

# Archbishop Lori's Talk: "Interior and Exterior Freedom"; St. Thomas More University

*"Interior and Exterior Freedom"*

*St. Thomas More University*

*Crestview Hills, Kentucky*

*Feb. 7, 2019*

## **Introduction**

First, let me thank Dr. Kathleen Jagger, Acting President, and Dr. Raymond Hebert, Executive Director of The William T. Robinson Institute for Religious Liberty here at St. Thomas More University for inviting me to join with Dr. Hunter Baker for a discussion on religious freedom. In establishing its Institute dedicated to religious liberty, St. Thomas More University honors its patron saint and offers a valuable service to religion and to the nation and to people throughout the world longing for freedom, and especially the right to exercise freedom of religion.

Let me add a warm word of greeting and thanks to Bishop Foys. Thank you for welcoming me to the Diocese of Covington where, at the Seminary of St. Pius X, a part of my priestly formation took place. And thank you, Father Twaddell, for your warm introduction. I first met Fr. Twaddell around 1970 when he arrived here from France, and later served as my professor of philosophy and as the seminary academic dean. Many, many fond memories!

As was noted in the introduction, I formerly served as the U.S. Bishops' "point person" on religious freedom, more on the domestic side than the international side. When I was ordained a bishop twenty-four years ago, this is the last thing I thought I'd ever do for the Bishops' Conference. So I can only surmise that this was a part of God's plan for my life! I am grateful to Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville who has succeeded me in that role and is ably advancing the cause.

This evening, Dr. Baker will discuss the courage needed to uphold and exercise religious freedom in the current context. As a companion piece to his presentation, I will discuss a broader quality of mind and heart of which courage is a component part, namely, interior freedom, that inward freedom which perdures even in the most oppressive conditions and situations. If nothing else, I hope that our joint reflections will offer encouragement at a time when challenges abound not only to the exercise of religious freedom but indeed to the exercise of all our fundamental freedoms.

### **Starting on the Wrong Foot**

Over time, I have come to see how easily discussions of religious freedom can start off on the wrong foot. We often wade into controversies over specific threats to religious freedom without sufficiently reflecting on what freedom itself is and on how the exercise of our freedoms are to engage and influence the culture in which we are immersed.

I'm not suggesting that we stop identifying specific threats to religious freedom or that we cease being alert to the various ways religious freedom has been eroded through bad laws, court decisions, and policies. Not to do so is to bury our heads in the sand.

And of late, there have been some limited religious freedom wins over mandates that would have forced believers and conscientiously objecting institutions to include contraceptive and abortion services in their health insurance programs. The Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Health and Human Services now gives greater attention to the religious and civil rights of faith-based service providers. Various Supreme Court decisions have been favorable to religious freedom such as *Hosanna-Tabor* which preserved the ministerial exception or *Hobby Lobby*, or the decision in favor of the baker, *Jack Phillips*. Lower courts have given injunctive relief to plaintiffs, such as the Catholic Benefits Association, against the aforementioned HHS mandates.

But regulatory relief can change with shifting political fortunes and lower court victories do not always stand the test of time. Furthermore, challenges to these victories have proliferated in various states. We must also acknowledge that the

general trends in our culture are not favorable to the protection of religious freedom at home and sometimes even abroad. Thus, we are obliged, I think, to discern, identify, and support various measures in law and policy to protect and defend the God-given gift of religious liberty.

To repeat, these important efforts are hampered by a poor understanding of freedom. Perhaps because we live in a free and open society, we tend to believe that freedom is a self-evident, unambiguous, indeed univocal, concept – which, of course, is not the case. As a result, it is all too easy for us to import uncritically the underlying assumptions of our culture about freedom into our efforts to protect and defend religious freedom.

One such cultural assumption is that liberty is little more than free choice, indeed an almost unlimited ability to make choices. Do you want a baby with blue eyes? There ought to be a way to make that choice. The greater the range of choice, the greater is our freedom, or so goes this view. In 1992 Justice Kennedy summed up this train of thought when he wrote: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life”.[1] (Freedom of choice is important but perhaps the Justice overstated matters just a bit.)

When we unreflectively import this view of freedom into our struggles to protect religious liberty, we harm the cause. Without intending to do so, we align ourselves with those who put the choices we need to make to defend religious freedom on par with choices others make to attain a personal life-style. It’s thus our willfulness vs. their willfulness, our autonomy vs. their autonomy. And in this contest, people of faith, at least some of them, are portrayed as standing in the way of the personal fulfillment of others. We are easily cast as cultural whistle-blowers who convince no one. And so we need to retrieve the richness and complexity of religious freedom – as a way of transforming from within the understanding of freedom in our culture.

### **Starting on the Right Foot: Interior Freedom**

One way to re-start the conversation on religious freedom is to focus anew on interior freedom – both natural and supernatural. I base this observation on the clear assertion of *Dignitatis Humanae* that religious freedom is an endowment of

human nature itself.[2] Human nature is endowed by the Creator with reason and free will. In the depth of the human heart is a desire for God and an orientation to truth. The freedom to profess and practice one's religion is rooted in a transcendent, spiritual freedom at the very heart of our humanity.

Augustine, who has been called "the philosopher of freedom", offers us a point of departure for considering what interior freedom is. For all his alleged pessimism about human nature, coupled with his rightful concern to guard the gratuity of redemption, St. Augustine did not strip human nature of its inherent freedom and dignity. Indeed, in his dispute with Pelagius, Augustine spoke of "the positive vocation of man to use his will as a power of acting well" and also stressed that "true liberty to act well is dependent upon truth." [3]

To be sure, however, human freedom is both finite and damaged. It is finite because, among other things, every person faces a limited range of options. We are limited in our choices by circumstances, structures, other people, etc. and by the mere fact that choosing one thing necessarily means foregoing another. For example, when we choose one career path, we close off, at least temporarily, other career paths. If we choose to get married, we exclude a vocation to the monastic life. Wrestling with the finitude of freedom, people today often find it hard to make long-term commitments. Life, however, has a way of choosing for us, "since time passes inexorably". [4]

Human freedom is also damaged by original sin and by a tsunami of personal sins. From the dawn of creation sin has disguised itself as a liberating choice, as a choice that would free us from senseless rules and confining circumstances, as that choice which would bring us the happiness and fulfillment we long for. Experience, however, teaches us that sin imprisons us in selfishness and fear, undermines our freedom to choose what is good, and often brings our lives to a dead end where few if any external choices remain. Yes, our freedom is damaged—damaged but not obliterated, as Augustine concluded.[5] If his free will were obliterated why would God have pursued Augustine so vigorously as we see in his *Confessions*? [6]

Finite and flawed though it be our inbuilt freedom yearns for the infinite and the flawless, a yearning that we both express and mask in a thousand ways. "Lo, you were within, but I was outside, seeking there for you," Augustine wrote.[7] Thus the

battle between *cupiditas* and *caritas* is perennially joined. Or, as Pope St. John Paul II put it, “The heart is a battleground between love and lust.”[8] The grace of Christ begins and sustains the process of healing flawed freedom. The Letter to the Hebrews teaches us that the Son of God assumed our humanity and suffered death to free “those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life” (Heb. 2:15). As the Scripture scholar, Dr. Mary Healy, writes in her excellent commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews: “...the fear of death is an underlying force throughout *all* of human life. We instinctively resist and recoil from everything that reminds us of our mortality— pain, deprivation, weakness, criticism, failure. This paralyzing fear influences many human choices on a subconscious level, leads to various forms of escapism and addiction, induces us to grasp the false security nets proffered by Satan, and keeps us from pursuing the will of God with freedom, peace, and confidence.”[9] So too, Father Jacques Philippe, in his reflections on interior freedom, describes how Christ frees the human heart not only from overtly sinful behavior but also from self-loathing, insecurity, mediocrity, and resentment. He also helps us to understand how it is that the giving of our consent to suffering and persecution can liberate us inwardly, an inward freedom that no one and nothing can take away from us![10]

The advent of Christ’s grace vastly expands the horizons of freedom, for when overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the human soul is embraced by the Redeemer’s love, an infinitely beautiful love stronger than sin and more powerful than death. Thus we can begin to love as we have been loved, to know as we have been known (cf. John 13:34; 1 Cor. 13:12). Or, as Fr. Philippe puts it, “God can transform our hearts to the point that they become capable of loving with a love that is as pure, freely given, and disinterested as God’s own love.”[11] It is love that opens our hearts to truth and it is truth that liberates our liberty.[12] In place of what Servais Pinckaers calls “freedom of indifference” our wills begin to gravitate toward “freedom of excellence”[13] as our highest calling to participate in the most excellent of all loves dawns upon us. What happens in the heart of a person who becomes interiorly free, free not merely to choose what one wants but rather to choose that which is truly excellent – that which is true, good, and beautiful? Time doesn’t permit a full discussion of that question, but suffice it to say that a person who becomes interiorly free is no longer the victim of circumstances but rather

learns to consent to trials, sufferings, and external circumstances that seem to limit one's range of choices. While rebellion is not always out of the question and sometimes a necessity, interior freedom is attained most often not by rebellion or resignation but rather by assenting to those things that seem to hem us in, seeking in hope the good that can come from those things we cannot change.[14]

As love takes possession of us and as we respond in love, we begin to experience true interior freedom. Less and less do we regard the Commandments as arbitrary rules and more and more do we experience them as a way of participating in God's Providential governance of ourselves and of the world.[15] As our "inner self is . . . renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16) our freedom is exercised as part of our vocation to love both God and others. Thus, freedom is to be used not merely to perfect oneself, important as that is. Rather, our degree of interior freedom is proportionate to the degree that we love our neighbor, just as Christ loves our neighbor.[16] One can indeed posit an intrinsic link between interior religious freedom and the freedom to serve others in accord with moral convictions confirmed by faith. And so, we should not defend our freedom to serve others merely on the grounds that our charitable and social institutions do a lot of good work in society, but also on the grounds that true interior freedom has a vested right, if I may say so, to express itself in loving service to others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Possessed by such a love, a person becomes supremely free, come what may. This is the kind of interior freedom that martyrs possess. Imprisonment, torture, and death do not shake their interior and sovereign freedom. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, bound by the rules of monastic life and living in close quarters with her fellow sisters attained a freedom of spirit that those who love her and pray to her find liberating.[17] At this University we think of your Patron, St. Thomas More. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, hemmed in by his enemies, St. Thomas More exhibited a freedom that no earthly king could touch as with superb intelligence and insight he bore witness to the truth. Tertullian (as related by Pinckaers) tells us that the true prison is "the heart of man where the darkness of sin and impurity reign . . . In contrast, true freedom is freedom for God who reigns in the heart of the martyrs with their light and interior fragrance, and the assurance that exonerates them from the judgment of the world." [18] And let us be clear: Being interiorly free does not mean that it becomes easy to bear witness to the truth. Even in those hearts in

which the liberating grace of Christ pulsates, there is struggle, anguish, and sorrow – but above all, freedom – freedom for the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Isn't this what all true witnesses to Christ have in common? A sovereign freedom that suffers with Christ so as to reign with him! (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). For most of us this takes a less dramatic form than the sacrifices of the martyrs, be they ancient or modern. Nevertheless, bearing witness to Christ and to our faith in the current climate requires no small degree of interior freedom, courage, and love. In this connection, Pope Francis speaks of bloody martyrdom against Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and elsewhere as well as the "polite persecution" suffered by people of faith in the West. This can include the loss of reputation, the loss of one's job and income, the loss of friends and acquaintances, public opprobrium, and the like. For faith-based institutions the persecution entails both public criticism by elected officials and opinion makers and also prejudicial regulations approved by no one other than bureaucrats.

Being interiorly free, in the profound sense I'm attempting to describe, makes us more convincing advocates for religious freedom in our culture. The courageous witness of those who are interiorly free sheds light on the truth that religious freedom is a fundamental endowment of our humanity. What's more, being interiorly free does not absolve us from rigorously defending religious freedom both theoretically and practically. It does make us more prayerful and thus more discerning in how we go about defending freedom and equips us to be credible witnesses in society, beyond the walls of our churches, to the truth that sets our humanity free.

### **Civilization of Truth, Freedom, and Love**

The question of how to foster and defend religious freedom in the current climate cannot avoid the recent conversation about *The Benedict Option* by Rob Dreher[19] or Archbishop Charles Chaput's recent book, *Strangers in a Strange Land*. Time doesn't permit me to do anything more than raise the question about how we engage a culture that, arguably, is no longer merely indifferent to faith but is suspicious of and hostile to religious faith, especially organized religion.[20] Do we withdraw and create safe spaces to protect our interior freedom such as monasteries and/or

intentional communities? Or do we decide that the City of God and the City of Man can coexist after all? Or is coexistence something the ambient culture will not tolerate? Or do we decide that we will creatively and strategically engage the culture, withdrawing here, engaging there, still looking for points of connection, always trying to transform from within, not unlike St. Paul at the Areopagus? I side with those who say that we sometimes need to strategically withdraw but only so as to engage the culture more effectively and lovingly. I say this first, because evangelization always requires prayer and interiority as the foundation for public witness and engagement with the surrounding culture. Second, because religious freedom, while deeply personal, is never private; rather, it is meant to be expressed in the marketplace of ideas, in works of charity and in evangelization. So how does strategic withdrawal for the sake of engagement play out with regard to religious freedom? In concluding, let me suggest a few tasks and challenges.

In my view, a critical task is to retrieve the Catholic intellectual tradition and to make it our own by prayer, contemplation, and study. Many of you are deeply involved in studies that shed light on the anthropological roots of religious freedom, that explore its roots philosophically and theologically, and that study its expression or lack thereof in history and in current affairs. Yet, retrieving the Judeo-Christian Tradition, while crucial, is not enough. This retrieval must also be accompanied, as Robert Louis Wilken, said, by “a rebirth of moral and spiritual discipline and a resolute effort on the part of Christians (not just theologians) to comprehend and defend the remnants of Christian culture.”[21] As we know, in some quarters of the Church, not much of substance is said about religious freedom or human dignity. While it’s true that regular church-goers understand more than the unchurched, only a relative few grasp the depth and beauty of the gift of religious freedom & still fewer grasp the severity of the threats to religious freedom at home & abroad.

Thus, another critical task is forming evangelized leaders who can engage the wider culture. “Re-sourcing” ourselves, having a season to store up treasure, does not mean withdrawing from the world we have been called to transform. It does mean creating space and opportunity for leaders, both lay and clerical, to be raised up and formed, leaders who can go into the world to change it. This surely involves the ongoing renewal of all vocations in the Church’s life. Sometimes it involves the creation of intentional communities. At other times parishes need to raise up



“missionary disciples” – small communities of men and women whose own interior freedom enables them to bear witness to the Gospel before un-evangelized parishioners, the lapsed, the indifferent, and effectively engage the culture all around them. Sometimes these efforts are more specialized. I think of guilds to help form lawyers and physicians and other professionals so that they can live their faith and bear witness to it among their colleagues, even amid the headwinds of culture.

The task of those who are thus well-formed is to evangelize effectively. But evangelizing not only saves souls, it also preserves religious freedom. When people’s minds and hearts have been opened to the truth and beauty of God’s love and the love of God has been poured into their hearts – then the natural endowment of religious freedom comes alive and such people are more likely to defend religious freedom in society. Conversely, the failure to evangelize effectively endangers religious freedom. As fewer people practice any religious faith with any regularity, society’s regard for the value of religious liberty diminishes and its will to protect religious freedom also diminishes.

As President John Garvey of Catholic University said in a talk to the U.S. Bishops, “If we want to protect religious freedom we need to love God more.”

Religious institutions such as parishes, schools, and charities can no longer pretend that these are ordinary times, especially in these times when the scandal of sexual abuse weighs heavy upon us. Yet, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims, “Do not throw away your confidence...” (Heb. 10:34), that is, your boldness! We must be robust in our Christian identity and missionary zeal. When our parishes lose their evangelizing edge or our schools and charities become too much like their secular counterparts, we run the risk of surrendering, bit by bit, our religious freedom. So, we need to build bridges, reach out in friendship to those we disagree with, but in the process let us not forget or surrender who we are. That is why our parishes and all our institutions need to undergo what Pope Francis calls “a missionary conversion”. Pastors must continually form consciences for faithful citizenship – not only during an election cycle but also in the normal course of preaching and catechesis. Religious schools ought to play an important role in helping parents form new generations of leaders for Church and society. Evangelization should be built into the Church’s service to those in need. It should

capture a beautiful interior freedom of disciples that expresses itself in service to others coupled with a deep respect for fundamental truths about the human person and adherence to moral teachings that respect and protect human dignity.

When I began serving as Chair of the Bishops' Committee on Religious Liberty, I was asked if we were on the cusp of starting a religious freedom movement. I'm not sure that a movement is what we need. Rather, just as many in the Church work assiduously to create a culture of life to supplant the culture of death we see all around us – so too many in the Church must work, in spite of all obstacles, to create a civilization in which man's fundamental freedoms are valued and protected . . . This goal must be in view in all forms of evangelization, catechesis, and apologetics. As Mary T. Clark wrote many years ago: "Man continues today the consecration of himself and of the world to God, not by static isolationism or by nervous absorption in worldly transactions, but by creating a civilization that reflects the truth of man's value-judgments and that will be a fitting atmosphere for the continued advance of human interior liberty." [22]

And finally, let us note the role of the state in protecting religious liberty. As *Dignitatis Humanae* teaches, "...all men and women should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups, or any human power, so that no one is forced to act against his conscience, in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits." [23] But as David Schindler and Nicholas Healy point out, non-coercion is a good start but surely not the limit of the state's obligation toward religious freedom. Rather, without establishing a particular faith, the state must value not only religious freedom but also the pursuit of truth and morality. [24] Thus the state must work to free its citizens from exterior hindrances to the proper use of their free will to pursue what is right and good. But only its citizens can decide, "through knowledge and self-discipline [to] unceasingly safeguard [their] interior freedom to choose the good." [25] Thank you listening!

[1] Justice Anthony Kennedy, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833.

[2] *Dignitatis Humanae*, № 2.

[3] Mary T. Clark, *Augustine the Philosopher of Freedom*, New York: Desclée (1958) p. 226-227.

[4] Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom*, New York: Scepter, 2007, p. 27.

[5] A summary discussion of Augustine's notion of free will is found in *Augustine for the Ages, "Libero arbitrio, De,"* Roland J. Teske, S.J., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1999) pp. 494-495.

[6] "You called and cried aloud and shattered my deafness . . ." St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 27.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Pope John Paul II, General Audience, July 23, 1980.

[9] Mary Healy, *Hebrews: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016, p. 56.

[10] Cf. Jacques Philippe, op. cit., especially Part One, Chapters I-IV.

[11] Ibid., p. 76.

[12] During the debate on *Dignitatis Humanae* at Vatican II, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla famously declared, "Non datur libertas sine veritate" {AS III/2, 531} quoted in D. L. Schindler and M. Healy, *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2015), p. 49.

[13] Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press (1995) cf. pp. 327-353.

[14] This paragraph is also indebted to the reflections of Fr. Jacques Philippe, op. cit.

[15] Clark, op. cit., p. 231.

[16] Ibid. p. 232.

[17] Cf. Jacques Philippe, op. cit., p. 18.

[18] Servais Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom*, trans. by Patrick M. Clark and Annie Hounsokou, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press (2016), p. 101.

[19] Cf. Rob Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, New York: Penguin Random House (2017); Charles Chaput, *Strangers in a Strange Land*, New York: Henry Holt & Company (2017).

[20] In his various works Paul Ricoeur addresses the “hermeneutics of suspicion” with a “hermeneutics of belief”. He identifies Freud, Marx and Nietzsche as “masters of suspicion” in questioning the validity of consciousness, belief, and organized religion. Their views, once thought esoteric, have found their way into the stream of popular culture.

[21] Robert Wilkin, quoted by Rob Dreher in a tweet dated April 19, 2017.

[22] Clark, op. cit., p.229.

[23] *Dignitatis Humanae*, № 2.

[24] Schindler and Healy, op. cit., cf. especially pp. 113 ff.

[25] Clark, op. cit., p. 235.