

VEGETABLES, CONSCIENCE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: WHAT DOES RELIGIOUS LIBERTY HAVE TO DO WITH HUMAN DIGNITY?

Daniel ISTRATE, Lecturer PhD

Timotheus' Brethren Theological Institute of Bucharest
4distrate@gmail.com

Abstract: Religious freedom is perceived as a basic human right, and one that should be respected by people and governments around the world. Buy why? Is it because of its economic or political advantages, or the benefits it brings? These are good things, yet more important is the philosophical basis of religious freedom, which needs to be anchored in human dignity, a central concept in the biblical and Christian worldview. As such, freedom of religion is not something governments must grant but something they must recognize and respect. And if one is to respect another's conviction to eat only vegetables, how much more should one respect another's convictions when it comes to religion and worship based on the dictates of one's conscience? Yet, it should not be forgotten that religious freedom is one of a package of rights, privileges and responsibilities that man has as he fulfils his mission as God's viceregent on earth.

Keywords: Religious freedom, Conscience, Human dignity, Vegetables, Worship, Human rights

The importance of religious freedom, and thus of this volume, is highlighted again and again by religiously motivated suppression, oppression, persecution and violence – or even acts of war – taking place in many places around the world.¹ According to Rev. Joseph D'Souza, "more than seven in

¹ According to ANC International's 2018 'Religious Freedom Report', the organization "found evidence of significant religious freedom violations in 38 countries" (<https://religious-freedom-report.org/>). Although the number of countries involved seems low, many of those included in this list are quite populous, such as China, India and Pakistan...

10 people in the world live in countries with high restrictions or hostilities against religion,” hence the title of his opinion piece published in July 2019 on foxnews.com, “Why religious liberty is the most pressing issue facing our world today.”² Coming via the same media even more recently (August 2019) is Timothy Head’s opinion piece entitled “Religious freedom is now a foreign policy priority for the US.”³ But why, or on what basis should religious freedom be ‘the most pressing issue facing our world’, or ‘a foreign policy priority for the US’ or for any other country? Neither Rev. D’Souza nor Mr. Head address the reason or the basis but rather the consequences or results of having or not having the liberty to worship according to one’s conscience. Although D’Souza states that religious freedom is a basic human right, and even goes on to lament that bilateral relations between

...As such, Olivia SUMMERS (associate counsel for public policy with American Center for Law and Justice - ACLJ) notes that, “While ... serious restrictions and ... violent upheaval are occurring in only 24% of the world’s countries, those nations cover 74% of the world’s population” (“Religious Freedom Violations Affect 74% of World’s Population”, 2016, <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/religious-freedom-violations-affect-74-of-worlds-population>, Accessed 28/08/2019). While Summers’ statement was based on the US Department of State’s 2015 ‘International Religious Freedom Report’, the same report for 2019 is even more sobering, as seen through the eyes of Sasha INGBER (National Public Radio Reporter, News Desk): “Religious Freedom Report Offers Grim Review Of Attacks On Faith Groups,” April 29, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/29/718244032/religious-freedom-report-offers-grim-review-of-attacks-on-faith-groups?t=1567461634197>, Accessed 29/08/2019. According to CeCe HEIL (Senior Counsel with ACLJ, specializing in public policy and global legal matters including the United Nations), “Persecution on grounds of religious faith is a global phenomenon that is growing in scale and intensity”, yet a lesser known fact is that “an estimated 80% of persecuted believers around the world are Christians” (emphasis hers; “Startling Report Calls Christianity by Far the Most Widely Persecuted Religion in the World, and Warns Persecution of Christians Is Nearing Genocide Level,” August 2019, <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/startling-report-calls-christianity-by-far-the-most-widely-persecuted-religion-in-the-world-and-warns-persecution-of-christians-is-nearing-genocide-levels>, Accessed 06/09/2019). Heil’s former affirmation is based on the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on ‘Freedom of Religion and Belief’ (FoRB), while the latter comes from the report commissioned by the British government and released just a couple of months ago by Bishop of Truro (see a pdf of the report here: <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>). The 80% figure is first found on page 6 of the Report, yet note 2 on page 137 states that the figure “is now a conservative estimate”).

2 D’SOUZA, Joseph, “Why religious liberty is the most pressing issue facing our world today,” July 16, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/joseph-dsouza-religious-liberty-ministerial-pompeo-washington>, accessed 08/23/2019. Rev. D’Souza is the founder of Dignity Freedom Network.

3 HEAD, Timothy, “Religious freedom is now a foreign policy priority for the US,” August 24, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/religious-freedom-foreign-policy-priority-tim-head>, accessed on 27/08/2019. The author is the executive director for the Faith & Freedom Coalition.

nations have for too long “been driven by economic interests at the expense of human rights,” yet he seems to land on the same approach: “Our leaders need to understand religious freedom is actually good for business” and “religious intolerance is not good for business.”⁴

On the one hand, D’Souza refers to the work of economist Carmel Chiswick, who suggests that religious freedom fosters economic freedom and progress, and thus material prosperity.⁵ On the other hand, he refers to the work of Brian J. Grim whose research indicates that religious hostility creates an environment that is not conducive to economic development, driving away both foreign investment and a solid ethnic work force as well as potential future talent.⁶ D’Souza concludes his article still on the pragmatic side: “If we want to live in free, prosperous and peaceful societies, we must defend and promote the fundamental right of faith of every individual.”⁷

While D’Souza strongly implies it yet makes only a passing reference to nations holding each other accountable in the area of human rights (especially regarding religious freedom) rather than be driven only by economic interests, Timothy Head’s opinion piece makes it a point of emphasis that there should be negative consequences for nations whose governments do not allow people to worship according to their conscience. He speaks of Boko Haram’s atrocities against Christians committed in the

4 D’SOUZA, J. “Why religious liberty is the most pressing issue ...”, 2019.

5 Carmel CHISWICK is a research professor of economics at George Washington University in Washington DC, USA. Some of her work on this topic include *Economics of American Judaism*, (Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy), New York, Routledge, 2008; and “Immigrants and Religion,” In *Handbook on the Economics of International Immigration, Volume IA*, Edited by B. R. Chiswick & P. W. Miller, North Holland, Elsevier, 2015, pp. 375-385.

6 The work which D’Souza is probably referencing here on economics and religious freedom is GRIM, Brian J. and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics), Cambridge University Press, 2010. According to <https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/brian-j-grim>, “Brian Grim is president of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation (RFBF) and a leading expert on international religious demography and the socio-economic impact of restrictions on religious freedom.” Also, perhaps surprisingly, Grim’s more “recent widely reported research finds that religion contributes \$1.2 trillion to the U.S. economy annually, more than the combined revenues of the top 10 technology U.S. companies including Apple, Amazon and Google” (see also <https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/brian-j-grim> for some of the many media outlets that publicized Grim’s findings; for some of the more recently published research in this area, see GRIM, Brian J. and Melissa E. Grim, “Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, July 2019, Springer US, published online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w>).

7 D’SOUZA, J. “Why religious liberty is the most pressing issue ...”, 2019.

name of Islam in West Africa; of the Burma's (Myanmar's) predominantly Buddhist government's persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority; and of "Iran-backed militias terrorizing religious minorities." In response, Head notes, "The Trump administration has also put hundreds of foreign governments on notice that the United States will no longer turn a blind eye to the atrocities of religious repression and violence around the world."⁸ But what does it mean to 'no longer turn a blind eye'? According to Head, the warning translated into action – or rather economic sanctions, against Iran and Burma: "The administration put words into action when Pence announced a new round of U.S. sanctions in response to Iran-backed militias terrorizing religious minorities. He announced similar sanctions against the Burmese government for its brutal persecution of the Rohingya. [And with the U.S. leading the way, he hopes this] "is improving the likelihood that more governments will agree to take individual and collective action against persecution, and seriously consider the real advantages of religious freedom."⁹

There certainly are advantages to religious freedom, and where such freedom is not a reality, external influence and pressures do help. But while not minimizing the short-term efficacy of economic sanctions and other external means of 'persuasion' – for, after all, real people in real life circumstances benefit greatly as a result of a government ceasing or loosening its religion-motivated persecution or oppression – the deeper question we posed earlier comes to the surface again: why, or what is the philosophical basis for religious freedom? While D'Souza labels religious freedom as a most basic and a fundamental human right, without elaborating on it, so does Head in his conclusion: "It is imperative that the U.S. continue to speak to the entire world with one voice, with resolute moral clarity, that we stand ready to export one of our most central and sacred rights, the right of humans to worship as they please and to live out their faith as they see fit."¹⁰

8 HEAD, T. "Religious freedom is now a foreign policy priority for the US," 2019.

9 Ibidem.

10 Ibidem. One might be tempted to understand Head as saying that religious freedom is something that belongs to Western societies (especially to the U.S.) and which they want to export to where people do not have it; however, he is actually speaking about a right all humans everywhere should be able to enjoy, and calling on those able to influence (or 'discipline') others toward that goal to continue to do so, leading to a reality where all humans could freely exercise this central and sacred right.

But again, why should we consider one's religious liberty as one of the most central and sacred rights, or a most basic and fundamental human right, and on what philosophical basis should governments respect every citizen's desire to worship according to his own conscience? Although such a right was specifically included in the 1948 United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18), was enshrined in the US Constitution via the 1791 First Amendment (as part of the Bill of Rights), and could be perhaps seen in general terms among the provisions of the 1215 Magna Carta (Articles 1 and 63), the question of its philosophical basis still stands: where does this right come from? Is there something or someone that grants man the right to worship according to his conscience's dictates? If one's conscience is involved, such a right could not belong to society or to a state to grant. Could it be that the basis for such a right is what this volume and conference already hints at by its title, "Human Dignity and Religious Liberty"? Indeed, our shared *human dignity* is the basis of our *religious freedom*.¹¹

Yet, what are we to understand by *human dignity*? Dictionaries define *dignity* as 'inherent worth', or 'inherent value'. As such, the right of a person to worship freely, together with other rights or privileges, is something rather inherent to what it means to be human, something that every member of mankind already possesses. So, it is indeed not something that needs to be granted by an outside entity, such as the state, but rather something that is already there and which the state needs to acknowledge and respect. But where does man's worth or dignity come from, and on what authority could we speak of such a concept? And, if human dignity includes one's right to worship according to his conscience, what is *conscience*, or, what is it that sits in such a position of authority over man, to whose dictates man should have the freedom to submit, and where does this authoritative voice comes from?

At this point we are dealing with fundamental questions of human existence – our origin, meaning and purpose as humans – and to these

11 One major concurring religious document is the declaration "Dignitatis Humanae," promulgated by Pope Paul VI in December 1965 as part of the work of The Second Vatican Council (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm). For other declarations joining religious freedom and human dignity see <https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/rfievnts/exploring-global-charters>. See also CASPAR, Jason, "From DC to Mecca, Should 'Human Dignity' Be the New 'Religious Freedom'?" July 22, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/july/mecca-declaration-dignity-religious-freedom-ministerial-dc.html>, Accessed 12/09/2019.

questions there have been offered competing answers, especially in the modern era; yet, one must decide which answers and which worldview accounts best for the data. So, approaching the issue backwards, if we start with religious freedom as a human right (or with any other inherent human right), then what is its best and most reasonable explanation in light of the available data and in light of the reality we experience? The answers could broadly be classified as theistic and atheistic. For the atheistic route, if man were the result of blind evolutionary forces, then how could one speak intelligibly of human dignity? What value or dignity would a human have in a value-less world? And what rights could a human claim above that of a tree or a dog?¹² Yet, as the title of this article indicates, we are suggesting that the theistic and especially Christian worldview provides the most coherent explanation for what we call human dignity or worth, which gives us the reason or the philosophical basis for religious liberty. And this coherent explanation is found in the Bible, which is, in a manner of speaking, the authoritative instruction manual with which humans have been graced by their Creator.

But what is the framework the Bible provides for our discussion of human dignity and religious liberty? Perhaps we could speak of this framework as a drama in three acts: dignity bestowed, dignity marred and compromised, and dignity restored (or Creation, Fall into Sin, and

12 It is instructive to study the would-be dialogue between Ted Bundy, the notorious serial killer, and one of his victims, as presented by Harry V. JAFFA, Professor of Political Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College and the Claremont Graduate School, in his *Homosexuality and Natural Law*, Center for the Study of the Natural Law, The Claremont Institute, Upland, CA, 1990, pp. 3-4. The caveat is Jaffa's acknowledgement that this wording "was composed on the same principle as the speeches in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, attributing to each speaker the words that fit his character and the circumstances in which he spoke." Even though it is hard to imagine such a dialogue taking place, the words do reflect Bundy's worldview, where the naturalistic/evolutionary and relativistic convictions are taken to their logical, though extreme, conclusion, so that one's right to pleasure trumps someone else's right to life in the struggle to succeed and fulfill one's desires. Here is part of that constructed dialogue: "I recognize that your life and your freedom are very valuable to you, but you must recognize that they are not so valuable to me. And if I must sacrifice your life and freedom to mine, why should I not do so? The unexamined life was not worth living to Socrates. And a life without raping and murdering is not worth living to me. What right do you—or does anyone—have, to deny this to me?... I want you to know then that once upon a time I too believed that God and the moral law prescribed boundaries within which my life had to be lived. That was before I took my first college courses in philosophy. Then it was that I discovered how unsophisticated—nay, primitive—my earlier beliefs had been. Then I learned that all moral judgments are "value judgments," that all value judgments are subjective, and that none can be proved to be either "right" or "wrong." The content of Professor Jaffa's book is also available online at http://www.angelfire.com/la/jlush/natural_law.html (Accessed on 07/09/2019).

Redemption). The first act of the human drama is recorded in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, where we learn of God creating mankind – man and woman – after His own image, especially referring to their role of reflecting His character on earth and to exercise royal dominion over the earth,¹³ to act as God’s viceregent by ruling over creation both on His behalf and under His kind authority – in a real sense, this means worship or service rendered unto God, ascribing the highest worth and importance to the Creator.¹⁴ So, human dignity or worth – with all the accompanying inherent human rights, privileges and responsibilities it entails – stems from this initial lofty status and endowment from a gracious Creator.¹⁵

Having true freedom to choose whom to worship, man soon abandoned worshipping or serving his Maker and rebelled (Genesis 3), marring and compromising his dignified status; this is the second act of the human drama, or man’s fall into sin. As a result, even though he maintained his rights as God’s special creature,¹⁶ yet man’s capability to reflect God’s character on earth suffered irreparable damage – irreparable by man’s initiative or ability. By usurping God’s place and becoming his own arbiter of right and wrong, man’s nature and disposition toward God changed from worshiper to an would-be autonomous agent, which in reality is enmity and service to another god. As such, we see how man’s rebellious inclination toward God soon found expression in utter disregard for another carrier of God’s image, as we witness Cain taking away from

13 See also HART, Ian, “Genesis 1:1-2:3 As a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.2, 1995, 315-336 (especially pp. 317-324, 331; available online at https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull_1995_46_2_06_Hart_Gen1Prologue.pdf).

14 For more detailed discussion on man being made in God’s image see WALTKE, Bruce K., with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2001, pp. 65-66, and 69-70; CLINES, D. J. A. “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19, 1968, pp. 53-103; and HOEKEMA, Anthony A., *Created in God’s Image*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1986.

15 The signers of the American Declaration of Independence (1776), though not mentioning religious liberty (which was later included as part of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, in 1791, though it might be in view as one aspect of Liberty, the second unalienable right mentioned here) acknowledged that our unalienable rights come from a Creator: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

16 As Waltke points out, “The image is not erased after the Fall but continues seminally to every individual (Gen. 5:1; 9:6). However, after the Fall the first Adam (and all humanity can only partially fulfill the cultural mandate” (*Genesis*, p. 70)

his brother Abel the most basic inherent human right, the right to life (Genesis 4). Such evil orientation and corruption of human nature led to all kinds of abuses of the rights and privileges that God had graciously bestowed upon mankind in creation, as man perpetrated all manner of evil and violence against his fellow man down through the history.

Next, man's troubling predicament ushers in the need for the third act, redemption, where man's lost Paradise is restored by God Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, Who rendered perfect obedience and service to God the Father. Through God the Son's incarnation, life, death on the cross, and resurrection, He both gained a righteous status and made atonement for mankind's trespasses; and on the basis of His accomplishments on our behalf, man is now reconciled to God through repentance from sin and trust in the work of Christ on his behalf. Only in this manner is human nature renewed and transformed, being conformed after the image of His Son – Who was and is Himself the incarnate image of God. Thus, the image of God in man is finally restored to the extent that man is able again to begin rendering worship or service acceptable to God, beginning again on the road of being His viceregent on the earth by displaying His character to the rest of creation.

The biblical framework with its three major acts in the human drama sketched above provides the most plausible explanation for our perceived inherent right of religious freedom, or the liberty to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience. And, according to biblical teaching (the Epistle to the Romans 1-2), even in the heart of the one who is not aware of the third act resonates not only the plausibility but also the truthfulness of the first two acts of this drama as introduced here: instinctively man knows both his identity and his duty on earth: as to his identity, having been made in God's image, in his heart he still recognizes his creaturely status as he witnesses God's power and attributes displayed in nature, and he knows that he is accountable to his Maker and should live in gratitude and worship to Him even though he chooses to go the other way; as to his duty, man is aware both of the imprint of God's essential moral law inscribed by the Creator on his heart and of the presence in his mind of a judge or an arbiter, of sorts, a small inner voice which either approves or disapproves of one's deeds. This inner voice is what we call *conscience*, which sits in that lofty position of authority over man and to whose dictates, as noted above, one should have the freedom to submit in his worship or in the free exercise of religion.

What are a few more relevant aspects about human conscience, beside it being the arbiter of right and wrong? And what does conscience have to do with vegetables within the framework of the Christian faith, and how does it all connect to religious freedom? Human conscience *works through man's reason*, as his thoughts either condemn or approve what he does (Romans 2:15), and *affects his emotions*, inducing the sense of either relief or guilt. Also, *conscience is a merciless and implacable judge*, as it always condemns or approves based on the database from which it operates; according to the Epistle to the Hebrews 9:9, it *requires perfection*, which is yet another clue concerning its origin. However, in man's rebellion against God, his *conscience was compromised*. As man chose to go against his Maker, the bug of rebellion infected every aspect of his nature, including both the ability of conscience to discern the nature of the information in its database as well as the ability to process that information to render judgments.¹⁷ Just as a bugged computer system needs outside intervention, such as an antivirus program, so man's *conscience needs correction and instruction* from outside of him; and God accomplishes this through His flawless revelation, the Bible, as the antivirus needed to cleanse or reset man's conscience and renew his nature in the image of His Son (Romans 8:29) so that man can worship the true God again (Hebrews 9:14).

The multiplicity of religions and differing religious convictions (in which conscience is surely involved) serves as a general proof that there is a problem with man's conscience, for, if nothing happened, every human being would act according to the same code and worship God in the way He expects. But we could notice that even within the Christian faith there are things that sometimes conscience condemns when God does not condemn, and sometimes does not condemn when God does. This reality makes it imperative that man should not go by what he feels is right (functioning as a law unto himself) but rather by what God says through the Scriptures; conscience thus stands in need of correction and instruction by God's written revelation, a standard uncorrupted by sin.

¹⁷ It should be noted here that although conscience usually works alright when it comes to the basic moral law, such as taking someone's life, lying or stealing, and this on a universal level, apparently there are glitches even at that level due to the interference of sin. Yet, in addition to that initial basic moral law inscribed by God on man's heart, information from one's education and life experience is continually added to the database used by conscience to render its judgment, information that is also subject to the corruption of sin.

An example that illustrates that Scriptures must take precedence over what one's conscience might dictate, but an example which also serves to instruct us regarding religious liberty, is found in Romans 14:1 – 15:13, where we learn of one who has a weak or not well instructed conscience, and one who is more mature. The apostle Paul instructs the Romans to accept the one who is weak in faith (v.1), as "one believes he may eat anything, while the one who is weak eats *only* vegetables."¹⁸ As the context reveals, this is a matter of what one's conscience dictates: the conscience of the *weak* Christian allows him to eat only vegetables, while the conscience the *strong* Christian allows him the liberty to eat anything, including meat. According to Paul, one must not transgress the dictates of his own conscience, otherwise he commits sin (v. 23). Yet, how could the same thing, such as eating meat, be sin for one Christian, and not be sin for another? The variable factor is one's conscience, which must be followed by everyone. The practical biblical mandate here is that the one who eats meat should not despise but rather accept his brother who does not, and the one who is free to eat only vegetables should neither judge the one whose conscience allows him to eat meat, nor should he try to impose such limitations on others. In the conclusion of this section Paul exhorts both the weak and the strong to "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted or received us to the glory of God" (15:7).¹⁹

Paul argues his point on a number of different levels, yet conscience is a prominent factor in the argument. Each one, says Paul, is accountable to the Lord, and must act before Him with a clear conscience, or according to the dictates of his own conscience.²⁰ Believers are exhorted to act in love, working toward what is good for the others, yet especially

18 Unless noted otherwise, the cited biblical text represents the author's own translation of the Greek text.

19 Paul's personal conviction here lines up with that of the *strong*, as he does not consider any food to be unclean. This is in line with the allowance made by God in Genesis 9 shortly after the Flood that people may eat meat (beside the previously sanctioned diet of fruits and vegetables of Genesis 1), as well as Jesus' statements that since food goes into the stomach it cannot defile a man, to which Mark the evangelist adds, "thus declaring all foods to be clean" (Mark 7:18-19).

20 This does not mean that biblical instruction should not take place, and growth should not happen especially for the weak. It should, with the result that the weak do not continue to stumble over what Scripture does not forbid. And Paul does some of that instruction here, in a gentle way. Yet, one is responsible to act before God according to his conscience or convictions, and to act in love toward his neighbor, as each one is in the end accountable to Christ. See also BOICE, James M., *Romans, An Expository Commentary, Vol. 4: The New Humanity, Romans 12-16*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1995, pp. 1731-1737.

the strong should be careful with the weak so that “no stumbling block will be put in their way causing them to act contrary to their conscience.”²¹

So, how do vegetables relate to religious freedom? One could search the whole Bible and will not find anywhere stated that man has a right to religious freedom. Yet, here is an argument from the smaller to the greater, which should make it obvious that the Scriptures address this matter quite well. The greater affirmation, and the higher order truth is that the Bible presents man as God’s special creation, endowed with a high status of His viceregent on earth. Man was made for this very purpose, to represent God and display His character as he functions as king over creation on behalf of the High King. This implies that there should not be anything that prevents man to worship or render his service to his Maker according to the dictate of his conscience, which is God’s voice or ambassador in man’s heart. But, the same Bible states that the law of love among men should be exercised to such an extent that a man should be free to follow his conscience if it means that he could only eat vegetables – the dictates of one’s conscience should be followed judiciously before God. Now, if one’s conviction to eat only vegetables – a lower order truth – should be respected, how much more should a truth of the highest order be honored, such as one’s conviction to worship God according to his conscience!

There is one more area to explore briefly, that of the double-sidedness of religious freedom.²² On the one hand religious freedom implies no coercion for anyone to do anything in the religious sphere that goes against his own conscience; on the other hand, it implies freedom from any restrictions in practicing one’s religious convictions whether “in public or in private, alone or in association with others.”²³ If on the former aspect there is some agreement, it has not been so with the latter, especially because of the presence of sin in our fallen world. For, what if someone’s or a group’s religious practices are in error, or go against the common good, or might even be destructive? Perhaps

21 KRUISE, Colin G., *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2012, p. 528.

22 For a more detailed discussion on this, see MURRAY, John Courtney, “Arguments for the Human Right to Religious Freedom,” 1968, Woodstock Theological Library at Georgetown University, <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/murray/1968>, Accessed 9/9/2019.

23 Ibidem.

a valuable approach here is to realize that religious freedom, though a crucial right, it is only one of the rights and privileges humans have as a result of their dignified status in God's creation. While anchoring one's right of religious freedom in human dignity one cannot act in a way that goes against the dignity that other carriers of God's image have, nor go against his mandate to reflect God's image and character on earth – there must be harmony in the free exercise of man's rights and privileges, and also realize that the other side of rights and privileges are man's duties. Arguing again from the smaller to the greater, if one is to abstain from a food if it causes another to stumble, what is it that love for God and love for man cannot do?!

Religious freedom is indeed a worthy cause to rally around, as there so many fellow human beings around the world suffering persecution because of religion, and especially because of their Christian faith. Promoting freedom of religion as a social good, or for its benefits, it is sometimes helpful on the pragmatic side, and beneficial for those in dire need of outside intervention. Yet, to use the words of Timothy Head, if we are “to export one of our most central and sacred rights, the right of humans to worship as they please and to live out their faith as they see fit,” the pragmatic argument and economic advantages of religious freedom will only go so far. For religious freedom to be adopted and to endure in more countries around the world, more work needs to be done in the area of convincing them of the philosophical basis for such a right, namely, our human dignity – that we are creatures endowed by Our Creator with one main mission: to represent Him and display His character on earth, and as such, all the rights and privileges, together with the accompanying duties, are tools and means for man to display God's glory throughout His creation.

Bibliography

- ✦ BOICE, James Montgomery, *Romans, An Expository Commentary, Vol. 4: The New Humanity, Romans 12-16*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1995.
- ✦ CASPAR, Jason, “From DC to Mecca, Should ‘Human Dignity’ Be the New ‘Religious Freedom’?” July 22, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/july/mecca-declaration-dignity-religious-freedom-ministerial-dc.html>.

- ✦ CHISWICK, Carmel U., *Economics of American Judaism* (Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy), Routledge, New York, 2008.
- ✦ --- "Immigrants and Religion." In *Handbook on the Economics of International Immigration, Volume IA*, Barry R. CHISWICK & Paul W. Miller (eds.), Elsevier, North Holland, 2015, pp. 375-385.
- ✦ CLINES, D. J. A. "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19, 1968, pp. 53-103.
- ✦ D'SOUZA, Joseph, "Why religious liberty is the most pressing issue facing our world today," July 16, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/joseph-dsouza-religious-liberty-ministerial-pompeo-washington>.
- ✦ GRIM, Brian J. and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics), Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- ✦ GRIM, Brian J. and Melissa E. Grim, "Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse," *Journal of Religion and Health*, July 2019, Springer US, published online: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w>.
- ✦ HART, Ian, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 As a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.2, 1995, 315-336.
- ✦ HEAD, Timothy, "Religious freedom is now a foreign policy priority for the US," August 24, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/religious-freedom-foreign-policy-priority-tim-head>.
- ✦ HEIL, Cece, "Startling Report Calls Christianity by Far the Most Widely Persecuted Religion in the World, and Warns Persecution of Christians Is Nearing Genocide Level," August 2019, <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/startling-report-calls-christianity-by-far-the-most-widely-persecuted-religion-in-the-world-and-warns-persecution-of-christians-is-nearing-genocide-levels>.
- ✦ HOEKEMA, Anthony A., *Created in God's Image*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1986.
- ✦ INGBER, Sasha, "Religious Freedom Report Offers Grim Review of Attacks on Faith Groups," April 29, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/29/718244032/religious-freedom-report-offers-grim-review-of-attacks-on-faith-groups?t=1567461634197>.
- ✦ JAFFA, Harry V. Jaffa, *Homosexuality and Natural Law*, Center for the Study of the Natural Law, The Claremont Institute, Upland, CA, 1990.
- ✦ KRUISE, Colin G., *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentaries, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2012.

- ✦ MURRAY, John Courtney, "Arguments for the Human Right to Religious Freedom," 1968, Woodstock Theological Library at Georgetown University, <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/murray/1968>.
- ✦ SUMMERS, Olivia, "Religious Freedom Violations Affect 74% of Wolds' Population", 2016, <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/religious-freedom-violations-affect-74-of-worlds-population>.
- ✦ WALTKE, Bruce K., with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2001.