

Fr. Perozich comments —

Since I am so comfortable in my life in the United States, I have a weakness in my soul to be drawn away from the necessity of salvation in Jesus Christ in worship and charity.

I am told that because I am a 69 year old priest, I should not give Eucharist because I might contract C19.

Additionally, I have an exemption from Mass attendance if I feel my physical health is threatened.

Access to bring sacraments to patients in the hospital is limited also, using C19 as the excuse.

Religion is becoming subject to the state, to a virus, to the control of the elites in power in the church, governments, NGOs, and pseudo science.

Jesus Christ is everything to me and to every human being.

On a cold windy day in the back country of San Diego where I was supplying for a priest away from his parish, an email came from the bishop prohibiting once again indoor Masses when it was impossible there to celebrate one out of doors without the possibility of getting pneumonia.

To comply, I canceled the Mass, and left open the church as is done every day for private prayer.

At Mass time I informed those in church that there could be no public Mass as they were used to celebrating indoors. I told them that I would celebrate my own private Mass, facing Jesus on the cross and tabernacle, that none of the call/responses would be done because it was a private Mass.

They were instructed to wait outside if they feared C19 and that communion would be brought to them after the Mass. Some stayed to pray inside.

On the following week the pastor received a call from one of the bishops saying that a report was given that a Mass was celebrated against the regulations.

At another place where I now am helping, I went to hospital and a care center for last rites, complied with the paper work, temperature check, special mask, and provided sacraments as a Catholic priest should do.

The nurse said that there were C19 patients in the facility moved to a special floor. I responded that I have no fear for my health or of dying in order to minister to Catholics at any facility. St. Aloysius Gonzaga died during a plague doing the same thing, and I am no where near the saint that this innocent hero was.

Jesus told the man with the afflicted child, "Fear is useless, what is needed is trust."

I am Catholic. I need Jesus and the sacraments. If my body dies serving the Lord, I am convinced that my soul will rise to eternal life. If my body survives because I will NOT serve the Lord, I dread the judgment that awaits.

Go to Mass.

Receive the sacraments.

Follow protocols for protection for yourself and others.

Live your faith.

Don't let churchmen, governments, NGOs, and pseudo science govern your life.

Jesus lived and died for love of you. Live for Him, for you will surely die anyway.

St. Paul said he would rather be at home with the Lord rather than away. Why do Catholics not think the same way? Nonetheless, Jesus is the Lord of our lives and will call us home in His time and at His will.

This is the kind of witness and conviction that will bring the world to believe in Jesus in whom resides salvation, forgiveness, unity, and peace.

Settimo Cielo **di Sandro Magister**

24 nov

Churches Closed. What Has Changed in the War on Religious Freedom



They are not going unnoticed at the Vatican, the restrictions imposed by various governments on the celebration of Mass in churches, on account of the coronavirus pandemic. If Pope Francis seems compliant, the secretariat of state does not. On November 16, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for relations with states, spoke at the "Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief," which brings representatives of

numerous governments around the world together every year, to **sound the alarm** on such restrictions, which “endanger the freedom of religion.”

For the Catholic Church, in fact - Gallagher explained - **access to the sacraments does not constitute a mere corollary of the freedom of assembly, but is an essential attribute of the right to religious freedom.**

In maintaining this Gallagher is squarely in line with the two latest erudite documents of the International Theological Commission, one on religious freedom and the other - published this year with the approval of the prefect of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria Ferrer, and with the “favorable view of the Holy Father, Francis” - dedicated to the “**reciprocity between faith and sacraments.**”

A reciprocity that for the first Christians was so indissoluble as to be worth martyrdom - “Sine dominico [vivere] non possumus,” the martyrs of Abitene said to their persecutors - but that today is the butt of the joke for a freshly appointed cardinal like Mario Grech, who in a recent **interview** with “La Civiltà Cattolica” instead charged with “spiritual illiteracy” those Christians who suffer from the lack of the Eucharistic celebration during the “lockdown,” not understanding - he says - **that the sacraments can be dropped because there are “other ways to engage in the mystery.”**

The fact is that the prohibition of Mass and the closing of churches are only the latest act - justifiable only in rare and temporary cases of emergency - of a wave of restrictions on religious freedom that has been steadily increasing on a global scale for years.

A few days ago the Washington-based Pew Research Center published a detailed update on the subject:

> In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally in More Than a Decade

The survey measures in the first place the restrictions on religious freedom imposed by governments, which see China in the lead, followed -

among the most populous countries - by Iran, Russia, Indonesia, Egypt, Vietnam, Turkey.

But it also measures the hostility to one or the other religion that manifests itself in widespread behavior. And here in the lead is India, followed by Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia.

What is striking about China is the contrast between strong government hostility toward religion and popular benevolence, while in India the opposite occurs, with the spontaneous aggression of the population being even stronger than the already heavy restrictions imposed by the government.

Asia, the Middle East, and northern Africa are the areas with the greatest restrictions on religious freedom. But Europe also enters the rankings, albeit at lower levels. Here government restrictions play their part, but social hostility an even bigger one. Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, France are particularly characterized by acts of anti-religious aggression.

The most targeted, all over the world, are Christians, closely followed by Muslims and a little further down by Jews, despite the latter being only 0.2 percent of the world population. Hindus and Buddhists follow at a bit of a distance.

But is it only in quantity that restrictions and attacks on religions have been growing for years? Or is their quality also changing?

This question is answered by the other document of the International Theological Commission, the one on religious freedom, made public in 2019 also with the formal approval of the pope, and duly covered by “La Civiltà Cattolica” in its latest issue, with a **commentary** by the Jesuit theologian Felix Körner, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University:

> Religious freedom for the good of all

The genesis of this document is instructive in itself. It takes its cue from the 1965 declaration on religious freedom "**Dignitatis Humane**,” which is also one of the conciliar teachings against which traditionalists have lashed out the most, to the point of breaking with the Church as the

followers of Marcel Lefebvre have done and as it seems today could be the next step for Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò.

In the footsteps of **Benedict XVI's** exegesis, the document reaffirms that “Dignitatis Humane” must be interpreted within the framework of “reform in continuity,” in keeping with the newness of the times and at the same time in perfect adherence to the Church of the first martyrs.

But it goes beyond this, because today - the document points out - the historical context has changed considerably in comparison with the years of Vatican Council II.

Körner summarizes the changes that have occurred as follows:

“A first change noted is the evident growth in religious pluralism (cf. no. 9). While this was barely visible in the 1960s, today most of humanity lives in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts.”

“A second is that religion is increasingly considered a private matter, which must be excluded or sidelined from the public sphere.”

“Thirdly, and to a much greater extent than 55 years ago, religion is now perceived as a problem (cf. no. 2).”

And the latter is the point that the document of the International Theological Commission develops the most. “The authors of the document,” Körner writes, “acknowledge that in today's societies religion is often more feared than welcomed. People are deeply aware of the crimes committed in the name of religion (cf. nos. 4; 25; 82). And this obviously fosters the idea that religious freedom itself is a danger to humanity. If the state does not intervene to domesticate and civilize this extremely dangerous factor, meaning religion, no one else will be able to do so.”

The forms of “fundamentalism” are the most glaring element of the “problem.” The document distinguishes these from a simple “return to traditional piety.” It rather insists that they can develop as a reaction to the liberal state, either because this declines to provide direction, embracing “relativism,” or because it usurps an excessive power to guide, pushing religion out of the public sphere in a sort of “soft totalitarianism” (cf. no. 4).

Fanaticism, in fact, can be religious or anti-religious (cf. no. 5). It **can take either the form of theocracy or that of state atheism**. The document brands as "political monophysitism" (cf. no. 61) models in which the power of God and the power of the state are interchangeable.

The document focuses on what is happening in Western societies, referring to the analysis of Charles Taylor in "The Secular Age." **An idea of "egalitarian and nonevaluative neutrality" has emerged according to which religious affiliation is equated with belonging to a recreational club and "the whole world of human morality and social knowledge must be 'democratized'."** But the majority vote cannot be applied when fundamental values are involved, because in this way the state becomes "ethically authoritarian." And thus, "in its original relationship with the truth, the exercise of freedom of conscience ends up finding itself in constant danger. In the name of this 'state ethics' there is an undue calling into question, beyond the criterion of just public order, of the freedom of religious communities to organize themselves according to their principles" (cf. no. 62).

(In a footnote, no. 69, the document adds that this "state ethics" is also found in Asia, where "the limit to religious freedom in many constitutions is expressed through the clause 'assuming it is not contrary to civil duties or to public order or moral justice'," but where "the common good and public order are nevertheless defined by the circle of power." And one cannot help but think of China).

The way out that the document proposes to neutrality theorists and to religious communities is an effort to find common ground. Liberal cultures, which tend to see religions as fundamentally irrational and ideological, should overcome this prejudice and look at them more closely. On the other hand, religions too should learn "to elaborate in a humanistically understandable language their vision of reality and of the coexistence that inspires it" (cf. no. 7). An elaboration in which Christianity, on account of its "rationality," has a facilitated role.

The document calls for mutual recognition between the state and religious communities. Every religion "must agree to 'present itself' before the just demands of reason 'worthy' of man" (cf. n. 70). And among these

“demands” that of “the peaceful reciprocity of religious rights,” in the first place freedom of conversion - which for example in Saudi Arabia is prohibited and punished with death - is to be universally guaranteed.

Another innovation of the document - which Körner points out - is the insistence on the religious community rather than on the individual. While “Dignitatis Humanae” had presented a theory of religious freedom that put freedom of personal conscience first, the document more markedly develops the right of religious communities to act as protagonists in the public sphere.

A final note on the authors of these two documents of the International Theological Commission, all listed by name at the beginning of both.

Among the authors of the document on religious freedom are the Italian Pierangelo Sequeri (a theologian of confirmed expertise, unfortunately transferred to become head of the refounded John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences) and the Australian Tracey Rowland, this year’s recipient of the **“Joseph Ratzinger” prize** that is issued by the foundation of the same name.

While among the authors of the document on the reciprocity between faith and sacraments are the German Marianne Schlosser, also awarded the “Joseph Ratzinger” prize in 2018 (whose resignation from the synod of Germany made a stir last year), and the American Thomas G. Weinandy, known for his respectful but severe and substantial **public criticisms** of Francis’s pontificate.

In 2019, the “Joseph Ratzinger” prize was also awarded to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, who is cited in a key passage of the document on religious freedom.

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