

## Religious Freedom is a Right and a Privilege

By Matt Kavanaugh

On this hallowed eve of October 31st, the eve of All Saints, there is no better time to reflect on the importance of religious freedom and its place in the world. In some places like the USA, we take this concept for granted. In other parts of the world, many people are judged for what they believe and even openly tortured. In this essay we will examine some of the reasons why people deserve religious freedom without any interference.

Religious freedom is important for billions of people across the world, including us Catholics. If governments were unwilling to provide their citizens with the ability to practice their religion, it would be a violation of their human rights. Everyone has the right to freedom of the mind and soul, and this would be infringed upon if all people were required to practice a certain religion. The American Colonies were founded in the 17th century when the British government was not providing its people enough freedom of religion. They set the foundation for the USA, a place where the government cannot legally force us to practice a certain religion, or any religion at all as deemed by the First Amendment. Since the 1700s, many other countries have recognized the right to religious freedom and now grant their citizens the right to practice the religion of their choosing. This differs from the religious specialization of nations that had occurred in earlier times. Government should be about keeping order and well-being of the state, not about trespassing upon personal thoughts and beliefs.

If religion is controlled by the state, it becomes an immense institution that actually violates the moral of the religion itself. This can be seen in many parts of the world today. For example, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) will torture and kill people that do not believe what they do. In North Korea, the government enforces an atheist state and those who practice their religion in the public eye may be persecuted. Throughout history, the unification of church and state has led to the justification of malicious acts, such as the Crusades. Do you think God wants us to commit mortal sins just to defend our religion? What is the point of believing if you have no moral values? Government is much more likely to turn corrupt and protect only a select group of people than to provide for the needs of everyone, which is not the philosophy behind Catholicism or most other world religions.

Many charitable acts occur from religious organizations not funded by the government. The leaders of a nation can only do so much to help its people. Here in the USA we rely on many non-profit charities to help people who are in need. For example, groups like the Salvation Army and United Way help many people by providing people with basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. More importantly, most of these organizations began from religious roots, so that tells you how much religion has really contributed to our society. In other words, without freedom of religion, people would be

unable to express their beliefs in public through the creation of religious charities and other organizations. Simply put, the world would not be as good a place as it is today.

In conclusion, religious freedom is important for all people as it is a basic human right, government can become too powerful and corrupt when religion is involved, and charities may not have as much impact if not based on religious principles. Pope Francis may have said it best: "May you defend these rights, especially your religious freedom, for it has been given to you by God himself."