

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

understanding the basics ▪ defending a right

Defending Freedom: Everyone's Task (7 of 7)

Discussing the current debate surrounding religious liberty kindled by the HHS mandate, Cardinal Dolan says, "This has not been a fight of our choosing. We'd rather not be in it. We'd prefer to concentrate on the noble tasks of healing the sick, teaching our youth, and helping the poor, all now in jeopardy due to this bureaucratic intrusion into the internal life of the church." While the Church would rather be about her works of charity, she has nevertheless stood on the front line of the battle for religious freedom, and her shepherds have been in the forefront. Individually and as a conference, the bishops have taken the lead and drawn the nation's attention to the seriousness of the threat that the HHS mandate imposes on America's rich heritage of religious freedom. They have illustrated for us the magnitude of the challenges that lie ahead if religious liberty is treated as a lesser right. But this battle for religious freedom cannot rest with the bishops alone, and they are the first to admit it.

In their recent document, *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*, they say: "As bishops we seek to bring the light of the Gospel to our public life, but the work of politics is properly that of committed and courageous lay Catholics. We exhort them to be both engaged and articulate in insisting that as Catholics and as Americans we do not have to choose between the two. There is an urgent need for the lay faithful, in cooperation with Christians, Jews, and others, to impress upon our elected representatives the importance of continued protection of religious liberty in a free society."

Professor Glendon echoes the bishops. She says that as faithful Catholic Americans we too must "embrace our responsibility for bringing Christian principles to life in the secular sphere." The Second Vatican Council made clear that every Catholic – from the Pope right down to the person in the pew – has an obligation, by virtue of their baptism, to "remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that [everyone] may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it" (*Lumen Gentium* 36). Archbishop-designate Lori expresses that sentiment more concretely: "It's not enough for the bishops and leaders of Church institutions to clearly state our teaching; the government needs to hear from the lay faithful. The more [government leaders] see a unity and resolve on the part of the whole church, the less likely they are to try to impose such unjust and illegal rules."

History, Professor Glendon reminds us, has shown that successful resistance can in fact be "mounted by concerned citizens and courageous bishops...[so] religious leaders and citizens need not roll over and play dead when their basic freedoms are attacked." The fight has not been of our choosing, but it is every Catholic's duty to respond and speak what we know to be the truth.

"As a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail and religious liberty may be restored."

BISHOP WILLIAM MURPHY

PRAYER

Almighty God, Father of all nations, for freedom you have set us free in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:1).

We praise and bless you for the gift of religious liberty, the foundation of human rights, justice, and the common good. Grant to our leaders the wisdom to protect and promote our liberties; By your grace may we have the courage to defend them, for ourselves and for all those who live in this blessed land.

We ask this through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, our patroness, and in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.