



HAL
open science

How far has the holy see fostered religious freedom from Vatican II up to now?

Blandine Chelini-Pont

► **To cite this version:**

Blandine Chelini-Pont. How far has the holy see fostered religious freedom from Vatican II up to now?. Universality of Human Rights or Imperialism of the Universal? Seeking Grounds to Stand on. A Homage to Professor David Little. Princeton Theological Seminary, Aug 2017, Princeton, United States. hal-02294817

HAL Id: hal-02294817

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-02294817>

Submitted on 23 Sep 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**IRLA Meeting of Experts, The Erdman Center,
Princeton Theological Seminary, August 29-31 2017
UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS OR IMPERIALISM OF THE UNIVERSAL?
SEEKING GROUNDS TO STAND ON**

**A HOMAGE TO PROFESSOR DAVID LITTLE (HARVARD UNIVERSITY)
FOR HIS SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THE IMPERATIVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF**

HOW FAR HAS THE HOLY SEE FOSTERED RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FROM VATICAN II UP TO NOW?

Blandine Chelini-Pont, LID2MS, Aix-Marseille University

The Catholic Church belatedly included religious freedom in its doctrine with a foundational text that came out of its last ecumenical-universal Council, the Second Vatican Council, held between 1962 and 1965. This text was promulgated fifty-one years ago, on December 7, 1965, as the *Dignitatis Humanae* Declaration. It was a kind of Copernican revolution.

Medieval tradition

Let me recall the theological and practical past of this Church. During the long Middle Ages, it was taught by her that truth and error couldn't have the same rights or be treated equally. So, truth should be protected in consciences and in society by civil authorities. That meant there was no place for any kind of freedom of conscience nor any kind of political independence for civil powers to not protect the rights of the true religion against the false ones. Concretely, what was predominant in the medieval past was the preservation and wide spread of the true religion taught by the Catholic Church. It meant not only that open criticism, attempts at dissent or true heresies would need immediate eradication, but also that Catholic laws should be incorporated and imposed on all people by the civil powers. It meant not only that forced conversion would finally be justified as a necessity of salvation for the lost souls of false religions, as practiced in the modern age by Hispanic and French Churches against Jews, Muslims or Protestants as well as against natives in the American and Asian colonies, but also that it was justified to protect the souls themselves from any kind of doubt, trouble or dangerous ideas. There was no freedom of conscience, no freedom of thought, no freedom of worship, no freedom of nothing, whilst at the same time Catholic theologians recognized and highly valued the role that human will played in religious adherence.

To be fair, there was a debate among theologians at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern one. Isabelle Poutrin, a very eminent French historian, has been looking at this debate, spending years researching archives related to the Spanish Inquisition and in particular forced conversions and their justification by Catholic canonists. The debate focused on the best

methods for maintaining the true religion: either by means of legal prohibitions and by force, if necessary, on the part of the civil authorities, or, better still, by persuasion. What kind of persuasion? Christ-like persuasion by means of more charity work, pastoral teaching, admirable testimonies of faith, personal sacrifices and martyrdom, rational and brilliant demonstrations of what the truth was, more holiness on the part of the clergy, religious orders or civil elites of the nobility and the royal European circles.

So, before the humanistic period, there was a deep compassionate tendency within this Church to highlight uplifting examples of the true faith, and another strong tendency, an uncompromising and vigilant one, which justified constraining people (even by condemning them) rather than allowing the collective body of the Church to be corrupted.

19th century

I don't have the time to present the historical steps taken by this Church in abandoning her highly uncompromising position. There were internal and external steps, together linked by the movement of history. But in the middle of the 19th century, things had moved far enough for there to be no more forced conversions under the responsibility of civil Catholic authorities. The Catholic doctrine accepted to tolerate silent faith dissenters, but not the open right to conscience. She still barely justified maintaining publicly, when possible, the sole presence of the Catholic Church as a public religion, coupled with toleration for other cults if they remained private or hidden.

This position at that time was no longer sustainable in many countries, nor for many Catholics then living in separation systems like the American one, nor for intellectuals who defended "liberalism" within the Church. So, we could assert that the famous 1864 papal encyclical *Quanta Cura. Condemning Current Errors*, which came with a written list of those so-called errors entitled *Syllabus of Errors*, was the ultimate attempt at maintaining this traditional position.

Let me quote extracts from this text before reading the condemnations themselves:

And, against the doctrine of Scripture, of the Church, and of the Holy Fathers, they [the adepts of the impious and absurd principle of "naturalism"] do not hesitate to assert that ... erroneous opinion, most fatal in its effects on the Catholic Church and the salvation of souls, called by Our Predecessor, Gregory XVI, an "insanity", that "liberty of conscience and worship is each man's personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society; and that a right resides in the citizens to an absolute liberty, which should be restrained by no authority whether ecclesiastical or civil, whereby they may be able openly and publicly to manifest and declare any of their ideas whatever, either by word of mouth, by the press, or in any other way." But, while they rashly affirm this, they do not think and consider that they are preaching "liberty of perdition"; and that "if human arguments are always allowed free room for discussion, there will never be wanting men who will dare to resist truth, and to trust in the flowing speech of human wisdom; whereas we know, from the very teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, how carefully Christian faith and wisdom should avoid this most injurious babbling."

The *Syllabus* condemned, among others, the following affirmations:

15. *Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true.*

16. *Man may, in the observance of any religion whatever, find the way of eternal salvation, and arrive at eternal salvation.*

17. *Good hope at least is to be entertained of the eternal salvation of all those who are not at all in the true Church of Christ.*

18. *Protestantism is nothing more than another form of the same true Christian religion, in which form it is given to please God equally as in the Catholic Church.*

24. *The Church has not the power of using force, nor has she any temporal power, direct or indirect.*

77. *In the present day it is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship.*

78. *Hence it has been wisely decided by law, in some Catholic countries, that persons coming to reside therein shall enjoy the public exercise of their own peculiar worship.*

79. *Moreover, it is false that the civil liberty of every form of worship, and the full power, given to all, of overtly and publicly manifesting any opinions whatsoever and thoughts, conduce more easily to corrupt the morals and minds of the people, and to propagate the pest of indifferentism.*

Then, when the 1965 Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* was passed by 2,208 bishops against 70 during the ecumenical Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church and then promulgated by Pope Paul VI, almost one hundred years after the *Syllabus of Current Errors*, it could be truly said that it was a Copernican move.

Interwar experience

In great part, this change came about thanks to the long-lasting effect of many forces within the Church trying to conceive the Catholic Tradition within the inexorable evolution of the Western world. The text itself was principally the end result of many debates and drafts by the American theologian and Jesuit professor John Courtney Murray, with Pope Paul VI himself correcting its final version. But, this text was also preceded by years of “physical” experiences of religious coercion and totalitarian persecution during the interwar period in Russia, then in Germany, and to a certain extent in Italy and Mexico, with the latter going through a deep crisis provoked by liberal and anticlerical measures. Then there was the Second World War, the Jewish genocide and Nazism in its full destructive power.

All these experiences changed completely the political thought and sense of priorities of the Catholic Church, and gave her tools to correlate the defense of her own liberties and her persecuted believers with freedom and dignity for others who suffered the worst persecution because of their religion. The Catholic Church was pushed to admit religious freedom as a benefit within the wider benefit of the rule of law based on universal rights, then seen as the most protective legal and political regime.

Let me quote some extracts this time from the interwar, Second World War and postwar period, where we can follow signs of this conceptual shift.

The first one comes from the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* against Nazism, in which Pope Pius XI wrote that *“The believer has an absolute right to profess his Faith and live according to its dictates. Laws which impede this profession and practice of Faith are against natural law”*.¹

¹ Source: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius11/p11brenn.htm> [paragraph 31]

Another extract comes from the 1937 encyclical *Firmissimam Constantiam* protesting against Mexican secularism: “[the Church’s] members have the right to find in civil society the possibility of living according to the dictates of their consciences”.²

Another statement was made by Pope Pius XII in December 1944 in his famous Christmas message: “Taught by bitter experience, [the peoples] are more aggressive in opposing the concentration of dictatorial power that cannot be censured or touched, and call for a system of government more in keeping with the dignity and liberty of the citizens.”³

The Dignitatis Humanae Declaration

Let me quote now from the *Dignitatis Humanae* Declaration of 1965. Its full title is: *Declaration on religious freedom: Dignitatis humanae. On the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in matters religious.*

Paragraphs on the freedom of conscience and religion:

2. This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

4. The freedom or immunity from coercion in matters religious which is the endowment of persons as individuals is also to be recognized as their right when they act in community. Religious communities are a requirement of the social nature both of man and of religion itself. Provided the just demands of public order are observed, religious communities rightfully claim freedom in order that they may govern themselves according to their own norms, honor the Supreme Being in public worship, assist their members in the practice of the religious life, strengthen them by instruction, and promote institutions in which they may join together for the purpose of ordering their own lives in accordance with their religious principles.

6. Finally, government is to see to it that equality of citizens before the law, which is itself an element of the common good, is never violated, whether openly or covertly, for religious reasons. Nor is there to be discrimination among citizens. It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or fear or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders men from joining or leaving a religious community. All the more is it a violation of the will of God and of the sacred rights of the person and the family of nations when force is brought to bear in

² Source: *Nos Es Muy Conocida. On the Religious Situation in Mexico*, 1937, paragraph 26,

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius11/p11noses.htm>

³ <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/p12xmas.htm> (paragraph 12). See also:

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/p12xmas.htm>

<https://curate.nd.edu/downloads/2z10wq00w1b>

any way in order to destroy or repress religion, either in the whole of mankind or in a particular country or in a definite community.

Besides this Declaration, two other texts were produced by the Second Vatican Council in which the Church recognized its links with other monotheistic religions and other Christian Churches: the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* in which non-believers are said to be in search of God, and the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*) which even recognizes that non-Christian religions could “reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, She proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.”⁴

As the Catholic and French theologian Cardinal Yves Congar, one of the prominent inspirers of the Council, stated: “one cannot deny that such a text materially says another thing than the *Syllabus*, and even quite the contrary of its proposals 15, 77 and 79”. Father John Courtney Murray, comparing the two positions, the traditional one and that taken by the Second Vatican Council, wrote: “Their divergences are at a deeper level, so profound that it could be difficult to go further.” Murray also wrote, regarding the role of public authorities in religious affairs (*cura religiosus*), that the two positions, the traditional and the new, “were either contradictory, or contrary”... Last but not least, Cardinal Ratzinger, in his 1985 book *Principles of Catholic Theology*, admitted that the Declaration was a new thing, of course extracted from and inspired by the Catholic Tradition. He however used very strong words regarding the Second Vatican Constitution called *Gaudium et Spes*: “If one is looking for a global diagnosis of the text, one could say that it (along with the texts on religious liberty and world religions [*Dignitatis Humanae*, *Nostra aetate*]) is a revision of the *Syllabus of Pius IX*, a kind of counter-*Syllabus*.”⁵

To sum up the whole change, in *Dignitatis Humanae* the Catholic Church worked out how She saw the relation between truth and freedom. From this point on, She has taught that human beings are destined to achieve their salvation and/but need to do so freely, therefore, they will be protected, anywhere and at any time, by political, civil and legal powers so they may find God and then adore Him.

The diplomatic struggle for religious freedom

Since the publication of this foundational text, religious freedom has become a major diplomatic issue for the Vatican State – a fictional international state that is nevertheless recognized by 186 others and is active in many international organizations and events.

1. The first and often unknown consequence of the Declaration is its application to the Catholic Church itself regarding her agreements and concordats signed by the Vatican with different states. All countries where the Catholic religion was the state religion modified their constitutions or changed the contents of their concordats with the Vatican: Spain in 1967, Italy in 1984, Colombia in

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (paragraph 2)

⁵ https://www.traditioninaction.org/ProgressivistDoc/A_031_RatzingerCouterSyllabus.htm

1973, and so on. Spain could be the most relevant example: in the Concordat of 1953 it was written that the “*Apostolic Roman Catholic Church will continue to be the sole religion of the Spanish State*”. In doing this, it confirmed a law already brought in by Franco's regime. This stipulated that no one would need to worry about the private exercise of his/her religion, but that only the public manifestations (such as exterior ceremonies) of the Catholic religion would be permitted. Under Vatican pressure after the Second Vatican Council, Franco's government granted entire freedom of worship to any religion through the Law of June 28, 1967: “*The profession and practice, public as much as private, of any religion will be guaranteed by the State, with no other limitations than those established by article 2 of the present law.*” In a certain sense, it is because of Catholic diplomacy that Catholic confessional states disappeared at the end of the 20th century.

2. Since 1965, as I have just mentioned, Catholic diplomacy has been consistently in favor of religious freedom. Because of this specific diplomatic preference, every decade religious freedom has been defended on the basis of prevailing geopolitical contexts and has thus been given different flavors depending on the decade and, if I may say so, on a discrete tendency to strengthen the defense of religious freedom when it suited strict Catholic interests.

a. First moment: the seventies and the use of religious freedom in the Vatican Ostpolitik

During the seventies, the most important initiative taken by this Church in its role as a “state” was the Holy See's participation in the July 1975 Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which we can say was essential to the reopening of Eastern European countries. During it, the USSR accepted to include human rights as binding obligations of the Accords, which consequently led to frequent reports and missions being conducted beyond the Iron Curtain to check how thoroughly they were respected.

For the first time, the Holy See was participating in a “political” international conference and did it because it had been invited by Warsaw Pact countries thanks to its paradoxical Ostpolitik designed by Archbishop Agostino Casaroli during the sixties (he concluded an agreement with Communist Hungary and Yugoslavia despite tremendous persecutions against Christians and especially against Catholic clergy). The Ostpolitik was led by Cardinal Villot, the Holy See's Secretary of State, who explained this attitude through the fact that these agreements at that time weren't a *modus vivendi* but a *modus non moriendi* (a way to stay alive).

During preparatory hearings, the Holy See was successful with representatives of the KEK (the Conference of European Churches, which has brought European Protestant and Orthodox Churches together since 1948) in introducing religious freedom and freedom of conscience as an important point of the treaty. Msgr Casaroli, Secretary of the Vatican's Council for the Public Affairs of the Church and President of the Helsinki Conference, signed the Final Act. A message was sent to the Conference by Pope Paul VI, explaining that the common heritage of Europe was that of universal values and human rights. Several historians consider Helsinki as the first step in the “irreversible” erosion of the Communist world enabled by this Ostpolitik.

There indeed lay a wager at the basis of the Vatican's Ostpolitik: by obtaining an opening or a greater space (when the space already existed, like in Poland) for religious freedom in Communist states, there could also be greater hope that these states would evolve. This wager was made by Pope John Paul II who nominated Msgr Casaroli as his new Secretary of State.

b. Second moment: John Paul II's era and the use of religious freedom in global human rights politics.

Pope John Paul II was Archbishop of Krakow during the Second Vatican Council and intervened in the debates on religious freedom as a witness to what its absence meant. It was precisely during his pontificate that religious freedom was developed as an anti-totalitarian weapon for the Eastern Churches in Europe and then elsewhere like in China. The number of official initiatives, speeches, and actions increased as human rights were evoked constantly. Furthermore, religious freedom was then presented by the pope as an unavoidable condition for the Church anywhere to accomplish her mission. For example, in Cuba in January 1998: *"Today, as forever, the Church in Cuba desires to gain the necessary place to continue serving everyone in accordance with the mission and teachings of Jesus Christ."*

A few days later, in José Martí Square, JP II defined freedom of conscience as *"the basis and foundation of the other human rights"*. On different occasions such as during his addresses to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, JP II repeated that religious freedom *"could never be isolated, and should be defended as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression and cultural and political pluralism"*.

c. Third moment: Pope Benedict's era and the Church's defense of religious freedom as a social right

The stance taken by Benedict and Vatican diplomats in the 2000s was to recall that religious freedom was really the primary human right because it expressed the most fundamental reality of human persons searching for the truth without being constrained to act against their conscience, but at the same time practicing together, living peacefully within their religious community in a pluralistic and respectful society. Religious freedom was thus connected with pluralism, and protecting pluralism by law was seen as the best way to prevent or diminish a rise in intolerance and discrimination. All religious communities had the right to be respected in all societies, in their worship as well as in the symbolic manifestations of their identity.

This orientation made it possible to bring together two very different types of adversaries within the same denouncement: the secular one and the intolerant Islamic other. It is very interesting to note how this pope (and his diplomatic staff) succeeded in bringing together these two very different issues, namely, moral-ethical Western liberalism coupled with social, political and legal constrictions on the one hand, and the failure of contemporary forms of Islam succumbing to renewed forms of intolerance, discrimination and even genocide under ISIS rule, on the other.

Demanding protection for Christians in countries where they were mistreated as Christians was a big and continuous challenge during Benedict's pontificate and still remains a huge undertaking. In 2010, Benedict convened cardinals from all over the world to consult them on the situation of Christians in the ME and especially in Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan where they are historical minorities. He was at the time deeply concerned by a new trend of blasphemy accusations and death penalties and so, internationally, the Catholic Church opposed blasphemy laws and their implementation in Muslim countries. His 2011 New Year vibrant message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace was dedicated to religious freedom as the path to peace.⁶

On the occasion of his 2012 Address to the diplomatic corps in the Vatican, Benedict restated that *"[i]n many countries Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. At times they*

⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html

are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second-class spectators of national life.”⁷

Then, in the same address, Benedict changed his target to “Western countries”, regretting the fact that “[i]n other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society, as if it were a cause of intolerance rather than a valued contribution to education in respect for human dignity, justice and peace.”⁸

What we can discern, behind these words, is a demand for religious citizens to be respected and listened to on social and life issues in their Western societies, and to be allowed to actively engage with politics and the law-making process. Special concerns about and a desire to protect Christians in European countries began to emerge because of their discrimination due to social pressure or contempt for their morally backward attitude. In October 2010, a new Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe was created by the Council of the Bishops’ Conferences in Europe with the blessing of Pope Benedict and, since then, hundreds of anti-Christian acts have been recorded: 180 in 2011, 600 in 2012, 1,700 for the years 2014 and 2015, etc. Vatican diplomats have reported these figures at many meetings. Recently, in January 2015, Msgr Gallagher, a British cleric appointed by Pope Francis as Secretary for Relations with States, was pleased to announce that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved, after three previous resolutions on religious freedom between 2011 and 2013, a new resolution entitled “Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians”.

It could be paradoxical then that, at the moment when voices were being raised in Europe, or in the UN and the powerful Organization of Islamic Cooperation, denouncing religious and social discrimination against the Muslim population of Europe, we see Catholic counter-mobilization denouncing Christianophobia on the same continent.

d. Fourth moment: the current era of Pope Francis

In these past few years, we have again reached a new stage. Under Pope Francis, religious freedom has been connected with a renewed vision of justice in societies. Of course, he seems to continue Benedict’s line, especially with regard to the fate of Arab Christians (and non-muslim people) in Syria and Iraq. His diplomacy has had some success, such as in June 2015 when an agreement was signed between the State of Palestine and the Holy See on the protection of all religious (Christian) minorities. Mobilizing for Christian security wherever Christians are in a minority has been Rome’s primary objective for the past 20 years. In July of this year 2017 in Rome, an International Conference on “Protecting Religious Communities” was organized by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Milanese think tank Institute for International Political Studies. Msgr Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States, opened the floor pleading for the return of Christians to the Mosul area as a concrete challenge for rebuilding Iraqi society. At this conference, a new Observatory on Religious Minorities in the World and on the Respect for Religious Freedom was announced under the Italian Ministry’s responsibility. Its President, Prof Salvatore Martinez, is also Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions.

⁷ http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120109_diplomatic-corps.html

⁸ Ibidem

Francis seems to be continuing Benedict's line, but he has been emphasizing some low polarities within it. Francis connects effective religious freedom with mutual understanding between people in pluralistic societies. I quote Francis: *"Religious freedom is a fundamental right which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors whose religious views differ from our own."*⁹ Any restriction of religious freedom undermines social coexistence and paves the way for conflicts, radicalization, and religious fundamentalism.

New words have appeared in papal diplomatic speeches as in the one given in Rome before the EU heads of states and governments on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the first European Community, or the 2014 speech before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: words like multicultural world, multipolar societies, direct and institutional dialogue between civil authorities and religious denominations. It seems that now the diplomatic policy of the Catholic Church is to promote the protection of religious pluralism as a reflection of a just and peaceful society.

Conclusion: Catholic hiatus

I cannot deny that this top-level diplomatic line is not perceived or shared by all national Catholic churches nor all Catholics. Far from it. Given the strong national traditions within it and her huge size, the Catholic Church can reflect many contradictory positions. Pope Francis is being challenged by at least one other more intransigent and vindictive branch of the Church.

Pope Francis's line consists now of mixing religious freedom with interreligious dialogue and refugee relief and welcome, calling for no restriction in any of these fields. Does everyone recall his trip to Greece and the fact that he brought a Syrian Muslim family with him on his flight back home? Or his first visit to Lampedusa island in 2013, just after his papal election, to meet with black illegal migrants who had been saved from death? Last August, 21 (2017), he focused on welcoming refugees by calling for joint programs between public and private actors, a new kind of humanitarian visas, etc. The current director of the Paris School of International Affairs, Enrico Letta, former head of the Italian government (for one year in 2013-2014), has said that the migrants are for Pope Francis what the Wall (Iron Curtain) was for John Paul II. If we paraphrase Francis's words, he could call this new wall "the wall of world disinterest".

But the challenge he faces is that Catholic priority on religious freedom could easily be limited to the protection of Catholic or Christian minorities who are discriminated against or persecuted around the world. It is difficult to distinguish this special and crucial call for protection from Islam-phobia and its extension to Muslim foreigner workers, migrants and refugees portrayed as false and dangerous refugees. Let me explain the difference: in June 2017, President Donald Trump appointed Senator Samuel Brownback, Governor of Kansas, as the new American Ambassador-at-large for Religious Freedom around the world. Senator Brownback converted to Catholicism in 2002. This new Ambassador is known not only for his very strict position on abortion, intelligent design, freedom of education, etc. but also for his anti-Islamic positions. He has signed a state bill in Kansas preventing state courts and agencies from using Islamic or other non-US laws when making judicial decisions, as it could have been ever the case. The Council on American-Islamic Relations in Washington denounced the Kansas law and its spokesman, Ibrahim Hooper, said "[it

⁹ <https://cruxnow.com/papal-visit/2015/09/26/francis-the-right-to-religious-freedom-is-fundamental>

was] unfortunate the governor chose to pander to the growing Islam-phobia in our society that has led to introduction of similar unconstitutional and un-American legislation in dozens of state legislatures". In January 2016, after the Paris terrorist attacks, Brownback withdrew Kansas from the list of states participating in a federal program for refugee resettlement. He forbade Syrians' access to his state in order to protect his citizens from "false refugees".

We have the same attitude in Europe. Eastern countries, with Catholic majorities and the assent of national episcopates, explicitly refuse to let in Muslim migrants on the grounds that they are dangerous or unassimilable people. We have heard very sad reports of families with children and old people fleeing, as millions of Europeans fled from Nazi or Soviet troops during the war, and being suspected by public opinions and media of being terrorists. The media impact of what happened in Munich, Germany in January 2016 during the New Year street parties was tremendous. When women were assaulted by young foreign males, were they refugees, illegal migrants or legal migrants? No matter, they were all male foreign Muslims. The imaginary of sexual predation, machismo and violence perpetrated by Muslims exploded again... And despite very cautious diplomacy and despite the fact that thousands of Christians are working hard in Europe and in other Western countries to help migrants, refugees or long-settled foreign families, the Catholic mood is deeply divided. Many do say the Church has gone too far in her openness and should reconsider her position on showing her concern for Muslim populations which could be persecuted or simply helped.