Cause for Hope**

It is a great irony but also a cause for hope that at the very moment when religious liberty is under sustained pressure around the world, including in the United States, contemporary scholarship is demonstrating yet again what our founding generation firmly understood: religious freedom is utterly necessary for individuals and societies if they are to flourish.

It is necessary for many reasons, not the least of which is the need to invite religious ideas and actors into the public square. This is why, as *Dignitatis Humanae* put it, government must not cordon religion out of public life, but must "show it favor." This is why President George Washington in his second farewell address told the nation that religious ideas in public life were "necessary for political prosperity."

Today the work of sociologists Brian Grim and Roger Finke, to take but one example, shows that religious freedom is highly correlated with the consolidation, stability, and longevity of democracy, and with other goods such as economic development or the absence of violent religious extremism.

Of course, correlation – even high correlation – does not prove that religious liberty contributes to these goods in a *causative* way. The Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University is

working to discern and explain these relationships, that is to say, the *causal pathways* by which religious freedom makes democracy more stable, or encourages economic growth.

In many ways these pathways are not new. For example, William Penn, the great American Quaker, argued in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that merchants should move to Pennsylvania because its protections for religious liberty were good for commerce. Today the empirical data confirm Penn's argument. Imagine if we could convince China that moving toward religious freedom would help sustain economic growth, or Egypt that they will never achieve significant economic development without religious freedom.

As for the relationship between religious freedom and stable, lasting democracy, some of the causal pathways are also embedded in American history and the purposes of the religion clauses of the First Amendment. James Madison, George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson well understood that a healthy democracy requires a vibrant civil society to limit the power of government. Madison's Federalist Paper No. 10 is perhaps the most powerful expression of this view. He understood that of all the elements of civil society, none limited the powers of government more effectively than religious associations, including churches and synagogues, but also including faith-based schools and orphanages.

Religious associations perform this role both by providing services that might otherwise fall to the state, and by positing an authority higher than the state. Madison wrote in his 1785 *Memorial and Remonstrance* that religious freedom is not a freedom for license but a freedom to do what is right and good. Religion, he wrote, "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." In order to carry out this duty, he continued, men must have freedom from state coercion.

These and other principles help explain the empirical data showing the necessity of religious freedom to the consolidation and stability of democracy. Imagine if we could employ these data and explanations to persuade Iraq or Pakistan that that they need religious freedom to achieve their own goals of lasting and stable self-government.

Perhaps the most important causative link that we are investigating is the connection between the presence of religious freedom and the undermining of religion-related terrorism. Several of our scholars have explored this link – including Notre Dame's Daniel Philpott and Georgetown's Timothy Shah, as well as Brian Grim, President of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation. I am delighted to say that other scholars are also zeroing in on this incredibly important subject. In a paper published last year, scholars from the State University of New York, Nilay Saiya and Anthony Scime provided the results from a data analysis that appears to confirm causation: less religious freedom means more religious terrorism. More religious freedom means less religious terrorism.

**Conclusion: the Role of US Foreign Policy and the Catholic Church in America**

Let me conclude with a few thoughts on the role of US foreign policy, and of the Catholic Church in America, in addressing the global crisis of religious freedom.

The core of my argument has been that the decline of religious freedom in the United States is restricting our capacity to perform a task that is vital to international peace and security, one that only the United States can perform adequately: the task of convincing other nations – especially Muslim nations -- that it is in their interests to stop religious persecution and embrace religious freedom.

The United States is the only nation that can accomplish this goal precisely because the United States is the only nation in history that has been committed in law and culture to the *public* role of religion. Given Islam's intrinsically political nature – a nature it shares with Catholicism -- only an argument that invites Islam into public life stands a chance of convincing Muslim-majority nations to support religious freedom for all their citizens.

Should US foreign policy leaders choose to do so, they could draw on America's own history, as well as emerging scholarship in making arguments to the Muslim world.

But, ironically and tragically, it is the public aspects of religious freedom that are now under siege in the United States. So, it is here that the Church – and especially the American Church – can play a vital role in presenting anew the universal case for religious freedom.

In 1998, Congress passed the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act, which was signed into law by President Clinton. It mandated that the United States advance religious freedom in its foreign policy, and it created an office in the State Department, headed by an ambassador at large, to achieve that goal. It also created a separate advisory IRF Commission, on which several Catholic bishops have served.

In the seventeen years since the passage of that law, some modest progress has been achieved. US diplomats have become adept at producing an annual report on the status of religious freedom in every country. All presidents have given major speeches abroad that included this subject – for example, President Bush in 2002 in Beijing, and President Obama in 2009 in Cairo. The Commission has over the years made some very important policy recommendations.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to argue that US policy has had much impact on the status of religious freedom anywhere in the world. Having served under both Presidents Clinton and Bush, and having written critically of both, I can say that all three administrations are responsible. But US policy has reached new lows under the current administration. For over half this President's tenure the position of IRF ambassador has been vacant. Until recently, the person who did fill the position briefly was unqualified and denied authority or resources.

Meanwhile the President refuses to discuss religion as part of our national security strategy to undermine Islamist terrorism. The National Security Strategy of the United States reads as if religious freedom had no role to play in international affairs. Since the administration began in

2008, the State Department has spent far more diplomatic energy and resources on the advancement of international LGBT rights than it has international religious freedom.

What can the Church – bishops, priests, religious, and lay members, including attorneys -- do to address this crisis at home and abroad? How can we help reconvince Americans of the value of religious freedom for all our citizens? How can we help our foreign policy elites understand that it is in our national interests to promote religious freedom abroad with vigor and effectiveness?

And how can we best provide witness to the suffering Church abroad, and give hope to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are under siege?

First, we can present anew to US foreign policy elites, and to the American public, the intrinsic value of the Catholic case for universal religious freedom, namely, the fundamental dignity and equality of every person in the eyes of God. Grounded in this theistic premise, the Catholic Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, demands an immunity from coercion in civil society for all persons, believers or not, and all religious groups on the basis of full equality under the law.

We should emphasize to skeptics and non-believers how this argument protects them, in particular how it has *staying power*, precisely because it begins with God. I must protect your religious freedom even if you are a non-believer because it is my religious obligation to do so. I believe that the state does not create this right but the state must acknowledge and protect it.

On the other hand, if religious freedom is a right created by the state, it can be removed by the state. This understanding endangers your right not to believe, as well as my right to believe, because it remains fragile, its status dependent entirely on the preferences of those with power.

We Catholics must acknowledge that this understanding of religious freedom did not take modern form until the promulgation of *Dignitatis Humanae* in 1965. Before then, the Church asserted that the state must privilege Catholic teachings. Now it demands only the freedom of the Church – *libertas ecclesiae* – to present and defend those teachings publicly within civil society, on a basis of full equality with others, religious and not.

We should also remind the skeptics that the Church's centuries-old demand for *libertas ecclesiae* helped develop the idea and practice of limited government and created the very possibility of social pluralism. Its modern, successful struggle to embrace democracy, including equality for all religious institutions in civil society and law, provides a model for other religions, especially Islam, to learn similar lessons from history and experience.

Samuel Huntington, in his book *The Third Wave of Democratization* wrote that the lessons of *Dignitatis* played a substantive role in triggering the democracies that emerged from the 1970s into the 1990s, eighty percent of which were Catholic. Those nations came to embrace religious liberty, not only in the traditional sense of *libertas ecclesiae*, but on the basis of the equality of all religious institutions in civil society – Catholic and non-Catholic, Christian and non-Christian.

We should point out to the US foreign policy establishment the importance of this truth in presenting religious freedom to the Muslim world. It teaches two key lessons: first, that democracy cannot consolidate and remain stable without full equality among all religious groups, and, second, that democracy need not place religion at the margins of political life. Again, *Dignitatis* teaches that “government ought ...to take account of the religious life of the people, and show it favor....”

Most in the Muslim world, when they hear the phrase “religious freedom” do not think of such a “religion-friendly” understanding of the role of government. Unfortunately, they are far more familiar with the French model of privatization (which has triumphed in Europe) -- moving religion to the margins of public life. It is a tragic irony that the United States, which has until recently invited religion into public life in a way consistent with the teachings of *Dignitatis*, has begun to abandon the American model for the French.

Partly as a consequence, our policy is viewed by Muslims as designed to remove Islam from political life. While you or I might have sympathy with such a goal, we must recognize that it is utterly unrealistic.

Precisely for that reason it is crucial to point out that religious freedom, both as understood at the American founding and as understood by *Dignitatis*, is not an unlimited right. It does not constitute the political or civic right to do what I want simply because my conscience or my religion says I must do it.

The question of how to define the limits to religious freedom in any given culture is of course quite important.

In the Muslim-majority world, perhaps the most powerful limit would be the principle of equality under the law for all religious ideas and actors. This principle would undermine the basis for the anti-blasphemy, -apostasy and -defamation laws that provide a gateway to violent extremism.

But America cannot persuade the Muslim world, or anyone else, that religious freedom is of value if it is prepared to set aside the defense of religious freedom in favor of defending sexual liberation here and abroad.

So what are the proper limits on religious freedom in America? In my view, the so-called “strict scrutiny” test accurately reflects what the Founders intended as limits in the First Amendment ban on establishment and the guarantee of free exercise. That test permits the state to limit the religious freedom of an individual or group, but only if it has a compelling reason to do so and, if such reason exists, the state limits freedom in the least restrictive way.

Unfortunately, that test – placed into law with the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act – is unlikely to withstand the emerging moral and legal consensus that religion cannot be permitted to argue for legal barriers to sexual freedom and equality.

This leaves us in a moral, religious, and political dilemma. What is our responsibility as Catholics in this new world? Let me end by citing one aspect of the Holy Father's signal theme – God's love for us, and our need to respond in love to Him.

Both are captured, I think, in the beautiful passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, nor has the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him."

Pause on that last phrase. What does it mean to love God in our world? We all, of course, must decide what this means for us in our interior lives and with those God has put by our side – our families and closest friends. But what does it mean to respond to God's love *publicly* – to love Him in public life -- in these trying times?

I believe that there are many answers to that question. Surely high in the catalogue of answers must be that to love God is to live His truth in our own lives and to advocate in public life for those truths. Our own heritage of religious freedom in this wonderful nation has privileged us Catholics in a way that is surely part of God's mercy toward us.

So, when we contemplate how we are to love Him, let us exercise that religious freedom to share His truths with our fellow citizens– winsomely, with love, courage and clarity. By so doing, we can fulfill our responsibility to them and our country, and – we can hope – to the millions of Christians around the world who suffer grievously because they too love the Lord.

Thank you.