



**(CCCB – Ottawa)...** The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) today released a [pastoral letter on freedom of conscience and religion](#)

. Issued by the CCCB Permanent Council, the letter expresses concern about an “aggressive relativism” in Canada that seeks to relegate religion to the private sphere.

“Legitimate secularity draws a distinction between religion and politics, between Church and state,” the pastoral letter states, but is open to the engagement of religious beliefs and faith communities in public debate and civic life. “Radical secularism”, however, excludes religion from the public square “and from freely engaging in the public debate necessary for shaping civic life.”

In its pastoral letter, the Permanent Council explains why freedom of religion and conscience is necessary for the common good of countries such as Canada where religious diversity is the norm. When religious freedom “is threatened, all other rights are weakened and society suffers,” the pastoral letter states. “Freedom of conscience,” the letter explains, “is a necessary condition for seeking the truth and for adhering to that truth once it is sufficiently known.” Emphasizing that the right to religious freedom includes the right to live out one’s faith in the public square, the pastoral letter states that “attempts to limit expressions of religious faith to places of worship ... should be judged as a serious curtailment of a guaranteed right.”

The Most Reverend Richard Smith, Archbishop of Edmonton and President of the CCCB, noted

in his [introduction to the pastoral letter](#) that it is “addressed to everyone of good will, calls on Catholics, all believers, and even those of no faith, 1) to affirm the right of religion to be active in the public square, 2) to maintain healthy Church-State relations, 3) to form consciences according to objective truth, and 4) to protect the right to conscientious objection.” Archbishop Smith also noted the letter was being released in preparation for Pentecost. He said the pastoral letter “encourages all faith communities to contribute to the formulation of public policy and the common good, and concludes by exhorting believers not to compromise their convictions, but to stand up for their faith, even if they must suffer for it.”

The [CCCB Permanent Council](#) serves as the CCCB administrative board. Currently composed of 12 Catholic Bishops from across the country, it is responsible for overseeing the activities and policies of the Conference between the annual meetings of the Plenary Assembly of all the Bishops of Canada, and approving how the decisions and recommendations of the Plenary Assembly are implemented.

The letter can be [downloaded](#) freely from [www.cccb.ca](http://www.cccb.ca) . The printed version can be ordered from the CCCB [Publications Service](#) at [www.cccbpublications.ca/](http://www.cccbpublications.ca/)

---

[PDF of the pastoral letter](#)

[Introduction to the pastoral letter by the President of the CCCB](#)

[Summary of the pastoral letter](#)

[Questions for reflection](#)

[To order copies](#)