

Heritage, Religious Freedom, Cultural Integration, Boundaries, and Accountability

Union of Saints

I. Protecting Heritage While Protecting Individual Freedom

A society has a legitimate interest in preserving the cultural heritage that developed among the people who formed its communities over generations. American heritage includes Christian and Catholic traditions, Native American cultural and spiritual traditions, African American traditions, Acadian and French-American heritage, and the traditions of numerous immigrant communities that became part of American society over time.

Protecting heritage can include preserving historic churches, Native cultural sites, cemeteries, monuments, architecture, literature, music, languages, ceremonies, traditional foods, holidays, archives, and other expressions of cultural history. It can also mean allowing families and communities to transmit their traditions to future generations.

Heritage preservation is different from compulsory identity. Preserving Christianity within American history does not require every American to become Christian. Preserving Catholic heritage does not require every American to become Catholic. Protecting Native American traditions does not require every American to adopt Native spirituality.

The principle is therefore **freedom of cultural expression combined with freedom of individual conscience**.

People should be able to practice, preserve, teach, celebrate, or decline a cultural or religious tradition according to their own conscience.

II. Heritage Versus Compulsory Identity

The distinction becomes clearer when several concepts are separated.

Concept	Meaning
Heritage preservation	Protecting historically developed cultural, ethnic, Indigenous, and religious traditions
Cultural expression	Allowing people to practice and transmit those traditions voluntarily
Pluralism	Allowing different communities to exist within a common civil framework
Assimilation	The process by which populations adopt elements of a common civic culture
Compulsory	Requiring people to adopt a racial, ethnic, national, political, or religious

Concept	Meaning
identity	identity
Coercion	Using law, institutional authority, intimidation, violence, or social force to compel behavior or belief

The central distinction is **origin versus compulsion**.

Religions originating outside North America became part of American heritage through centuries of voluntary participation. Christianity itself originated outside North America and subsequently became deeply embedded in American history. Immigrant communities have likewise contributed languages, foods, religious traditions, music, businesses, architecture, and customs to American culture.

The relevant question is therefore not simply whether a tradition originated somewhere else. The question is whether participation is **voluntary, compatible with the common civil order, and respectful of the rights and culture of the American people**.

III. Race and DEI

Racial conflict can arise when people are treated primarily according to racial categories rather than as individuals.

Programs described as DEI can have different purposes and structures. Some address documented discrimination or attempt to expand participation. Other policies can involve racial classifications in admissions, employment, funding, representation, or institutional decision-making.

The important questions are:

- Is an individual being treated equally?
- Is race being used as a qualification or disqualification?
- Is someone being excluded because of racial identity?
- Is a policy addressing an identifiable form of discrimination?
- Does the policy create a new form of unequal treatment?
- Are individuals being required to accept an ideological interpretation of race?
- Are people being treated as representatives of a racial group rather than as individuals?

A society can oppose racial discrimination without requiring forced racial programming or racial hostility toward any population. Protecting people from discrimination does not require denying the legitimate cultural identity of another population.

The principle should be **equal civil standing for individuals while permitting voluntary cultural association**.

IV. Religious Freedom and Religious Coercion

Religious freedom includes the freedom to practice religion and the freedom of conscience. It also includes the freedom to decline a religion.

This principle applies equally to Christianity, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Native American spiritual traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, and other belief systems.

A Muslim should be free to practice Islam. A Jewish person should be free to practice Judaism. A Christian should be free to practice Christianity. A Native American should be free to preserve Indigenous spiritual traditions. A person without religious belief should be free to remain without religious belief.

The conflict begins when voluntary religious practice becomes **compulsory practice imposed upon other people**.

Voluntary practice	Potential coercion
Wearing religious clothing by choice	Being forced to wear it
Attending religious services	Being compelled to attend
Religious education within a family	Compelling unrelated people to accept the teaching
Maintaining a religious community	Using institutional authority to impose religious rules on outsiders
Practicing religious ceremonies	Conduct that violates generally applicable laws or another person's rights
Teaching one's faith	Compelling another person to profess the faith
The same standard should apply to every religion.	

An example: Bell towers are a part of American culture and have been used for centuries, whereas Muslim prayer broadcast over loudspeakers can be a form of compulsory forcing and is not a part of American culture or tradition. It is, rather, a territorial religious practice within a foreign culture.

In the same way, Thanksgiving is a holiday tradition in America that has been celebrated for centuries. Religious animal sacrifice, however, is highly protested, can be harmful to the American spirit, and can cause disease and high levels of stress for both animals and people.

V. Examining Harm Within Religious and Cultural Systems

There is an important difference between **individual wrongdoing** and a practice that has become institutionalized, normalized, or systematically imposed.

An individual can commit a terrible act while belonging to a particular religion, race, ethnicity, or political movement. That does not establish that every person within that population is responsible for the act.

A different question arises when a practice, institution, doctrine, law, or political movement systematically permits, encourages, conceals, or normalizes harmful conduct.

That can be examined through several levels:

1. **Individual wrongdoing** — an individual commits an act.
2. **Cultural practice** — a longstanding practice can be examined for its effects.
3. **Institutional practice** — an organization establishes rules affecting people.
4. **Indoctrination** — people are taught that a hierarchy, practice, or ideology is obligatory.
5. **State coercion** — government uses legal, police, military, or economic power to compel compliance.
6. **Normalization** — harmful conduct becomes socially accepted and difficult to challenge.

This distinction allows criticism of a practice without condemning every individual associated with the community.

VI. Women's Autonomy and Religious Practice

Women's autonomy is one area in which cultural and religious practices can require careful examination.

A woman voluntarily choosing a hijab, niqab, burqa, head covering, religious clothing, or another practice is different from a woman being legally or socially forced to wear it.

The central question is **whether meaningful choice exists**.

The same principle applies to religious practices affecting the body, sexuality, marriage, children, or other deeply personal decisions. Practices can be evaluated according to

consent, age, bodily autonomy, medical evidence, applicable law, and the rights of the people directly affected.

The other concern is forced cultural assimilation, indoctrination, or coercion. For example, normalizing the cultural practice of forcing women to wear hijabs can raise questions about how this may affect a Western culture that rejects this practice. Ultimately, the decision should be up to the culture the foreigner enters. Cultural norms and practices should be respected.

Criticism of a particular practice should remain directed toward the practice, institution, or coercive system involved rather than toward every person belonging to the religion.

VII. Religious Rites and Public Standards

Religious liberty does not mean that every religious practice should be exempt from ordinary civil law.

Religious practices involving children, bodily alteration, animal treatment, public safety, sanitation, property, or other legally protected interests should be examined according to the same basic standards and laws applied elsewhere.

For example, **brit milah**, a Jewish circumcision practice, should be discussed through questions of parental religious freedom, children's rights, medical standards, informed consent, and law.

Similarly, religious animal sacrifice should be examined through animal-welfare law, public-health requirements, zoning, sanitation, and other generally applicable rules.

The principle is:

Religious freedom protects sincere religious exercise, while society must retain the authority to establish generally applicable standards and boundaries that protect human beings, animals, public safety, and the civil order.

Animal, child, or women's abuse should therefore not be viewed solely within a religious context, but within the context of a healthy and lawful society. Acts of abuse should be recognized as wrongdoing, regardless of the religious context in which they occur, rather than being treated as religious or societal norms.

All abuse is wrong.

VIII. Enclaves, Languages, and Cultural Integration

A community maintaining its ancestral language, religion, businesses, food, traditions, and cultural institutions is not inherently harmful.

Cultural continuity can be a legitimate part of pluralistic society.

A different question arises when a community becomes institutionally isolated, rejects the common civic framework, prevents meaningful participation in the broader society, or demands special treatment that removes equal obligations.

Language presents a similar issue.

Americans can preserve ancestral languages while a government or institution maintains common administrative languages and provides appropriate language-access services. The goal can be a common civic framework alongside legitimate cultural preservation.

The distinction is therefore between **cultural preservation and civic fragmentation**.

IX. Natural Assimilation and Civic Integration

When immigrants come to the United States, assimilation does not have to mean abandoning their ancestry, religion, family traditions, or cultural heritage.

In a free society, cultural integration can occur naturally over generations as people participate in the same schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, institutions, laws, civic traditions, and public life.

Natural assimilation is therefore different from forced assimilation.

Forced assimilation attempts to erase a person's language, religion, ancestry, or cultural identity through coercion.

Natural assimilation occurs when people voluntarily become part of the society around them while retaining whatever elements of their heritage they choose to preserve.

An immigrant can remain proud of being Irish, Acadian, Mexican, Indian, Jewish, Muslim, Polish, Italian, or another heritage while simultaneously becoming fully American in civic identity.

This creates an important distinction:

Cultural heritage can be preserved while civic identity is shared.

A healthy society can therefore have many ancestral cultures while maintaining a common civic culture.

X. Why Civic Integration Matters

Social cohesion requires people to have enough shared institutions, laws, civic expectations, and common public identity to live together peacefully.

Immigrants entering American society naturally encounter American institutions, American law, American schools, American workplaces, American communities, and American civic traditions. Participation in those institutions creates opportunities for cultural exchange and gradual integration.

This does not require immigrants to erase their heritage.

It does require recognition that entering a new country involves joining an existing civic society.

A person can maintain a religious faith, speak an ancestral language at home, celebrate cultural holidays, prepare traditional food, maintain family customs, and preserve historical traditions while also participating in the broader American civic community.

The objective is therefore **integration without cultural erasure**.

XI. The Right of a Society to Establish Its Own Civic Boundaries

A nation retains the authority to determine its immigration laws, citizenship requirements, language policies, educational standards, public-safety regulations, and other rules governing participation in its civic institutions.

Americans can therefore debate what level of immigration, integration, citizenship, language access, and cultural accommodation is appropriate for the country.

That debate should concern **laws and public policy**, rather than treating immigrants as inherently harmful because of their ancestry.

Americans also retain the democratic right to reject policies that they believe produce social fragmentation, institutional segregation, unequal treatment, or coercive foreign political influence.

The same principle applies to foreign governments and political movements.

An immigrant may retain affection for a country of origin. A diaspora community may maintain cultural connections with relatives abroad. People may continue to speak another language and maintain international friendships.

Those relationships become a different matter when a foreign government or political organization attempts to exercise coercive political authority inside the United States or demands political allegiance that conflicts with American law and individual freedom.

XII. The Right to Say No to Foreign Political Coercion

Americans can say **no** to coercive conduct, policies, and institutions while continuing to respect peaceful individuals.

Americans can reject:

- foreign political coercion;
- foreign governments attempting to control American civic institutions;
- forced religious observance;
- intimidation based on nationality or religion;
- discrimination against Americans because of ancestry;
- demands that American law give way to a foreign legal authority;
- political movements seeking to eliminate equal citizenship;
- coercive isolation of communities from the broader civic society;
- violence or intimidation justified by foreign political causes.

At the same time, Americans can support peaceful cultural exchange, immigration conducted according to law, voluntary religious practice, international friendship, cultural preservation, and contributions immigrants make to American life.

This creates a distinction between **foreign influence as cultural exchange** and **foreign influence as coercive political authority**.

XIII. Integration Without Erasure

The healthiest conception of assimilation is neither cultural destruction nor permanent separation.

It is participation.

An immigrant does not have to stop being who they were in order to become part of American society. Over time, participation in a common society naturally creates shared customs, shared experiences, shared institutions, and a common civic identity.

Children of immigrants may speak their grandparents' language, celebrate their family's holidays, eat their traditional foods, and preserve their family's religion while also speaking English, attending American schools, participating in American institutions, forming friendships across communities, and understanding themselves as Americans.

That is natural cultural development.

The resulting society can contain many heritages without requiring every community to remain permanently separate.

XIV. The Boundary Between Pluralism and Fragmentation

Pluralism allows different communities to preserve their identities while participating in a common civic society.

Fragmentation occurs when communities become so institutionally separated that common citizenship, common law, common civic expectations, or ordinary interaction between populations begins to break down.

The goal should therefore be:

Many heritages, one civic framework.

That framework allows cultural difference while maintaining equal citizenship.

It permits religious diversity while maintaining civil law.

It permits ancestral languages while maintaining meaningful participation in public institutions.

It permits immigrant communities to preserve their traditions while allowing natural cultural exchange and assimilation.

It permits Americans to welcome newcomers while retaining democratic authority to establish immigration and citizenship policy.

XV. Foreign Identity and American Civic Life

The presence of a foreign cultural tradition does not automatically constitute a threat to American society.

People can retain connections to their ancestral nations while becoming fully participating members of American civic life. Immigrant communities have repeatedly contributed to the development of American culture.

The concern arises when political or religious movements seek to impose a foreign political, religious, or national authority upon people who have not consented to it.

The issue should therefore be evaluated through concrete questions:

- Is participation voluntary?
- Does the group recognize the authority of American civil law?
- Are individuals free to leave the community?
- Are women and children protected from coercion?
- Are members free to disagree?
- Are outsiders treated equally?
- Is political allegiance being compelled?
- Are American laws being respected?

This provides a standard that can be applied regardless of whether the movement is religious, ethnic, nationalist, ideological, or political.

XVI. Population Transfer, Genocide, and Demographic Engineering

Population questions require precise terminology.

Genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, deportation, population transfer, colonization, forced assimilation, persecution, occupation, and voluntary immigration are different phenomena.

Genocide has a specific legal meaning involving acts committed with the required intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

Population movement by itself does not establish genocide.

When examining demographic policies, the relevant questions include:

- Was movement voluntary or forced?
- Who organized it?
- Was violence involved?
- Were people expelled from their homes?
- Was property confiscated?
- Was cultural identity suppressed?
- Was the population deliberately targeted?
- Was there an intent to destroy a protected group?
- What legal authority was used?
- What happened to the displaced population?

Precise distinctions prevent different historical events from being incorrectly treated as identical.

XVII. Political Representation

A democratic society should allow citizens to participate in political life without being excluded because of race or ancestry.

Questions concerning representation should therefore examine the actual rules governing voting, candidacy, districting, political parties, eligibility, public office, and institutional appointments.

A representative does not necessarily have to share the racial or ethnic identity of every constituent. At the same time, citizens should not be prevented from representing their communities because of racial identity.

The governing principle is **equal political citizenship**.

XVIII. Accountability

A society can recognize the possibility of rehabilitation while maintaining accountability.

When an individual commits serious violence, the justice system can impose lawful punishment, supervision, restrictions, and other measures intended to protect the public. Rehabilitation can be part of that system without meaning that responsibility disappears.

The same principle applies to institutions.

If an institution knowingly perpetuates discrimination, abuse, coercion, corruption, or other serious wrongdoing, accountability should address the institution and the individuals responsible for the conduct.

Accountability means that responsibility remains connected to the person, organization, government, or institution that actually caused or enabled the harm.

XIX. The Victim Should Not Become Responsible for the Victimizer

A society should not require an innocent person to accept continued abuse simply because confronting the person responsible might create social conflict.

A victim should not be required to surrender basic civil rights, bodily autonomy, safety, conscience, or equal standing in order to accommodate an ideology, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, or political movement.

Forgiveness can be voluntary.

Rehabilitation can be valuable.

Reconciliation can be valuable.

Cultural tolerance can be valuable.

None of these concepts requires an innocent person to accept continued victimization.

The principle can therefore be stated:

A civilized society cannot make the victim responsible for accommodating the person who harmed them. Accountability places responsibility upon the person or institution that committed, enabled, or knowingly perpetuated the harm.

XX. Drawing the Line

The purpose of boundaries is not to eliminate human differences.

The purpose of boundaries is to establish the point at which one person's freedom begins to interfere with another person's fundamental rights.

A person can maintain a religion.

A family can preserve its heritage.

A community can maintain its traditions.

An ethnic population can preserve its language.

A Native nation can preserve its cultural traditions.

A Christian can practice Christianity.

A Jewish person can practice Judaism.

A Muslim can practice Islam.

A person can reject all religion.

All of these forms of human difference can exist within a society governed by equal civil rights.

The boundary is crossed when **voluntary identity becomes coercive identity**.

XXI. Modern Warfare

Modern warfare presents another example of institutionalized power requiring accountability.

The relevant questions include civilian protection, military necessity, proportionality, displacement, treatment of prisoners, destruction of infrastructure, forced migration, occupation, weapons technology, propaganda, and the consequences of military action for civilian populations.

These questions should be directed toward governments, military organizations, commanders, policies, and documented actions rather than toward entire national, ethnic, or religious populations.

Modern warfare should remain subject to law and accountability because military power does not eliminate the rights of civilians.

XXII. The Parting of the Seas

The metaphor of the **parting of the seas** represents the establishment of a clear boundary between peaceful human difference and coercion.

The objective is not to eliminate diversity.

The objective is to create enough civic space for different people to live alongside one another without requiring one group to surrender its existence, conscience, heritage, safety, or rights to another.

The sea parts between:

voluntary and compulsory,
heritage and imposed identity,
religious freedom and religious coercion,
cultural expression and cultural domination,
political participation and political exclusion,
rehabilitation and abandonment of accountability,
peaceful disagreement and intimidation,
immigration and forced population transfer,
individual responsibility and collective blame.

XXIII. A Principle for 2026 & Our New Year, New You: 2027

The year 2026 can be understood as a moment for reconsidering how a pluralistic society establishes boundaries while preserving human dignity.

Progress should not be measured solely by how many differences a society permits. It should be measured by whether the society protects the individual from coercion, protects their people from persecution, protects historic communities from unjust exclusion, preserves cultural heritage, and maintains accountability for those who cause serious harm.

The objective is a society in which people can retain their ancestry, religion, culture, language, and traditions while sharing a common civic framework.

Human diversity does not require human domination. Cultural preservation does not require compulsory identity. Religious freedom does not require religious coercion. Rehabilitation does not eliminate accountability. Tolerance does not require acceptance of abuse.

The fundamental boundary is:

An innocent and peaceful person should not be forced into another person's ideology, religion, racial conflict, political movement, cultural practice, or wrongdoing.

Society can protect the heritage of its people while protecting the freedom of every individual. It can welcome cultural contributions while maintaining a common civic order. It can recognize wrongdoing within institutions without condemning entire populations.

When coercion crosses the boundary into violence, abuse, intimidation, discrimination, forced conformity, or systematic violation of rights, **accountability becomes a central requirement of a functioning society.**

The goal is not separation because of human difference.

The goal is a clear civic boundary where **freedom remains voluntary, heritage remains preservable, difference remains possible, natural integration remains possible, and accountability remains at the forefront.**