

Archbishop Lori's Panel Discussion: "Interior and Exterior Freedom"

Annual Conference of the Academy of Catholic Theologians

The Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C.

May 25, 2017

Thank you for inviting me to serve on this panel with President John Garvey. I'm delighted to be with you today to discuss religious liberty and I hope my remarks will provide some fodder for discussion.

As noted, I serve as the U.S. Bishops' "point person" on issues of religious freedom, mostly those that pertain to its erosion here in the United States. When I was ordained a bishop twenty-two years ago, this is the last thing I thought I'd ever do for the Bishops' Conference. So this must truly be a part of God's plan for my life!

One thing I've learned over time is that discussions on religious freedom can easily start off on the wrong foot: we sometimes wade into specific threats to religious freedom without sufficiently reflecting on what freedom itself is and on how we must engage the culture in which we are immersed. It isn't wrong, of course, for the Church to identify specific threats to religious freedom or to be keenly aware of the ways religious freedom has eroded in our country through bad laws, court decisions, and policies. Not to do so is to bury our heads in the sand. Nor is it out of place for us to analyze how our societal "slouch towards Gomorrah" (which recently seems to have become a headlong rush) affects the state of religious freedom at home and abroad. At the same time we're obliged, I think, to identify and support various remedies through legislation, in the courts, and in public policy that promise to protect and defend the God-given gift of religious liberty. In fact, I've done a fair amount of that myself.

Yet these important efforts are hampered by a poor understanding of freedom. Perhaps because each of us is endowed with freedom, we tend to believe that freedom is a self-evident, 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. 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". (Freedom of choice is important but perhaps the Justice overstates 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 a par with choices others make to attain a personal life-style. It's our willfulness vs. their willfulness, our autonomy vs. their autonomy. And in this contest, people of faith, most often Catholics, come off as those who are standing in the way of the personal fulfillment of others. We are easily cast as unconvincing cultural whistle blowers. 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 the culture. Thus, the does the City of God infiltrate the City of Man to make it worthy of itself.

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. For all his alleged pessimism about human nature as well as his concern to guard the necessity and gratuity of redemption, St. Augustine did not strip human nature of its inherent freedom. 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." To be sure, human freedom is both finite and damaged. It is finite because, like it or not, every person faces a limited range of options. We are limited by circumstances, structures, other people, etc. and by the mere fact that choosing one thing necessarily means foregoing another. Human freedom is damaged by original sin and by a tsunami of personal sins - . . . damaged but not obliterated, as Augustine

concluded. Otherwise why would God have pursued Augustine so vigorously, as we see in his *Confessions*?

Finite & flawed though it be our inbuilt freedom yearns for the infinite & the flawless, a yearning that we both express and mask in a thousand ways. “Lo, you were within, but I outside seeking there for you,” Augustine wrote. Thus the battle between *cupiditas* and *caritas* is perennially joined. As Pope St. John Paul II taught, “the heart is a battleground between love and lust.” The grace of Christ begins the process of healing flawed freedom – such that 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). So also the advent of 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. It is love that opens our hearts to truth and it is truth that liberates our liberty. In place of what Servais Pinckaers calls “freedom of indifference” our wills begin to gravitate toward “freedom of excellence” as our highest calling to participate in the most excellent of all loves dawns upon us.

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. 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, as Christ loves our neighbor. 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, 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. 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.” 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. What’s more, the courageous witness of those who are interiorly free sheds light on the truth that religious freedom is a fundamental endowment of our humanity and much more than one choice among many others.

The question of how to foster and defend religious freedom in the current climate cannot avoid the current conversation about *The Benedict Option* by Rob Dreher or Archbishop 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 rapidly becoming hostile to religious faith, especially organized religion. Do we withdraw and create safe spaces to protect our interior freedom such as monasteries and/or intentional communities? 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, still trying to transform from within, not unlike St. Paul at the Areopagus? I side with those who say we need to withdraw so as to engage first, because evangelization always involves public witness and engagement with the surrounding culture; and second, because religious freedom, while deeply personal, is never private; rather, it is meant to be expressed in works of charity and evangelization. So how does withdrawal for the sake of engagement play out with regard to religious freedom? Let me suggest a few tasks and challenges.

In my view, a first task is to retrieve the Tradition and to make it our own by prayer, contemplation, and study. My saying this to you is a lot like bringing coals to

Newcastle. 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 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.” As we know, in many quarters of the Church, not much of substance is said about religious freedom or human dignity. Regular church-goers understand more than infrequent church-goers, but few grasp the depth and beauty of the gift of religious freedom and still fewer grasp the new and perilous situation in which we find ourselves.

So a second 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 evangelize it. This surely involves the ongoing renewal of all forms of consecrated 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 efforts 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 our culture.

The task of those who are thus well-formed is to evangelize effectively. 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 people are more likely to defend religious freedom in society. Conversely, 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. For as Jesus says to us in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart also be” (Mt. 6:21). I am reminded of President Garvey’s talk to the U.S. Bishops some years ago in which he said that 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. They must be robust in their Catholic identity and missionary zeal. When parishes lose their evangelizing edge or 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. Catholic schools ought to play an important role in helping parents to form new generations of leaders for Church and society. Evangelization should be built into the Church’s service to those in need. It should express a beautiful interior freedom of disciples that emanates 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. This is a task for us all but especially Catholic healthcare and social services.

When I began serving as Chair of the Ad Hoc 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.”

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." 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. Thus 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."

Thank you listening!