

POPE FLAGGED RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Everywhere Pope Francis went, religious liberty was his most consistent theme.

He opened his trip by addressing religious liberty at the White House, arguing that we are called “to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.” If there were any doubt about what he meant, it was removed altogether when he made his unscheduled visit to the Little Sisters of the Poor later that day. That was a direct shot at the Obama administration’s HHS mandate.

The next day, he admonished Congress of the necessity of “safeguarding religious freedom.” At the U.N. on Friday he emphasized “religious freedom” again, calling attention to “natural law.” He saved his most extensive remarks on this subject for Philadelphia.

On Saturday, Pope Francis spoke outside Independence Hall, summoning the crowd to embrace an expansive interpretation of our first freedom. “Religious liberty, by its nature,” he said, “transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families.” Thus did he shoot down the Obama administration’s position that we should be satisfied with freedom to worship. Similarly, the pope lashed out at attempts “to reduce it [religious freedom] to a subculture without the right to a voice in the public square...” He wants a full-throated exercise of religious expression, one that is not marginalized by secular elites.

Aboard the plane on his way home on Sunday, Pope Francis was asked about Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who refused, on religious grounds, to issue a marriage license to a gay couple. The pope contended that “conscientious objection is a

right—it is a human right.” He added that all human beings are entitled to human rights, including conscience rights.

The Catholic League stood with Archbishop William Lori in commending the pope for his steadfast support of a robust understanding of religious liberty.