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Religion, Period 2

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Defending God-Given Rights

In that fateful summer, in 1794, Marie-Geneviève Meunière, a nun belonging to the Discalced Carmelites walked to her death. Singing the psalm, *Laudate Dominum*, she walked up the steps, where the guillotine was. Lying down on the wooden slab, she slowly closed her eyes and said to herself, what caused me to deserve this? Why must I be persecuted for my beliefs? With her eyes still shut, she heard the blade drop and knowing that her time was at an end, waited for the inevitable. Everything turned black and the life of Marie-Geneviève Meunière came to an end. Religious freedom is an important aspect globally because it is a God given right that needs to be supported through acceptance, practice and courage so that implications such as religious persecutions don't occur. Throughout history, people have been persecuted both in England during the 1600's and the present day situation in Syria.

Prior to 1620, the English Government oppressed anyone who violated Protestantism, to insure a society was created that revolved around one religion. King James I sought to remove anyone who did not participate in church rituals or his church. Sending guards to hunt people who wouldn't succumb to church rituals forced many people into hiding. Priests, however, knowing the consequence if caught practicing a different religion, continued to spread God's message. In England the situation expanded to a point where practicing another faith became too dangerous. The result was many people fled. One of the people who fled was William Bradford.

He, just like many others was an individual seeking religious freedom. He convinced thirty-five people to join him. Helping others seek religious freedom, William Bradford used God's message to inspire others. Just like William Bradford, Father Dujarié, lived in an era where opposing religions were forbidden. Similarly, he pushed through tough times, in hope that something good would happen. Father Dujarié used secrecy to spread God's message. Helping others, he remained faithful and was able to keep opposing religions alive. Because of figures such as Father Dujarié and William Bradford, religion was able to be practiced. The outcome of these two peoples action was that no matter how dangerous a situation might be, religion is the most important factor. With that, Mitt Romney once said: "Religious freedom opens a door for Americans that is closed to too many others around the world. But whether we walk through that door, and what we do with our lives after we do, is up to us." Although it says Americans, the explanation suggests that religion is for everyone. All we have to to decide is what to do with that open door, and if we choose to accept it, what we will do with it in our life. Interpreting this also means we need to take steps so we can accomplish what we want. Both Father Dujarié and William Bradford understood this idea, which is why religion today is able to be practiced freely.

In Syria, Christians being persecuted has been characterized by the amount of death that has occurred, due to the continued practice of an opposing religion. With the first known established group, which was on April 8, 2013, many countries have tried to help Syrians escape the horrible epidemic. Countries, such as the United States, Germany, France and many other European countries have sent aid, as well as accepted refugees. Equivalently, Father Dujarié, went out and accepted people of all faiths. In doing so, he was able to save people from being subjected under one faith. Father Dujarié, who disguised himself as a shepherd, went out to

villages and attended people who needed help. With this act of courage and selflessness he was able to help. Learning to accept others is hard at first, but eventually taking the necessary steps, allows us to walk hand in hand with each other. Both Father Dujarié and many countries around the world see God's children who need help and are willing to risk their life, to save them.

Learning to accept others was illustrated by Micheal Bloomberg, when he said, "We may not always agree with every one of our neighbors. That's life. And it's part of living in such a diverse and dense city. But we also recognize that part of being a New Yorker is living with your neighbors in mutual respect and tolerance. It was exactly that spirit of openness and acceptance that was attacked on 9/11, 2001." With the situation in Syria and the world, not everybody agrees with each other. But, as a children of God, we are called to accept other for who they are, and be willing to take them in. The New Yorkers in this case are all the countries of the world, and we must work together in order to create a world that is more peaceful and tolerant of each other.

Throughout history, people who opposed a belief or religion, have been persecuted, which has been most consequential. As a world and children of God, we are called to accept each other and see God's face in each person. People such as Marie-Genevieve Meunière, William Bradford, the accepting countries of refugees and Father Dujarié, have all mastered this idea that we need to be accepting. Through these people, they give us hope and light in a world that can be rather dark and hateful at times. A closing thought about religious freedom and why it is an important factor in our world today was said by J.K. Rowling, "Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery." Before we can move forward as a world, we must first be able to learn to accept others, and when we are able to conquer that, then we will be able to abolish religious persecution and become a unified world.

