



### **Introduction**

I was driving down the road going the speed limit, to the exact MPH. Then, in my rearview mirror, I saw someone tailgating me and flashing their brights on and off. I resisted all urges to slow down or brake, and just stayed my course. The lights and tailgating continued for half a mile until the car flew past me, in a no passing zone. Evidently, I was infringing on somebody's right to get somewhere in a hurry. It was not my intent to inconvenience them. I was only executing my right to obey the law. It was unfortunate that our rights collided with one another.

Conflicting rights seem to happen a lot. Employers believe they have the right to require employees to receive vaccinations, yet employees sue employers for taking away their right to be vaccine free. It's a vicious circle and nobody really wins.

I wondered if there was any way to figure out who should win when rights collide. I did some internet searches on human rights and then looked in the Catholic Catechism (CC) to find the Church's position. Here is what I learned...

### **Human Rights**

*"Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being." (CC, 1738)*

That is pretty much all the Church has to say about rights. The Catechism has no list of rights. It simply mentions being free and responsible. The internet had some good information about Human Rights from many organizations, including the United Nations and United States Government. Since the Church did not have a list of rights, those lists were the place to start.

Right away, there was a problem. None of the lists matched. In fact, there were anywhere between seven and thirty rights on any particular list. Some rights were common to all lists: life, freedom, equality, safety and religion, to name a few. Some lists had very unique rights. One list claimed everyone has the right to their opinion. That is reassuring to know!

A bigger problem began to emerge. There were many rights that did not appear on any list, including: the right to an abortion, to avoid vaccines, to obey traffic laws and to get somewhere in a hurry. Without a definitive list, how does anyone know what rights they have or do not have? Furthermore, there are no instructions anywhere clarifying which rights are more important than other rights in the event that rights collide.

Maybe the answer is based on the individuals and not rights?

*"The dignity of the human person is rooted in their creation in the image and likeness of God." (CC, 1700)*

The Church grants dignity, again avoiding rights, to anyone created in the image and likeness of God. Documents published concerning human rights grant rights to "all human beings". It feels like this says the same thing as the Church, but without mentioning God. However, there are problems with this approach as well. Specifically, "what is a human being?".

Some claim that, scientifically, a fetus in the womb is not yet human. This definition means the fetus does not have the same rights as humans, so abortion is acceptable. The Church, though, claims the fetus was created by God and is in the process of being transformed into the likeness of God. The Church's definition means the fetus has dignity, so abortion is wrong. Another collision.

One common right of all human beings is equality. Yet, border walls are built in the United States to deny people from certain countries equal right to work in the United States. If those people are not equal, does that mean they are not human beings?



## When Rights and Freedom Collide

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Human rights do not seem to solve the problem of who wins when rights collide. The word *freedom* often comes up. Maybe freedom is the answer.

### **Freedom**

*“Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility.”* (CC, 1731)

Freedom is also listed as a basic right. Freedom might even be the highest right. If the Church, government or any organization restricts something, all one has to do is say their freedom to do it is being violated. Then, they can do it anyway. This is all starting to sound like mass chaos with no answer at all.

*“The exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything.”* (CC, 1740)

Hold the horses! The Church finally mentions the word *right*, but states there is a right people do not have. Rights are supposed to be things that cannot be taken away. And freedom cannot be freedom if there are restrictions. Will the confusion ever end?

### **Getting Answers**

*“The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good.”* (CC, 1926)

OK, the Church keeps bringing up the word *dignity*. What is that? The dictionary defines dignity as *“the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed”*. Here is a clue as to why the Church does not publish a list of rights in the Catechism. If the focus is on dignity, rights are not even necessary.

The Church says to focus one's attention outward for the *“common good”*, not inward for one's own good. To give others dignity (worthiness, honor and esteem) requires granting them life, freedom, equality and every other right contained in every list. Even the right to an opinion. The [International Bill of Rights](#) agrees that one needs to look outward not inward. It explains rights are something individuals inherently have as a human being (whatever that is) and each human being should protect the rights of all others. Rights are not something an individual claims for themselves.

We are starting to get somewhere. But is freedom limited when one has to act solely for the good of others?

*“The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to ‘the slavery of sin’.”* (CC, 1733).

The opposite of freedom is slavery. Slavery to sin means that one no longer has the ability to choose between good and evil, because sin dictates actions. Addiction is the ultimate example of slavery, as one becomes completely unable to choose anything except the object of addiction. Sin convinces the person that everyone else must give them the freedom to choose their addiction. In reality, the addiction has already chosen for them.

It's really like a magician performing a forced card trick. The magician fans out the cards and says “pick any card”. The subject picks what they think is a random card of their choice. In reality, the card pick was predetermined. They were never going to choose any other card but that card. Still, they are happy with their random choice.

### **Conclusion**

Rights and freedom are not the answer to the world's problems. Rights are often used as nothing more than an excuse to justify actions already predetermined. Freedom is not the right to do anything, but is simply the right to choose between good and evil. Slavery to sin takes away freedom, as one has no choice but to follow the bonds of sin. Slavery to pride and self-centeredness eliminate one's ability to freely choose actions that benefit the common good. Slavery to sin means there will always be tailgating, drunk driving, aversion to vaccines, abortion and so on.



## *When Rights and Freedom Collide*

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Christians must live on a higher plain. Slavery to sin must not take away the Christian's freedom to choose between the common good and self-righteousness. Christians will never be a light to the world unless they make different choices than the world makes. Dignity should be the rule for everyone created in God's likeness, including: the child in the womb, abortionists, those living south of the border, idolaters, LGBTQ, even that tailgater!

The world, enslaved to sin and selfishness, does not choose good because it has lost its freedom. Christians, not of the world, are free to choose good and should be a light to the world by all their choices.