International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation
October 8, 2015
About the Religious Freedom Project

The Religious Freedom Project (RFP) at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs is the nation’s only university-based program devoted exclusively to the analysis of religious freedom, a basic human right restricted in many parts of the world.

Under the leadership of Director Thomas Farr and Associate Director Timothy Shah, the RFP engages a team of international scholars to examine and debate the meaning and value of religious liberty; its importance for democracy; and its role in social and economic development, international diplomacy, and the struggle against violent religious extremism.

The RFP began in 2011 with the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation. In 2014 that support continued, while the project also began a three-year partnership with Baylor University and its Institute for Studies of Religion under Director Byron Johnson.

For more information about the RFP’s research, teaching, publications, conferences, and workshops, visit our website at http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/rfp.

About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

Acknowledgements

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Several European countries, the EU, and Canada have recently begun a more systematic treatment of international religious freedom in their foreign policies. The United States has done so since 1998 because of the passage that year of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). In theory, therefore, the potential exists for transatlantic cooperation in promoting religious freedom globally.

However, differences among Western democracies are significant, both with respect to the meaning and value of religious freedom itself, and to the question of how to promote it as an aspect of foreign policy. This dialogue—the first in a year-long series on IRFA policy—aimed to identify these differences and find ways to accommodate or overcome them in the urgent task of advancing international religious freedom.

This day-long event began with a keynote address on religion and modernity by renowned sociologist Peter Berger, followed by responses from Os Guinness and Walter Russell Mead. Then panel discussions featured leading voices from the academic and policy worlds, including Anne Leahy, Sue Breeze, Mustafa Akyol, Monica Toft, and Pasquale Ferrara. Speakers discussed the challenges and best practices for promoting religious freedom abroad; innovative ways to construct a united, transatlantic coalition; and the consequences of religious freedom, including its relationship to violence and extremism. The day concluded with a rousing speech by Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein, who spoke about the lessons other countries could draw from the American experience, as well as opportunities for improving the lives of religious minorities worldwide.

This conference is a partnership of two major initiatives. The first is a year-long series of events on policy associated with the International Religious Freedom Act, which will produce a revised edition of The Future of U.S. International Religious Freedom Policy. This series is sponsored by the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University (together with its partner, the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University), The Review of Faith & International Affairs at the Institute for Global Engagement, and the Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs at Boston University.

The second is a “Bridging Voices” grant from the British Council, awarded to Dan Philpott of the Center for Civil and Human Rights of the University of Notre Dame and to Fabio Petito of the School of Global Studies of the University of Sussex, in partnership with the European University Institute and the University of Milan, to foster a transatlantic partnership on religious freedom. This is the second of two policy dialogues on the subject, the first having taken place at Wilton Park, United Kingdom in February 2015. Generously co-sponsoring the dialogues are the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (BYU) and McGill University’s Birks Forum on the World’s Religions. The conference was followed on October 9 by a close-door policy dialogue which focused on the impact of Western religious freedom policies as well as the state of religious freedom in various regions of the world.
Welcome
Thomas Farr, Religious Freedom Project
Daniel Philpott, University of Notre Dame

Keynote Address: Toward a New Paradigm on Religion and Modernity
Panelist: Peter Berger, Boston University
Moderator: Walter Russell Mead, Hudson Institute
Respondent: Os Guinness, Author and Social Critic

The Case for Religious Freedom Policy
Moderator: Daniel Philpott, University of Notre Dame
Panelists: Mustafa Akyol, Star and Hurriyet Daily News
Allen Hertzke, University of Oklahoma
Sofia Lemmetyninen, European Commission

Keynote Conversation: Overcoming Differences Between Western Democracies in Developing a Common Religious Freedom Policy
Moderator: Timothy Samuel Shah, Religious Freedom Project
Panelists: Pasquale Annicchino, European University Institute
Thomas Farr, Religious Freedom Project
Ahmet Kuru, San Diego State University
Anne Leahy, McGill University

Moderator: Thomas Farr, Religious Freedom Project
Panelists: Sue Breeze, U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Pasquale Ferrara, European University Institute
Nilay Saiya, SUNY Brockport
Monica Toft, Oxford University

Keynote Address: U.S. Religious Freedom Policy: What Lessons Should Other Western Democracies Learn from It?
David Saperstein, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
THOMAS FARR: On behalf of the Religious Freedom Project, welcome to the campus of Georgetown University on this beautiful fall morning. I want to thank Fabio Petito and the British Council; Dennis Hoover and the Institute for Global Engagement; The Review of Faith & International Affairs, of which Dennis is the editor; my old friend and colleague, Cole Durham, and his International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University; Walter Mead of Bard College and editor of American Interest; and of course, the great Peter Berger and the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University, directed by Robert Hefner. I’m grateful to all of you and our other co-sponsors as well.

Let me say a word about the Religious Freedom Project here at Georgetown and the significance of this event today for our activities. The RFP represents a strategic partnership between Georgetown University and Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion, directed by Professor Byron Johnson. I’m delighted that you’re here, Byron. I’m particularly delighted to welcome the president and chancellor of Baylor University, Judge Ken Starr, who is here with us today. Thank you, Judge, for coming.

The Religious Freedom Project has three basic premises—always start with three, especially if you’re a Trinitarian like I am. [Laughter] First, religious freedom is important for individuals and for societies for a whole host of reasons, many of which we will talk about today. For example, we believe human beings are, by their nature, truth seekers. They naturally want to know the answers to the questions about the source of their being, the order of reality, and why they’re here. Is there something after death? No one can live a fully human life if they are not free to pursue these questions and to order their lives in accordance with the answers that they discover.

Religious freedom has social consequences as well; it’s not just important to individuals. It’s highly correlated with other socioeconomic and political goods such as economic growth and development, the consolidation and the stability of democracy, and the undermining of religious violence and religion-related terrorism.

The second premise is that religious freedom is in global crisis. Outside the West, the symptoms include violent, brutal persecu-
tion of religious minorities. Inside the West, including in the United States, the symptoms include increasing government restrictions on religion and rising social hostility to religion, particularly religious actors in the public square.

The third proposition is that these problems are not getting sufficient attention from opinion shapers and policymakers. Our goals at the Religious Freedom Project are to raise the profile of this issue, to build knowledge and awareness about religious freedom and its value to society, and to give a fair hearing to people with different views.

Today’s conference kicks off a year-long examination of U.S. international religious freedom policy. For the past 17 years—a period where we’ve seen three presidential administrations led by both parties—the United States has been required by law to advance religious freedom in its foreign policy. Is this policy a wise one? Is U.S. policy helping the victims of religious freedom around the world? Is it advancing American interests? What, if anything, could we be doing better?

In 2008, Dennis Hoover and I published a little book entitled The Future of U.S. International Religious Freedom Policy: Recommendations for the Obama Administration. It was published at the beginning of what became two consecutive administrations. We’re going to reexamine the premises of that book during the course of this year, beginning today. Then in early 2017 we will reissue the book to the new administration and the new president. What better way to begin this journey than our conference today, “International Religious Freedom: Toward the Model of Transatlantic Cooperation.” Can Western democracies agree in principle to advance religious freedom? If so, can they cooperate in the breach? What are the stakes? What are the obstacles?

Let’s get to it. We have a wonderful lineup of speakers, which you can see in your programs. Let me turn you over to Professor Dan Philpott, director of the Center for Civil and Human Rights at the University of Notre Dame. I’m proud to say that he’s also one of the scholars of the Religious Freedom Project. Please welcome Dan Philpott.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Thank you, Tom. Ladies and gentleman, it is also my pleasure to welcome you to this policy dialogue. I’m Dan Philpott, director of the Center for Civil and Human Rights at the University of Notre Dame. Seventeen years ago, the U.S. Congress mandated religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy through the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. In recent years Canada, Britain, Austria, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, and the European Union have adopted foreign policies of religious freedom in one way or another. Might these democracies cooperate in promoting religious freedom around the world? The premise of such a proposal is that through multilateral cooperation, the promotion of religious freedom would be empowered.

The proposal, though, is not without its difficulties. Would multilateral cooperation water down the pursuit of religious freedom and make it meaningless? Would there be frictiousness over strategy, or all talk and little action? Would the comparatively secular character of European societies inhibit cooperation with the United States? What about Western Europe’s comparatively strong tendency to govern religion through the state? Western Europe and the United States also have different experiences with Muslim populations. Will this affect their ability to cooperate on religious freedom? Even if a cooperative approach to religious freedom were to be developed, how would it play outside the West? Will it foment cultural clash or could the consensus on religious freedom be widened? These are the kinds of questions that we will be exploring over the next two days.

The coalition of sponsors behind the event is itself a remarkable feat of transatlantic, multinational, and multilateral cooperation. The coalition is a confluence of two streams. The series run by Georgetown’s Religious Freedom Project and its related partners—including Baylor University, the Institute for Global Engagement, and Peter Berger of Boston University—is one of the streams that Tom Farr just described. The other stream began with the Bridging Voices grant from the British Council for a series of two policy dialogues on religious freedom across the Atlantic. The architect of these dialogues is Professor Fabio Petito of Sussex University. I want to acknowledge Fabio. These policy dialogues were his brainchild. He was kind enough to approach me at Notre Dame’s Center for Civil and Human Rights to form a partnership. The first of these dialogues took place at the Wilton Park conference center in England back in February. This event is the second of two.

As a dialogue, this event is designed as a mutual and vigorous conversation conducted in the hopes of developing cooperation. Fabio also forged relationships with other partners who were indispensable for this dialogue. One is the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University directed by Cole Durham, who is here with us today. Cole is one of the greatest forces for religious freedom in the world. Cole’s center contributed to this event quite significantly, both in resources and by bringing some 40 speakers and
other participants. McGill University and the Birks Forum on the World’s Religions also contributed their resources and their ideas to today’s event. In addition, we welcome both Anne Lea- hy and Daniel Cere, both of whom bring their distinguished scholarly and diplomatic records in religion and politics. We regret the late cancellation of Professor Armando Salvatore from McGill, who also contributed significantly. Finally, the European University Institute and the University of Milan also contributed to this project. We are grateful for all those here representing these fine institutions.

Now, for the coming attraction, we are honored to have Professor Peter Berger as our keynote speaker and Professor Walter Russell Mead responding to him. We are also delighted to have Os Guinness with us, who will re- spond to Professor Berger. When you think of Os Guinness, the first thing that comes to mind might be, “Is he related to Guin- ness beer?” Well, it turns out that the answer is yes. He is the great-grandson of the founder of Guin- ness, which I think is his most distinguished accomplishment. [Laughter] He’s also the author of 30 books about Christianity, religion, and politics. One of his most central, driving questions is, “How do we live with one another despite our religious differ- ences, and how do we develop a healthy pluralism?” Os is the founder of the Trinity Forum, which has been devoted to these questions, and is a pioneer of what is known as the Williams- burg Charter on religious freedom.

We are also honored to have Professor Walter Russell Mead with us. He is one of America’s great public intellectuals, especially on foreign relations. He is the James Clark Chase Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College and editor-at-large and online director of the American Interest. From 1997 to 2010, he was the Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is the author of the influential Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World, and God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World, a major study of 400 years of conflict between Anglophone powers and their rivals. Walter writes regularly on international affairs for leading newspapers and magazines. If you don’t know of him, chances are you really haven’t been reading. Please join me in welcoming Walter Russell Mead and our opening panel.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: It is really wonderful to be here. It’s an honor to participate in an event of this kind, and it’s a special honor and pleasure to sit on a panel with Peter Berger—although, I have to say, if you sit on a panel with Peter Berger, you need to just give up because Peter will have the best jokes. [Laughter] He has the greatest range of knowledge about the way the world works. He has a scholarly reputation which I, in a dozen lifetimes, could never hope to match. As one of the great human beings in this sometimes difficult world of scholarship, Peter remains someone whom all of us are privileged to know and whom we hope to emulate. So Peter, thank you so much for being here on the panel.

I’m also delighted to sit next to Os Guinness, who I’m sure is well known to many people here. Some of you might know his great-grandfather’s work better than his own work. I’m thinking of a couple of research associates who worked with me; you could say that they live to deepen their knowledge of his grandfather’s work with Guinness beer. [Laughter] Over many years, Os has developed a reputation as one of the sharpest thinkers and most honest contributors to civil society. He is someone who’s helped institutions flourish. He has also done as much to build the civil society conversation about religion in our time as perhaps anyone in the world. So we have some wonderful people here.

I am not going to take up too much time here because I think we’re all waiting to hear from Peter. After Peter has finished his remarks, I’ll ask Os to respond. If there’s anything at all left to say after that, I’ll try to shape up the state of the conversation and maybe ask the two of them to engage each other a little bit, at which point we will throw it open to the floor for questions. But thank you all for coming. I think we are going to have a really wonderful experience.

America needs to reaffirm why freedom of conscience is the first freedom, seeing as there are many intellectuals who no longer believe that. You can see elite newspapers putting ‘religious freedom’ in quotation marks or seeing it as a cover for bigotry. The proper understanding of it is shamefully distant in many of the elite conversations taking place in many of the universities of this country. That is a scandal and a tragedy.”

Os Guinness
PETER BERGER: Well, I think I should begin by letting you in to two secrets. One is that Walter and I have what I think teenage boys call a “pissing contest”—who can tell more jokes about a particular topic? [Laughter] I think it was in Washington a couple of years ago that he and I competed for about 40 minutes, if I remember it correctly, and all we talked about were Romanian jokes. Maybe we should drop everything and do that, instead of talking about the topic or the issue. [Laughter]

The other thing my grandmother told me is never to begin any address with an apology, but looking around I think I owe you an apology. Why? I’m not wearing a tie. [Laughter] And the reason is because I’m uncomfortable enough traveling around in a wheelchair because of very bad arthritis, and I may as well be comfortable further up my body. The secret I should let you in on is that I now work as a consultant for the Greek government, which I think legitimizes that uniform. [Laughter]

What I intend to do in these remarks is to place the issue of religious freedom, which happens to be an issue in which I believe very fervently, in the larger context of the religious landscape today. Any interpretation of the world begins with trying to shoot out of the water other interpretations of the world. That’s very much the case here. When I began my work in sociology of religion—which as some of you know was about the time of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural [Laughter]—I believed in what everyone else believed. It came to be known as secularization theory, which has some very sophisticated expressions but a very basic thesis: the more modernity, the less religion. We thought we lived in an age of religious decline.

It took me about 25 years to conclude that this was a mistake. We don’t live in a secular age. We live in a pluralistic age. This does create specific challenges for every religious faith and every religious tradition, but it’s a different challenge from that of secularity.

For the last few years, I and some other colleagues began a very interesting conference in Germany. It was at the University of Muenster, where a professor by the name of Detlef Pollack runs a program on religion and modernity. He’s been one of the staunch defenders of secularization theory. He’s one of the few people who still stick to secularization theory, and I have criticized him. Yet we agreed on a lot of issues. One of the most
important was that pluralism needs formulas of peace. We need to learn how to create a situation where people manage to live together without killing each other. One of the important events in Western history was the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the horrible religious wars in Europe between Catholics and Protestants. Pollack and I said that we’re doing a Westphalian peace between secularization theorists and their critics, and we’ve kept this up. It’s a very useful relationship.

The basis of whatever I have to say about the religious landscape and its implications for religious freedom comes from that simple idea. We don’t live in a secular age. We live in a pluralistic age. I changed my mind about this—but, let me emphasize, not because of any religious or philosophical changes on my part. Throughout my adult life, I’ve been a moderate but incurable Lutheran, so it wasn’t some kind of new conversion experience that led me to revise my theory of secularization. Instead, it had to do with my reading of the evidence. I looked at religion all over the world. That’s my gig. It’s impossible to say that we live in a secular age. The empirical evidence just doesn’t allow it. We live in a furiously religious age with some interesting exceptions, which have to be explained.

We really have a new paradigm of religion and modernity which focuses on pluralism, a pervasive phenomenon. I published my ideas on this a little less than a year ago in a book called *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward the Paradigm for Religion in the Pluralist Age*. Secularization theory wasn’t wrong altogether. There are two pluralisms. There is pluralism in the usual sense of the word, which means different religions all coexisting more or less at peace. If they don’t, it makes no sense to talk about pluralism. If the Shi’ites and the Sunnis are killing each other, or what Protestants and Catholics did during the Thirty Years’ War is occurring, that’s not what anyone means by pluralism. Pluralism is different religions coexisting, which is becoming more and more a feature throughout the world.

Since I’m at a Jesuit university, let me mention that a few weeks ago six Jesuits from Latin America came to see me. They wanted to discuss pluralism in Latin America, which simply is a very new idea for Catholics. These countries were considered to be Catholic countries, but they’re not monolithically Catholic anymore. That’s a challenge not just for the Catholic Church, but for the self-understanding of these societies.

But then there’s a second kind of pluralism, which is between religious discourse and secular discourse, and it’s inevitable in modern society. Originally based on science and technology, it now has much broader implications. The further implication, which I think is very important, is that this new paradigm allows us to not see religion and modernity in some kind of conflict. Most religious people do not see an either/or relationship between religion and modernity, but a both/and relationship. They manage to be both religious and secular in different levels of sophistication. This immediately relates to religious freedom, because religious pluralism and the relationship between religion and secularity have to be politically managed, through what I call “formulas of peace.” Religious freedom becomes an issue almost immediately once you begin thinking in those terms.

Now look, religious pluralism is not a totally new thing. It has existed on and off in different periods of history in different countries. It always required some kind of political arrangement to make it livable. Edward Gibbon, in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, neatly summarized how the Roman Empire managed the coexistence of different religions. I’m quoting Gibbon’s very famous passage: “The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful.” It’s a very sophisticated, supercilious relation to religion, which I think could have been written by a Confucian. I think it very much describes the classical Confucian scholars who were contemptuous of things like Buddhism and popular religion. They knew better. One could call this pluralism “tolerance by contempt” or “tolerance of pluralism on the basis of contempt.” Let me say in passing that I think the religion policy of the People’s Republic of China is more Confucian at this point than Marxist, though it may become different under President Xi. Think of Gibbon’s formula. I think it’s a good lens to think about China today.

There were a number of different cases throughout history. There were certain periods under the Caliphate of Córdoba in Muslim Spain, what they called the Convivencia, when Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in peace. Under the Mughal Emperor Akbar, Hindus and Muslims lived together in peace in India. In the better years of the Ottoman Empire, there was some kind of religious pluralism, and the millet system did provide certain freedoms and privileges to non-Muslims who were second-class citizens, but they could flourish over long periods of time. Now in Western history, the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the Thirty Years’ War and created a formula of peace. The formula of peace was a territorial formula. The ruler, prince, or king would determine the religion of his country or state. Those
who didn't like it could leave, which was better than being killed or forcibly converted.

This territorial formula works fairly well as long as there is some kind of geographical division between faiths. But if there isn't, then it doesn't work. For example, consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Muslims, Jews, and Christians live in close proximity in a small territory. This is not a very hopeful combination of religious freedom and the state. This is why, for practical reasons, even if one believes in religious freedom as a good in itself, which I do, one should put one's money on some kind of separation of the state and religion. It doesn't necessarily have to look like the formula of the U.S. Constitution, but it should at least resemble it, where the state is not totally identified with a single religion.

There are interesting in-between cases, like the United Kingdom. I like to talk about the United Kingdom because one of the topics here is U.S. foreign policy, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has this wonderful phrase: “countries of particular concern.” They make careful reports about countries where one has reason to be concerned about religious freedom. I think they're being careful to talk both about our enemies like Iran and our friends like Saudi Arabia, who ironically resemble each other.

Well, my question is an interesting one. What does a country have to do to not be of concern? I think one has to be concerned about religious freedom in Russia. If you think there's a concern about the United Kingdom, you have to be crazy. There's as much religious freedom in England as there is in any other Western democracy. So should one be concerned that the queen is still the head of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury has an important position, and the Anglican bishops sit in the House of Lords? I think not. In a way it's like a millet system where the sultan was very, very tolerant of other religions. If the Patriarch of Moscow were to start to behave as the Archbishop of Canterbury now behaves, I don't think we would have to be concerned even if the Russian Orthodox Church is declared to be an important part of the Russian soul.

In other words, whether for practical reasons or for philosophical reasons, I think emphasizing religious freedom is a very practical way of approaching the issue of pluralism. And in my opinion, it's the most effective one—though, let me say again, it doesn't have to be a translation of the First Amendment into Russian or Chinese or Bulgarian. There are different types of separation between religion and the state—some de jure, some de facto. Even in Western democracies there are significant differences, and I'm sure we will discuss this in the next two days.

Religious pluralism means that individuals are constantly confronted with others whose faith is different. Hare Krishnas chant and dance in front of medieval cathedrals in Europe. Protestant missionaries from South Korea sneak into India or China with Bibles hidden in their suitcases. Conversations with neighbors and colleagues of other faiths are commonplace in America. This leads to something I call “cognitive contamination.” If you talk to people in a friendly way long enough, you begin to be influenced by them. That's true in religion as in anything else, and that undermines something that has been true of religion through most of human history: the taken-for-granted nature of a particular religious tradition.

In the United Kingdom, if you ask, “What gods do you worship?” It's analogous to asking today, “What's your zip code or your area code?” Depending on where you came from, you worshipped certain gods; it was simply taken for granted. There were some rebels like Socrates in Athens, but basically, if you were Athenian, you worshipped Pallas Athena.

But that is no longer possible. Religion was once taken for granted. We have lost that, and I think this is a fundamental consequence of pluralism. Christians shouldn't necessarily deplore this consequence, if only for the simple reason that our situation is very similar to that of the late Roman Empire, where Christianity could not be taken for granted because it was totally new. And when Paul preached in Athens, he mentioned the many altars that he saw in Athens. He couldn't appeal to tradition because what he was preaching was totally new.

Now I have to emphasize that fundamentalism in this context is the attempt to stop that cognitive contamination and to restore religion to a taken-for-granted status in the state and in people's consciousness. This is very difficult to do—but this is
good news. You either have to set up a totalitarian state that con-
trols all communications—which is difficult—or set up a sort
of mini-totalitarian state where you don’t have physical power
to coerce people, but you have psychological power instead. In
terms of the consciousness of individuals, pluralism and the loss
of the taken-for-granted nature of religion has been enormously
important.

For religious institutions—churches, synagogues, mosques, and
others—everyone becomes a denomination. Richard Niebuhr
defined a denomination as a church which recognizes the right
of other churches to exist in practice, if not in theory. Everyone
in America becomes a denomination, even Judaism—which, af-
ter all, used to be the religion of a people. If you lived in a shettl
in the old Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia, you had no choice
but to be Jewish. You might not have liked it, since it was not
a good thing to be Jewish, but there was no escape. In America
now there are at least four Jewish denominations. If you count
the different Hasidic schools, you have even more, because each
Hasidic school is in a way a denomination. Every religious group
in America becomes a denomination. The historically avant-
garde character of the United States—a state that was both plu-
ralistic and that legally guaranteed religious freedom—led to this
situation.

Speaking of Jews, there’s a wonderful American Jewish joke.
There is an American Jew who is stranded on a desert island all
by himself. He builds two synagogues, one in which he prays,
and the other in which he wouldn’t be caught dead. That is de-
nominationalism. [Laughter]

A student of mine discovered 60 schools of Buddhism in the
Greater Boston area, ranging from Tibetan Tantric Buddhism
to Zen. The U.S. government, as was mentioned before, is ob-
ligated by law to monitor and to advocate for religious freedom
worldwide. Now that Ireland and Poland have been not-so-slow-
ly sliding toward Euro-secularity, the United States is by any em-
pirical criterion the most religious state among Western societies.
It is also a democracy, and therefore it is inevitable that there
should be pressure on the government to represent the values—
religious and otherwise—of the citizenry within the limits set by
the Constitution. It is also inevitable that this should be resented
as hubris, both by some of our friends and some of our enemies.

Some time ago, I talked with a Swiss diplomat about the annual
report on human rights published by the State Department. He
asked very angrily, “Who the hell are you to give me a grade of
A?” Switzerland gets an A since there are no records of genocide
or anything like that, and it has about two lines in the report.
One sovereign country in the world—the United States—gives
grades from A to F to every other country in the world. That’s a
remarkable development. It creates great difficulties for Ameri-
can diplomats. Diplomats, after all, are required to discuss the
interests of their country with tyrants. It’s not very easy to inter-
rupt an amicable discussion about import duties on coffee with
a little remark like, “By the way, you should stop persecuting so
and so.”

I talked to a young American diplomat in the embassy in Sofia
whose job was to prepare reports on both religious freedom and
human rights. He hated it. He had to spend enormous amounts
of time recording every incident of religious conflict or intoler-
ance in Bulgaria.

The question, “What does a country have to be like to not be
of concern to the U.S. Commission on International Religious
Freedom?” raises very interesting philosophical questions in ad-
dition to practical ones. Is there a minimum acceptable level of
religious plurality before any outside observers will acknowledge
that there indeed exists freedom of religion? What are the mini-
imum requirements before you stop being “concerned”? This
may not be as easy as it first seems. However, given the place of
religious rhetoric in American politics, the question, it seems to
me, has very interesting implications.

I have said enough about why religious pluralism has to be po-
litically managed. The secular space also has to be politically
managed. Historically, the origin of secular space is science and technology, but it has spread into other areas. Science and technology are not possible except in a secular discourse. There is no such thing as a Lutheran dentistry or a Presbyterian physics. There is only good physics or bad physics.

In Boston, I know a very successful Jewish surgeon who is a very friendly guy and whose patients love him. He wears yarmulke in his practice and I think he’s very observant and very serious about his Judaism. His vocation is evident in the warmth he shows his patients and the interest he takes in them. He’s the prototypical, ideal Jewish doctor. But when he’s doing surgery, his faith becomes totally irrelevant in that moment. You can’t see if he has a yarmulke because he wears one of those doctor caps, and every move he makes has to be in a strictly secular discourse. If he’s worried about some move within the operation, he cannot consult the Talmud. If he did, he would be sued even by Orthodox Jewish patients.

Religion and secularity intersect in very interesting ways everywhere and all the time. In Boston, some colleagues and I recently organized a conference on the hospital as a site of interaction between secular space—the medical system—and religion. The hospital is based on modern science and technology. There’s a strict hierarchy. The physicians dressed in their long white robes constitute the clergy. Medical specialists sit on top as if they were gods, and they have lesser clerics under their command. Further down the chain there are masses of nurses and technicians. And lastly, the laity is often dressed in demeaning underwear, waiting and trembling about what sentence the hierarchs will pronounce on them. [Laughter]

Nevertheless, the hospital in modern democracies, certainly in the United States, is constantly infiltrated by religion. For example, in the United States you have chaplains. There’s a wonderful study of hospital chaplains by Brandeis sociologist Wendy Cadge. It has the wonderful title Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine. I also recently met a Buddhist chaplain in Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. In addition to the chaplains, there are also informal religious contacts such as clergy attending to patients, families praying, nurses having Bible study, and so forth. In other words, in an emphatically secular institution, religion constantly comes in.

Now, it’s not just science and technology. Hugo Grotius, who lived from 1583 to 1645, was a Dutch jurist who helped shape modern international law. He proposed that this discipline should be developed “as if God did not exist”—he used the Latin phrase etsi Deus non daretur—and thus become a secular discipline without any theological presuppositions. Grotius did this because he had no choice. He wrote in a Europe which was divided between Protestants and Catholics. You had states defined as Lutheran, Anglican, or Calvinist. You had the Orthodox Christian Russian Empire. You even had the Muslim Ottoman Empire. If international law was to apply to all of them, it could not be in the name of any one single notion of God.

And Grotius, although he himself was a very pious Protestant in the Netherlands, created the format of a thoroughly secular discourse, which is now true of law today in the United States and other modern countries. A judge, whether he is a federal judge or a state judge, has to make a judgment within the secular context. He cannot suddenly inject his Baptist faith or whatever other religion he has into his decision. It’s not allowed because secular space is very important. Obviously, however, Americans are the most litigation-prone people on earth and are therefore constantly occupied with boundary negotiations between the secularity of the law and various religious interests.

Now, looking around the contemporary world, it is not difficult to find many cases—not just in a hospital—where even robust, supernatural-oriented religions can coexist with the secular spaces of modernity. Unlike so much of mainline Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church has maintained such robust supernaturalism. I’ll give you an example. Imagine the pope in his pope-
mobile driving through the vast stretches of the Vatican State on a mission which is clearly supernatural. Let’s say he’s proclaiming a new saint—an act that actually extends the authority of the pope into the other world. But if the popemobile unfortunately does not start, who would his aides call? I’m sure the Vatican has both an exorcism office and a big garage with car mechanics. I think they will call the car mechanics and not the exorcist. This doesn’t mean that the pope doesn’t believe in the possibility of exorcism; it’s just irrelevant for the problem at the moment. This insight can be spun out in many ways, which I unfortunately have no time to do here.

But let me mention one other very important thing, and it also involves religious freedom. Increasingly, countries ask, “What are the basic values and beliefs that we really insist upon as the foundation of our nation and our state?” This is very much an issue that affects immigration policy in Europe today. I think no country can exist without certain common values that people accept and more or less follow. Otherwise, the country would collapse from within and be completely helpless against aggression from the outside. What are the basic values, be they German or French or Italian or whatever, that incoming immigrants, wherever they come from, have to accept?

The United States is rather formal about this. People swear an oath of allegiance upon becoming citizens, something I remember doing years ago and something which other countries don’t require. I think in Britain you just get a letter from the post office that says you are now a subject of the queen. [Laughter] But nevertheless, there is now a discussion of British values, just as there is a discussion about English values and Scottish values. What are the values that really are at the core of what we believe in?

Take the case of German Federal Republic. Its fundamental law, the Grundgesetz, was promulgated in 1949, which was very soon after the establishment of the federal republic. Unlike the United States, where the Bill of Rights came a few years after the Constitution in a separate document, in the German constitution the Bill of Rights comes at the very beginning. It begins with a lapidary sentence that the dignity of men is inviolate: Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. This is, of course, a very powerful statement. Everything else depends on the state preserving the dignity of men.

The positioning of this sentence at the beginning has a historical context, as this was just a few years after the collapse of Nazi Germany. The people who made the constitution were very aware of being guilty of monstrous violations of human dignity. And just a few miles from where the constitutional convention was sitting was the border of the Soviet Union, with its own horrors and violations of human dignity—perhaps not as bad in 1949 as a few years earlier, but bad enough. They must have thought, “No, this is not what we want. These are not our basic values. It’s the dignity of man, which is the basic value from which everything comes.”

But what is the religious basis of this? Many of the people in that constitutional assembly were pious Christians. Catholic social doctrine was important at that time and many of them were very pious Protestants—though at the time Germany was less Protestant than it is now, since now the east has a rather robust Protestant majority. But whether Catholic or Protestant, the parties have called themselves Christian—and still do—but not dogmatically. They were political parties appealing to not just Catholics or Protestants, but to any citizen of the state. The dignity of man certainly has a very interesting implication, and Christians and Jews certainly would have a religious legitimation for that statement. Why the dignity? Why is that inviolate? Because man is created in the image of God, and if you violate human dignity to the extent that the Nazis and communists did, you are spitting in the face of God.

But not all Germans are pious Christians at all—not then, and not now. They had other reasons for asserting this basic principle: an understanding of the human condition and the nature of man, which has many Christian, biblical roots. But some people who do not accept these roots believe in them very fervently; in fact, I know many of them. And that’s the interesting possibility: that people may passionately affirm common values but for different reasons, some of them religious and some of them secular. This has a very interesting implication for religious freedom. The political secular space can itself become a formula of peace, based on a shared recognition of the equality of being human.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: Well, that was a real tour d’horizon. Os, did it inspire any thoughts, responses, or questions in your mind?

OS GUINNESS: Thank you. It’s a tremendous privilege to be here. I did my doctorate on Peter’s work 40 years ago.

PETER BERGER: You regretted it ever since. [Laughter]

OS GUINNESS: My family is Anglo-Irish, so I’m not American. But I would say very simply and straightforwardly that it is time for America to stop squandering her heritage of religious freedom and to do justice to the extraordinary tradition that she
has. James Madison called the American way the true remedy for religion, public life, and diversity. Not far from here, John F. Kennedy talked about the challenge of making a world safe for diversity, just a few months before he died. Clearly, no one has come closer than the American Republic. It is not perfect, considering events such as past anti-Semitism, nativism, Philadelphia riots, and things like that. But maybe it is the most nearly-perfect order in human history, combining diversity with liberty and still achieving such harmony.

Yet after 50 years of culture warring, America is squandering her heritage. I have the privilege of speaking on this topic here and around the world. I’ve spoken in China, Russia, and many, many places. But while you can recommend America, she’s not doing so well herself at the moment. Many of those countries would like to see a reverse report on religious freedom in America, which would be interesting.

I’d like to start with some simple points. First, I will underscore Peter’s main point on the challenge of pluralization. Pluralization is putting enormous stress on all the traditional settlements of religion and public life. I think that when Prince Charles is crowned king in the future, we’re going to have a huge debate in Britain, because our settlement is under pressure. Likewise, the French model of laicite is under pressure, and the American system is under pressure. Most of the world’s settlements are under pressure, not only from the increase of pluralism, but from things like globalization, travel, immigration, the Internet, and social media. All of these are creating this challenge of how to live with our deep differences.

Secondly, I think in this country, America needs to reaffirm why freedom of conscience is the first freedom, seeing as there are many intellectuals who no longer believe that. You can see elite newspapers putting “religious freedom” in quotation marks or seeing it as a cover for bigotry. The proper understanding of it is shamefully distant in many of the elite conversations taking place in many of the universities of this country. That is a scandal and a tragedy. The idea of the freedom of conscience as the inner forum which, when protected, guarantees the outer forum of the public square and allows for a free, responsible, and robust civil debate needs to be anchored back in the American consciousness from the top to the bottom. Religious freedom’s links to civil society and social harmony need to be stressed again.

Thirdly, we need to face some of the weaknesses that the culture war has shown us in handling this issue. I’ll just mention a couple of them. One is illiberal liberalism, and another is unconservative conservatism. Today you can see that religious liberty is attacked and even human dignity is no longer supported, partly because of postcolonial ideas and partly because of postmodern ideas. Even human rights are seen as fiat rights; you can see a dangerous severing of the roots of these ideas. Peter referred to this phenomenon at the end. But I think the crisis is far deeper than he was suggesting. The need for the legitimation of our cultural roots is even stronger.

What do I mean by unconservative conservatism? Anyone who loves freedom and the history of freedom can see this in Montesquieu and in de Tocqueville. They pointed out that freedom is never guaranteed and protected by law alone, though law is precious and fundamental. It is also protected by what Montesquieu calls the spiritual freedom, or what his disciple de Tocqueville calls “the habits of the heart”—in other words, civic education. That has collapsed in America in the last 50 years. There are no “habits of the heart” left in many parts of the country over these issues, and so conservatives are as litigious as liberals. Unwittingly, they’re undermining the very freedom, including religious freedom, which they need to defend.

The harder task, I would argue, would be that we need to assess models, options, or visions for going forward. As I see it, you really have two extreme models in the world today. The first extreme is a kind of sacred public square where one religion or another is preferred or established. Peter referred to England as one mild example. You really couldn’t have a milder version of a sacred public square than the Church of England. Countries like Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are more severe examples. But all these versions of a sacred public square do not do justice to pluralism. Even those who would like to restore the 1950s consensus in this country, such as the religious right, often do not do justice to the pluralism that has increased since then.

The other extreme is the naked public square, which excludes all religions from public life completely. We not only have a growing secular space; we have a growing belligerence of secularists, who are growing in numbers as well. I want to make a strong distinction between three terms: secularism, a philosophy; secularization, an increase of the secular space; and separationism, a deliberate legal attempt to exclude religion from public life. When those three converge—secularism with separationism and secularization—then you have something that looks like the naked public square. That’s disastrous for many, many reasons.

Of course, you have mild versions. The Americans have perhaps the mildest form. The French are stronger, the Turks are even...
stronger, and the Chinese and North Koreans are the strongest. But obviously a naked public square does not do justice to the world's pluralism. What does?

I would argue that the fulfillment and development of America's heritage and promise is a civil public square where everyone of every faith is guaranteed protection of their faith, or the freedom of conscience, in the full sense. This includes the right to adopt, to exercise, to share, and to change their faith. And obviously the third and fourth of those militate against some of the liberal views of proselytism and some of the more conservative Muslim views of conversion. These protections reflect the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights' understanding of the right—which is not what the administration calls “freedom of worship.”

If this right is guaranteed for all, though, it has to be supported by what’s often called the “three Rs”: the rights, responsibilities, and respect that each person owes to everyone else. Civic education must teach that the right for one person is the right for another person, and that there is a responsibility for both of them. So the right for a Christian is the right for an atheist. I would insist that secularist world views are a religion too, since they represent an ultimate belief. And I think the European formulation—freedom of conscience, thought, religion, and belief—is clearer because it includes these secularist philosophies. And some of the European atheists, like Jürgen Habermas, willingly admit that. So for seculars to exclude any religion from public life is highly illiberal.

That notion of civility is often misunderstood today. It is often confused with niceness. It's confused with the sloppy, lowest-common-denominator ecumenism, as if we've all got to dialogue long enough, and we'll eventually all believe the same things. This is not true at all. Religious freedom is the freedom to be faithful. It takes seriously that we're living with differences, and there are very distinctive differences that make a huge difference to public life and to social life. Those are the very things that we've got to debate freely and honestly in our public life.

In other words, we need a reaffirmation here in America of the fundamental first freedom—of freedom of conscience and religious freedom—from the administration across to the last person in this country. We need them to acknowledge that the last 50 years of culture warring have been disastrous. Secondly, we need a restoration of civility. Religious freedom must be separated from all its misunderstandings and restored to its being a virtue and a duty for citizens in a very diverse society. Thirdly, we need a restoration of civic education.

As the much regretted Samuel Huntington said, it’s still relatively easy to become an American, but it is increasingly difficult to know what it means to be American because of the general disappearance of civic education in the last 50 years, especially in the public schools. De Toqueville said at the end of his life that a revolution is rather like a novel; the hard part to invent is the ending. I think the American Revolution got religious freedom almost perfectly right from the beginning—unlike race, women, and various other things. This country has written incredible chapters in the history of religious freedom for people of all faiths, but the present generation is squandering that heritage. It is time for leaders today to rise up and insist on something far more true to America's heritage, and far more effective and demonstrative for the whole world. There's a world problem today. How do we live with our deep differences?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Well, those were two fascinating presentations. I don't want to take up much of the audience's time. But I did want to make two observations. First, I really liked Os’ use of the phrase freedom of conscience. I think once you talk to people about freedom, religious liberty, or freedom of religion, you actually are rubbing some people the wrong way right from the beginning. But the phrase freedom of conscience really covers what we mean by religious liberty and also, of course, the right not to be religious. But I also think freedom of conscience implies the duty of conscience. That is, we believe that freedom of conscience is important because we believe that every human being has a duty to form and then to follow their
conscience. This may be one way of linking the idea of grounding an individual right in some sense of civic duty, which struck me as a tension in the remarks of both speakers.

The other thing I’d like to do is to provide a possible framing idea for some themes that were there in both talks. We’re seeing in the world today the triumph of two somewhat linked but also somewhat opposed revolutions. One is the Abrahamic revolution. The other is the revolution of individualism that, as Peter noted, explains how there could be different truths or different gods in a polytheistic world like the Roman Empire or much earlier. The laws in Athens and the laws in Sparta can be quite different. No one feels troubled by that; it’s just the way things are. But once you get this Abrahamic idea that there is one God who made everything and who is a moral being, and not simply a powerful representation or personification of natural forces, then there is implicitly this concept of a moral order that ought to be universal. And if Athenian laws do not reflect the will of the creator, there’s something wrong with Athens and it needs to be changed.

So what we’ve seen in the last few thousand years is the spread of Abrahamic religion. While it was originally the religion of one small group of tribes in the Middle East, it is today much more widespread. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism together comprise over 50 percent of world believers. So the idea of a universal moral order has become a much more important factor in international politics and in legitimizing the rule of states in different parts of the world. Unfortunately, as we may have noticed, those Abrahamic faiths don’t agree on all the details of the divine program that needs to be implemented. So Abrahamism is, among other things, an engine of conflict.

But there is another element that is connected to Abrahamism that is also present: the individualistic revolution, which sees individuals as being the source of the state or the seat of moral choice. The individual is not thought of simply as an entity that owes duties to the state, but as an entity of transcendent importance that gives legitimacy to state law. Individualism is going to increase pluralism, since individuals don’t come to the same conclusions. At the same time, a society that reflects the logic of individualism is going to be a permissive society that encourages individual expression, individual invention, and even of ways of living, while traditional Abrahamic societies have sought to impose conformity on the choices that individuals make in the name of the order that their Abrahamic faiths seek.

I have a couple of quick points here. One is that we ought to see secularism—in the ideological sense as opposed to the pragmatic sense—as much like an Abrahamic religion without god. That is, there is one source of truth in science or nature, however you focus it. Marx explicitly developed an Abrahamic world that didn’t have a god in it. But it had all the characteristics of Abrahamic faith, including universalism and a vision of an apocalyptic struggle at the end of history, which would see the creation of a secular kingdom.

In this way, the secular enlightenment is also a form of Abrahamic faith, even if the faith is not in the deity of Abraham. There is a universal dimension in modern secular thinking. There is a moral sense to which we ought to conform ourselves. We ought to obey the dictates of reason. There’s one truth everywhere. Paris is not so different from Delhi. In secular thinking, there is one fundamental way of seeing the world.

Now I’d like to open it up to the audience for comments, suggestions, and denunciations, whatever you like. But I would remind you of two things. One is that we are living in an Abrahamic world, at least where you and I are living. The other is that by their nature seek to build world orders grounded on moral, and in some cases religious, reflection. We’re also talking about an inherent tension between the Abrahamic faiths and the world orders they build and the value of the individual. But this tension is also one that inherently proceeds out of Abrahamic ideas, because Abrahamism sees a direct relation between the creation of God and the individual personality. This is a quite difficult tension and contrast within Abrahamic thought. That’s true whether we are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, secular, or increasingly none of the above. Furthermore, one of the ways that Abrahamism is changing the world is that faiths like Hinduism and others have been becoming more Abrahamic in the way that they organize themselves and understand themselves.
you all of the story of the young rabbincical student who, when talking to his rabbi, got a little frustrated, because every time he would ask the rabbi a question he never got a straight answer. The rabbi would always answer with a question. He said, “Rabbi, why do you do this? Why don’t you just give me the answer? Why do you always answer a question with a question?” The rabbi says, “What’s wrong with a question?” [Laughter] So think about that as you respond.

PREM JAIN: I’m a professor here in Georgetown. This question is for Mr. Guinness. I lived in India for about 30 years and then in America for about 40 years. I’ve been very much interested in the religions of different countries, including Buddhism and others. Mr. Guinness mentioned, quoting de Tocqueville and others, that we are squandering the American values on which the country has been founded. My experience in America is actually totally different. I’ve lived in the South, the Northeast, and elsewhere. My experience is that there’s much more religious freedom now than 40 years ago when I came. People are much more open about religions from different countries, and they accept people in their homes and other places much more. So where do you get this feeling that we are squandering this American value? Thank you.

OS GUINNESS: I’m not here to argue that America’s in bad shape. But I would just say that, on the one hand, there has been an enormous increase of people coming to America from all over the world. The idea that everyone is now everywhere is certainly true, and that has increased the importance of people getting along with other people from different backgrounds. But in terms of the understanding of religious freedom among the American public and especially the elite, you just need to compare, say, the late Clinton years—when something like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was passed with such an overwhelming consensus—with the current debate this past year about religious freedom. Clearly the misunderstandings are rife. As you were suggesting, Walter, religious freedom without freedom of conscience is dismissed as freedom only for the religious or freedom of worship. There are all sorts of other distortions at the elite level that show a most incredible ignorance of religious freedom.
I'm glad for the increase in tolerance, especially because of the increase of people from all over the world. There is certainly tolerance. But the elite's justification of it and the culture wars show that America has gone backwards.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: We have another question.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: This is a fascinating panel. Thanks to you all. Walter, I have a question for you. First comes the Abrahamic revolution, then comes the individualistic revolution. But isn't there an individualistic component to Abrahamism? You pointed this out by saying that the individual being is responsible to God and has personal morality. Therefore, can individualism and Abrahamism perhaps not be in conflict? Maybe individualism is an emphasis on one aspect of Abrahamism. I've actually read that argument in your books and have been benefitting from it. That's why I want to ask if you would like to elucidate that aspect of Abrahamism as well. Thank you.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: Well, I would say that yes, the importance of the individual does proceed from an Abrahamic view, which posits that there is one God who created everybody. And because he created everybody, everybody matters. They matter to God, the source of all being and all meaning. So there is a transcendent importance to each individual human being. People are not objects; they are subjects because of God's creation of them.

Nevertheless, as a practical matter, that's very much in tension with the kind of moral universalism that many Abrahamic faiths enjoin. So you'll find people saying, “Well, it's precisely because I'm Abrahamic that I'm following my own conscience and guide, and I'm going to live an openly gay lifestyle.” Then somebody else says, “Well, I'm Abrahamic and that's why I'm going to stone you for doing that.” So I think we have to say that there's a tension in these values that doesn't go away. We do have to ultimately recognize each of them as a fundamental value. And this is one of the reasons I think freedom of conscience is the key. What the Second Vatican Council did is reformulate ideas of religious liberty. Liberty of conscience may be the key issue.

OS GUINNESS: Could I add something to that, Walter? My Jewish friends, like Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, argue that Judaism is a great combination of universalism and particularism. They don't
see themselves as being Judaist for the world. They’re Judaist for Jews. Now I think the Christian balance to that, as you suggest, is freedom of conscience. So when Tertullian was the first one to talk about freedom of conscience, he says it meant un-coerced, voluntary, and free worship. This brings the universalism within certain bounds. And you mentioned that Vatican II advanced this argument. But, of course, Roger Williams, William Penn, and many, many other Baptists argued for that strongly in the seventeenth century.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Absolutely. I’m here at Georgetown, so I thought I should say something about Vatican II. [Laughter] Thanks for the hospitality.

**PETER BERGER:** Walter, I’d like to disagree with you on the Abrahamic business. Buddhists and Hindus in particular often blame monotheism for all the evils in the world, which is ironic given the lack of compassionate and tolerant religions coming out of South and East Asia. Look at what’s happening in the world today. Last week a Hindu mob killed a Muslim somewhere in India, because he was accused of eating beef. Is this Hindu compassion? The Buddhist monks are encouraging mobs in Myanmar to kill Muslims. In Sri Lanka, they stopped their civil war for the moment. But until recently, Buddhist monks were encouraging Sinhalese to kill Tamil Hindus. So I am not convinced of this wonderful world of non-Abrahamic religions.

Os, you identified the naked public square—that a friend, Richard Neuhaus, made famous—as being a sort of evil thing. Well, if the naked public square means that religion is not allowed to have a public voice, I agree. I agreed with Richard, and I agree with you. But the public square has to be secular, and in that sense it has to be naked. That’s a good thing. People can, as I tried to articulate before, accept that secular space and then inject it with their own religious values. But in order to be heard, and especially in order to enforce the laws, they have to translate these religious values into a secular discourse.

I want to give a concrete example. Why do we have doubts about same-sex marriage? It’s not necessarily because one thinks God hates homosexuals or anything like that. But the question is about what is best for our children: a man and a woman in charge of them, or two men or two women? There’s some material on that. One can have a religious belief that God wants heterosexual monogamy. My hunch is that God doesn’t care about it way one way or the other. But there are secular reasons for preferring certain traditional institutions. People who are secularists can agree with that, even if Christians or Jews have religious reasons for their views on marriage.

On East Asia, let me tell you about an episode which I love. I don’t know if any of you knew Taitetsu Unno. He was an American Buddhist of Japanese origin. Actually, he was a priest of a Japanese Buddhist School. He came from Hawaii and was a professor of religion at Smith College for many years. He gave a lecture at Boston University some years ago on Buddhism and human rights. He was very much in favor of human rights on Buddhist grounds. I asked him, “Tai, how can you say that? I mean, as far as I know, every school of Buddhism believes that the self is an illusion. How can the self have rights?” He stopped for a moment and said, “But I’m an American.” [Laughter] At first I thought this was a silly answer, but then I thought it wasn’t silly at all. He somehow had to merge his Buddhist view of the world with these very American, Abrahamic notions about individual rights. So this synthesis is not impossible, and it’s very interesting and important.

I totally agree with using the phrase freedom of conscience, which is a wonderful phrase, rather than freedom of religion. Many of us say that this means freedom of religion, but it can also be used by people who are not religious.

**YOSSI SHAIN:** I’m a professor here at Georgetown and interested in the subject matter. I’ll begin by asking about the freedom of conscience that you are referring to. The French Supreme Court, as you very well know, issued a 2011 ruling which prohibits the burka. It used the phrase freedom of conscience, which has to be secondary to freedom of thought. As a result of that ruling, if you wear a burka in France, it means you are delusional, like a Marxist. Freedom of thought prescribes an open society. That’s exactly what the French said in 2011: that freedom of conscience comes second to freedom of thought.

That relates to your first point, Peter, regarding modernization. It is understood in Will Herberg’s book on the triple melting pot, Protestant-Catholic-Jew, which described modernization as a system in which all the religious denominations in America adjust themselves to the civic creed and to liberalism. The question is: If there is a challenge to that concept itself, is there really a challenge there? Do you see that fact today, in a world where Christianity is under assault in parts of the world and thousands are murdered and excluded?

What does the freedom of conscience mean? Does it mean what Peter said, that primarily secularism will prevail and under secu-
larism everybody else can express themselves? Or will something else emerge that will challenge the domination of secularism and freedom of thought in our society?

PETER BERGER: I think it’s important to distinguish secularism from secularism. Secularism is a creed and an ideology which wants to banish religion as far as possible from society—certainly from any public expression. In this view, you can pray to your silly gods in private; that would be the attitude. But in public, no religion is allowed, and certainly not in any intellectually respectable circles. That can have a horribly totalitarian form, like in the old Soviet Union, China during the Cultural Revolution, or Albania—the only country in the world where all religions were prohibited during the communist regime. But there are milder forms of secularism, like silly people who are deeply offended if a Christmas tree is planted in a public park in Indiana. That’s secularism, but it’s on a low level. It doesn’t really threaten anybody seriously.

But secularity means something else. Secularity means there are spaces that use ideas, concepts, and discourses which are not specifically religious. I don’t think we could live in a modern society without such secular spaces—whether it’s science, technology, the law, or the marketplace. Do you not sell a house to a person whose religion you don’t believe in? I think you would sell the house. It’s a secular transaction.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: I think we have time for one more question. Then what we’ll do is we’ll try to answer that question, and the panelists, if they have concluding remarks, will make them.

MONICA TOFT: I’m Monica Toft. I’m a professor at the University of Oxford. I love this idea of freedom of conscience as an American Catholic post-Vatican II idea. But it doesn’t get over the problem that was alluded to earlier about conversion and proselytizing in communities that are trying to protect their communities, or states that are trying to protect their faith. In real, practical terms, how do you get around that? Freedom of conscience is not going to get around that when you can’t proselytize or convert in certain societies. Peter, you talked about the secular square. How do we move other societies and other faith communities that are trying to protect their own faith communities in that direction?

PETER BERGER: I have had quite a few discussions with Muslims in recent years. Well, I cannot tell Muslims what they should believe. But in the context of anti-jihadism, or rejecting the kind of persecution of Christians or other minorities that you referred to, I always begin with the fact that every single chapter in the Qur’an begins with this formula: “In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.” Before anything else is said in the Qur’an, there comes that statement in Arabic: 

\[ 	ext{Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahimeen} \]

What does that mean? Is this at the core of your faith, or is it accidental that every chapter of the Qur’an begins with that? There are ways of promoting tolerance and acceptance of other faiths through this message. I think it’s possible in Buddhism, and it’s possible in Islam. It wouldn’t be the same reasoning as a Christian or a Jew would have. But these different reasons can yield a strong affirmation of the same basic values that are in the German Constitution. That would be my response to that.

WALTER RUSSELL MEAD: Any closing thoughts, Peter?

PETER BERGER: Yes, one closing thought. I wrote this book which, if you are praiseworthy enough to read it, tells you absolutely nothing about my religious beliefs. [Laughter]

It’s an exercise in pure Bavarian social science, value free and objective, which I strongly believe in. But I’m not completely value free. I am, as I said before, a Christian of rather mildly Lutheran form. I wrote an essay which will be published, a Christian postscript to my book, The Many Altars of Modernity.

The basic message to Christians or any other religious believers is: Don’t be afraid of pluralism. It’s good for you. It’s good for you for three reasons. I’ll only mention the third, which I think is the most interesting. Pluralism, because of the phenomenon of cognitive contamination, which I referred to in my earlier remarks, forces you to distinguish between the core of your faith and the things that are more marginal—which are negotiable and which you can surrender to this contamination.

Rabbi Hillel the Elder, one of the founders of Rabbinic Judaism and Jewish law, was once asked—I think mockingly—to

“I don’t think we could live in a modern society without such secular spaces—whether it’s science, technology, the law, or the marketplace. Do you not sell a house to a person whose religion you don’t believe in? I think you would sell the house. It’s a secular transaction.”

Peter Berger
explain the meaning of Torah while standing on one leg. And he did. I don’t know if he chose the right formula. He chose the first known formulation of the Golden Rule. His version is, I think, “Don’t do unto others what you’d hate to be done to you.” I’m not sure if that’s the core of Torah. I would have chosen the Shema, the basic Jewish confession of faith—“the Lord is our God, and the Lord is one”—which antecedes all the moral teachings. But I think that is a very useful exercise.

When modern biblical scholarship invaded theological faculties in Germany, Europe, and also in the United States, Christians were forced to ask that question. If not every sentence in the Bible is an inerrant scientific fact, then what can we do away with? That question was extremely useful. When you keep asking that question, certain things take on a different form. If you push me against the wall, if you wake me up at 2:00 in the morning, what do I really believe? That’s a very useful thing, and that’s the consequence of pluralism. It doesn’t make for relativism or for an “anything goes” mentality. It’s a reflection on what is essential.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Os, closing thoughts?

**OS GUINNESS:** Let me respond to the earlier question. I like the two phrases together, freedom of conscience or religious freedom. I prefer to unite them. Freedom of conscience by itself can be misunderstood as purely internal, just as freedom of worship by itself can be made purely internal. Whereas I think if we look at the UN declaration, you have four very tough rights: the right to adopt, the right to practice, the right to share—that’s the whole notion of proselytism, which in some societies is unimaginable—and the right to convert—and that’s against the Muslim notion of blasphemy and conversion.

This is a very tough-minded concept. But if we unpack it, then the challenge is, how on earth do we do it with so many people of different faiths all in one country? That’s why I think we need to talk together about how to live with these deep differences. It will not be resolved by law alone. So America should be in the business of saying, “Look, we are more diverse than ever. How can we take this brilliant notion of freedom, which has been so incredible, and expand it in our time, and still achieve justice, diversity, and social harmony?” So that’s the challenge. I thought your question was fascinating, Monica. Unfortunately, we didn’t have time to discuss the epistemology of thought, conscience, and freedom.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** We would like to thank everyone for participating in the forum. Peter and Os were brilliant, as usual. [Applause]
DANIEL PHILPOTT: Thank you for being with us for this policy dialogue. One of its purposes is to encourage a transatlantic dialogue over religious freedom policy. We live at a time in which religious freedom is debated and on the agenda more than any other time in recent memory. We want to begin by asking: Why should we have religious freedom in the first place? What is the reason for having a religious freedom policy? Is it necessarily a good idea? What good does it do?

We’re very fortunate to have three very distinguished panelists who represent the diversity of perspectives on religious freedom policy. Let me first introduce Mustafa Akyol, who is the opinion editor and columnist for Turkish Daily News, Turkey’s foremost English language daily. He’s also the author of a wonderful book, which is one of my favorite books in the whole area of religion and global politics: Islam Without Extremes, an inspiring read and an inspiring case for freedom in Islam. I recommend it to everyone. His articles have also appeared in other major publications, including the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal.

We’re pleased to have with us Sofia Lemmetyinen, who has a very rich background in studying religion and global politics, as well as deep practical experience. She is the program manager at the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights unit of the European Commission’s Directorate for International Cooperation and Development, where she is in charge of issues relating to freedom of religion or belief.

Finally, we have my good friend, Allen Hertzke, who has been writing about religious freedom policy for many years now. He’s one of the world’s great experts. He is the Presidential Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma and a faculty fellow in religious freedom for the university’s Institute for the American Constitutional Heritage. He is an associate scholar with the Religious Freedom Project here at Georgetown as well.

So let’s think about the case for religious freedom policy. Often, advocates of religious freedom policy make two different kinds of arguments. There is a principled argument, which is the turf of philosophers and theologians: Why is religious freedom a universal value? Is it a universal value? Is it something
that is inherent in human dignity or is it just a product of cultural consensus at a particular time and place? But then there’s a second question about the consequentialist, policy-oriented case for religious freedom. What good does it do? What goods does it bring about? Does it make a difference for things like security, reduction of terrorism, democracy, other human rights, economic growth, the advancement of women’s opportunities, and so forth? In other words, is religious freedom valuable because it promotes these other goods?

I want to begin with that second question. What good does religious freedom do for countries around the world? If you’re trying to make the case to a country about why it should adopt religious freedom—even if it doesn’t quite agree in the cultural and religious sense—what might you say? Let’s start with Allen Hertzke. You’ve been making this case for religious freedom for quite a while. What good does religious freedom do, Allen?

ALLEN HERTZKE: Well, I did a TEDx talk at my university. I started by asking the audience to imagine a social force, a potent X factor, that reduces violence, increases stability, promotes human rights, empowers women, and increases interreligious harmony. Imagine that potent force. Surely, governments would want to promote it. NGOs would want to defend it. In fact, we do have great empirical evidence that nations that generously protect freedom of conscience and religious freedom actually are more economically viable, more stable, have greater interreligious harmony, and have less regional instability. In other words, religious freedom actually does promote economic development, peace, stability and interreligious amity. Imagine that potent force. Surely, governments would want to promote it. NGOs would want to defend it. In fact, we do have great empirical evidence that nations that generously protect freedom of conscience and religious freedom actually are more economically viable, more stable, have greater interreligious harmony, and have less regional instability. In other words, religious freedom actually does promote economic development, peace, stability and interreligious amity. It’s just striking to me how at the very time when religious freedom is under assault around the world, the best empirical evidence and events on the ground confirm its value.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Steel and coal were the war industries, isn’t that right?

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: That’s correct. I would also like to stress that the element of diversity that was alluded to in the first keynote panel is also at the core of what it means to be European today.

But now I’ll get to your specific question on how those 2013 EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief came about. It’s true that this is a relatively new development. Before those guidelines, we also published council conclusions on freedom of religion or belief with regard to the EU’s External Action in previously fighting each other in world wars, that this ground could be laid.

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But now I’ll get to your specific question on how those 2013 EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief came about. It’s true that this is a relatively new development. Before those guidelines, we also published council conclusions on freedom of religion or belief with regard to the EU’s External Action in...
2009 and 2011. I think this was a result of developments in the world. We witnessed the Arab Spring, where we saw an increase in attacks on religious freedom. There is ample evidence, as we’ve heard, of increasing violence and the ways that freedom of religion or belief can be violated in conflict. I think all of those elements brought together EU member states to discuss this matter in the field of external action.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: So there was already a commitment to freedom of religion coming out of the European experience, but then certain events in the world activated it, in a sense.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: Yes.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Was there resistance or debate over this? Did some people say, “This is not what we should be emphasizing?”

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: That’s a good question. I think that one has to bear in mind that the European Union is a hybrid animal. It has many institutions. I work for the European Commission, which is in charge of both implementing policies and also proposing legislation and budgets. But we also have the EU member states. We heard from the previous panel about the rich history and diversity and differences in their constitutional setup, and also the differences in how states deal with religion. So it wasn’t an obvious assumption that religious freedom would be a topic to look at. But I think that developments around the world, as well as advocacy from civil society organizations and counterparts in the United States and other countries, persuaded us that religious freedom is a very important issue. We realized that we needed to look at it in a more systematic fashion in our external policy, including in development cooperation, which is the area that I work in.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Mustafa Akyol, how do we best make the case for religious freedom in the Muslim world? There’s no better person to ask about this than you, because you’ve made this case. What kinds of arguments are most likely to win, especially in the face of widespread beliefs about apostasy and blasphemy, and even the inclination to associate the death penalty with those things? How do we best connect with the Muslim world on religious freedom?

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Let me first say one thing. The first time I got acquainted with discussions in the United States about religious freedom, which was maybe 15 years ago, I had what you’d call an “aha moment.” I found it interesting that Americans care about religion, because in Turkey, the Middle East, and the broader Muslim world, the notion of freedom has generally come from Western Europe and France in particular. Ideas from the French Enlightenment were transferred to us. Freedom always sounded like freedom from religion and freedom from God, which was manifest in the banning of the headscarf and the closing of some traditional Islamic institutions. Liberalism, through the lens of these kinds of programs and campaigns for freedom, sounded anti-religious. When I studied the U.S. experience, I noticed that they’re saying freedom of religion. So they think religion is a value. That’s interesting. Of course, more people are noticing that. And I think that’s a better form of modernity to present to pious peoples in the Middle East.

Speaking of Islam and Islam’s attitude towards religious freedom, I want to say one thing. In the Abrahamic hall of religions, every new religion defines the preexisting ones. The New Testament, for example, defines Judaism—though not in positive terms, as I understand, which caused some tension between Jews and Christians for centuries. Luckily, those tensions have been worked out. And Islam comes later and defines both Judaism and Christianity. That definition gives us some strength for religious freedom, but it sometimes gives us some problems and obstacles. On the one hand, Islam defines these preexisting monotheisms with the term People of the Book. These are communities that Islam accepts, so they have the right to flourish and have churches and synagogues in the Muslim world. And that’s why there have been Christian and Jewish communities in the predominantly Muslim Middle East for 14 centuries. They do not banish Coptic Christians, Palestinian Christians, or other groups. Actually, these minorities had a harder time in the twentieth century, mostly because of nationalism. I mean, Ottomans lived with Armenians for six centuries. In the nationalist zeal and era of modern nation states, unfortunately, we wiped out the Armenians in a great tragedy.

So on the one hand, you have the People of the Book idea, which is a good basis. As Professor Berger pointed out, it created the millet system, a system of nations defined by their respective religi-
gions. But on the other hand, that traditional idea did not make Jews and Christians equal. They were not equal citizens. That’s why today when you go to Egypt, you can still have some discussions about whether non-Muslims can be the head of state. Does sharia allow that? So you have those tensions. The Ottomans had actually made Jews and Christians equal citizens in the nineteenth century, which was a very important reform, I think, in the history of Islamic civilization, and it should be kept. But some Muslim movements today are way behind the Ottoman reforms of the nineteenth century. That’s one obstacle.

The other obstacle is the matter of conversion, because it was assumed that there’s a hierarchical universe. Muslims are here. Jews and Christians are here. Conversion from Judaism and Christianity into Islam was welcome—not forced, but welcome. But conversion the other way was generally not tolerated, which brings us to the problem of apostasy.

In my book *Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty*, I have a whole chapter on that issue, called “Freedom from Islam.” I make the case that some other progressive thinkers and scholars in the Muslim world are making. Actually, the ban on apostasy—which is not in the Qur’an but comes from the secondary sources and from the time that sharia was made—is actually based on very communalist logic. If you leave our community, maybe you will become our enemy; maybe you’ll join and be a fighter against us. It was high treason to the community, which is a good way to reinterpret that limitation on blasphemy and the death penalty. Of course, it’s hard to explain this to the Saudi or the Iranian government. They want to keep those rules. But there is certainly a more reformist approach to that topic using very solid theological arguments. I think the best argument against the ban on blasphemy and apostasy is to say that you can’t make people Muslims by force. You can make them hypocrites at best. And hypocrisy is worse than disbelief according to the Qur’an. So freedom of conscience is the only basis on which a genuine religiosity can flourish. As I said, a lot of Muslims are persuaded by this. Some of them are not, and we’re trying to persuade them.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** It seems to me that one of the core points you’re making is that religious freedom can be portrayed in a way that is good for religion. In other words, when religious freedom is portrayed in a way that tries to marginalize religion or sideline it—maybe that’s more like the French model—then you can see why it would raise great objections. But if you can see religious freedom not as an imposition of something that is alien, but as, in fact, a good thing for Islam—that Islam will flourish more if there is religious freedom—then that could be part of the ticket.

**MUSTAFA AKYOL:** Indeed, which means that when Western governments have a policy of religious freedom, it should not be framed in a way that it will be misperceived in the Muslim world as something that’s about the Christian minorities only. Well, Muslim majorities sometimes have religious freedom problems because of their oppressive governments. I actually see the progression toward an improvement there in the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. In Turkey, for example, the commission focuses on the ban on headscarves as a violation of religious freedom of the majority, along with the problems affecting our Christian minority. The perception that there is a sort of Western double standard about these values, which is sometimes true, is an obstacle to advancing those values in other parts of the world. People say, “Oh, this is a cynical agenda that we’re not buying.” The more principled the proponents of religious freedom are—and I think many of them are—the better it will be for evangelizing those values, if you will, to other parts of the world.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Well, that brings up my next question. We live in this interesting time where so many of the Western democracies are in some way incorporating religious freedom into their foreign policies, as is the European Union. Let’s take for granted that religious freedom is a good thing, whether on intrinsic or instrumental grounds. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s a good thing for individual states to go around
making themselves the promoters of it. Peter Berger brought up this dynamic of the United States giving everybody a grade. Isn’t there something perhaps a little bit presumptuous about that, to kind of sit in our State Department and grade everybody, saying, “Here’s your score”? I mean, are there pitfalls to the United States or any other country making themselves the promoters of religious freedom, especially in terms of how it would be received in the Muslim world or in Turkey? What advice would you give to the United States in terms of how to go about religious freedom?

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Well, I think U.S. standards regarding religious freedom are quite high compared to the rest of the world. So I don’t hear too much criticism of the United States about promoting religious freedom in the world but not having religious freedom at home. Of course, there are issues in the United States, too, but generally I can point out that there are Americans who wear headscarves, and there are Muslims who are free to open their mosques. So why should Muslims not have the same freedom in Saudi Arabia? Sometimes when you get into the broader issue of democracy, the United States promotes democracy and opposes dictatorships. But the dictators who are anti-United States have a different way of being evaluated sometimes in Washington. That creates a lot of question marks regarding whether there’s a double standard or not. I’m just speaking of the broader framework.

But again, I’ve been pointing to the United States Commission on International Freedom and its reports to say that they provide an honest evaluation of the facts in our country. The more principled the approach is, the better it will be understood. I, of course, make a distinction between governments and institutions that are really committed to these values and those that are not, because governments are so realpolitik. They have their concerns. But I think civil institutions are really committed to doing a better job in terms of articulating these values.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Allen?

ALLEN HERTZKE: I think in a way there’s a Westphalian premise in your question, because it’s as if states are the major players in promoting religious freedom. In a sense, we hope that the U.S. government will uphold high standards about the kinds of things that Muslims are talking about. But I also hope that the United States, the European Union, Brazil, and other countries around the world that have high standards of religious freedom promote civil society actors and give a megaphone to those who
are, in fact, making the case passionately. These countries should defend persecuted religious minorities—“heroes of conscience,” as I like to call them.

In fact, as I was listening to Mustafa, it struck me how over the past decade I probably had some of the most powerful conversations with Muslim heroes of conscience. People like Abdolkarim Soroush, who is making the case in very dangerous circumstances for freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. He is basically saying that theocrats create hypocrites. Theocrats don’t create authentic Islam. In fact, it’s terrible for Islam to have a theocratic regime determine what is orthodox in Islamic practice.

To me, we ought to be uplifting people around the world—civil society actors, heroes of conscience, religious dissidents, persecuted religious minorities—to have a voice. We should provide the megaphone to those people to exercise their voice. And in that way, our policies will not be policies of the U.S. State Department per se speaking to Pakistan. It will be civil society actors in the United States, as well as governmental actors, speaking to people in Pakistan who are raising the issue themselves.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: That’s an interesting argument, Allen, because you’ve been the champion of the International Religious Freedom Act over the years. You’re broadly sympathetic to it. If you lift up civil society actors, does that mean the governments are more handicapped? Should they even get out of the religious freedom business?

ALLEN HERTZKE: No. I don’t think governments should get out of it. I don’t think they’re mutually exclusive. In other words, if the State Department or the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom speaks with clarity, fairness, and empirical force, then it seems to me that will also help to empower the civil society actors.

The United States is unique in that while we have a State Department with all of its realpolitik considerations, we do have a watchdog commission that can speak truth to power and provide a greater megaphone to heroes of conscience. I think it’s just interesting that we have that framework. It seems to work pretty well.

What do you think, Mustafa? Is this two-voiced American response confusing? Does it work?

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Of course, a lot of people, especially in the Middle East, can’t figure out that there’s a government and then there are separate institutions that really are not controlled by the government. That’s very surprising to people in certain parts of the world. They don’t actually believe in that separation. They ask, “Come on, who’s running this?” They think there should be one person in control. Sometimes the government’s voice is lumped together with the American voice or the Western voice. Of course, that’s a hard problem to get over. But what you can do is show the diversity of opinions and try to explain that there are different positions. When I visited the United States, I was really surprised that Americans actually have a lot of different ideas—just like us in Turkey and the Middle East. But they can institutionalize those different ideas, unlike us.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: It seems that the European Union would be almost the ideal entity to give religious freedom more of a multilateral cast. When I was in graduate school, thinking back to those days and those seminar rooms, they called the EU a supranational entity, a pooling of sovereignty. So it would maybe give religious freedom more credibility if it were viewed as a shared value. But does the European Union ever get criticized for imposing religious freedom? Or is religious freedom seen as a consensual value there?

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: Well, indeed, the European Union is criticized as well on how the situation looks in the European Union. This is something that comes across in human rights dialogues, for instance, with countries and organizations. Indeed, there’s the supranational element in the European Commission, but there’s an intergovernmental element in the Council of the European Union comprised of the 28 EU member states. There’s also the European Parliament, which is there to defend citizens’ rights and views. I just want to highlight the plethora of actors on the European scene.

But I would like to add something to what Allen said before on the type of actors and on who represents and who speaks on behalf of Europe, the United States, or other countries. I think the role of civil society is very, very important. I can’t stress that enough. The
European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights that I’m managing with my colleagues actually focuses on supporting civil society actors—be they individual human rights defenders, faith-based organizations, or secular organizations promoting freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union.

We have a number of projects that are ongoing. There’s not only a political dialogue between the governments, but there are many, many other issues and processes that go on in the field, sometimes very low on the radar. We don’t know much about them. We can’t talk too much about them because these are very sensitive issues, and in order to protect the safety and security of the individuals and organizations in question, publicity might have to be limited. But indeed, there is a strong commitment by the EU to support civil society in this field. We had a call for proposals in 2013 for five million euros and we have another call coming up in 2017 for another five million euros.

ALLEN HERTZKE: Can I add one thing?

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Yeah. Go ahead.

ALLEN HERTZKE: I think the other dimension that is underestimated but vital is the scholarly dimension, the fact that there is a growing cadre of serious empirical scholarship by think tanks, independent scholars, and so forth. It’s a global enterprise. And so you think about the fact that the Pew Research Center actually publishes these fabulous empirical reports on global restrictions on religion, which provide empirical data for analyzing the impact of religious freedom. There’s a wonderful kind of collaborative, interactive relationship between scholars, advocates, policymakers, and civil society actors that I think creates a historic level of support for religious freedom. We’ve never had that before.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: I think we need to keep that audience open and those actors open. One other actor I didn’t mention, but I think has a key role to play, is the independent national human rights institutions. They play a key role in monitoring and reporting human rights violations in the third countries and also in holding governments accountable. So I just want to put that on the table. We might have many other actors that we are not naming today but that we need to take into consideration, because promoting freedom of religion or belief worldwide is quite a big challenge.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: I just want to touch upon something slightly different. The issue is one that Allen said at the very beginning when he mentioned his TED talk. Religious freedom is actually an antidote to a lot of the problems we’re facing, including religious extremism. That is sometimes a hard sell because people will tell you, “Wait a minute. Will we allow the extremists to go and speak their minds?” I admit that there is a limit to extremist propaganda if it incites violence, like if it says, “Go and kill these people because they’re infidels.” If you pump that sort of ideology into society, there can be a limit to that.

But we should not forget that extremists are generally motivated by the perception that they are persecuted. Their common motivation is that they are under attack—and they are sometimes under attack. I mean, you see it if you look at the jihadist movements in the Middle East. If you go back a few years before they began an armed struggle, you see that a secular Arab dictator crushed them and tortured them. And in prison they decided that the time is now for jihad. So in that sense, yes, there’s a concern about extremist propaganda. But the very origin of extremism often begins with the lack of freedom for people with a very conservative worldview, who could have existed peacefully. When they feel suppressed, they get more violent.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: We’ll be hearing more about that this afternoon from Nilay Saiya. He’s done some very interesting research on this. But is there a sense in which religious freedom could be seen as the solution to that problem? If you have religious freedom, would these people be less likely to experience that kind of persecution?

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Yes. We need religious freedom and political freedom, too, because in the Middle East it’s all mixed. Extremists are sometimes suppressed for political reasons, but they are often religiously motivated in that their reaction to sup-
expression comes from religious language. So I’m very sure that if there were more open societies in the Middle East, the extremists would be less violent. They could have very conservative views about life—such as the Salafi groups for example, who are the ultra-orthodox of Islam, if you will. I mean, they are not very modern in the way they see the world, but when you look at how some of them become violent, you see that they go through a context of persecution. Therefore, more religious freedom will help us against the problem of extremism as well.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Yes. One might ask whether the threats to religious freedom come as much from a kind of secularist agenda, like the Kemalist nationalist agenda in Turkey, as it does from Islamism. Mustafa, you pointed that out in your book.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Violations of religious freedom in the Middle East can come from the persecution of the heretics. There are a lot of people who think that heresy should not be allowed and bad ideas should be suppressed. They think you should punish the heretics. So that is one problem. That’s why, when you go to a Shi’a majority country, you see Sunnis not fully expressing themselves. When you go to Saudi Arabia, the Shi’a people are really seen as an enemy within, and they have a lot of problems.

In Turkey, the violations of religious freedom came from our secular establishment, which was upheld by the generals and was seen as the way to progress. French-style secularism is a problem. The problem is also nationalism. Turkey’s Greek minorities suffered heavily when Turkey and Greece fought over Cyprus. So the political anger at your neighbor becomes persecution and discrimination against your own citizens. The same thing happened to Turks on the other side of the Aegean. Turks in Greece have legitimate issues about religious freedom. In Athens, mosques are not allowed, but Turks want to have a mosque in Athens. The problem is not the Greek Orthodox Church as a theology, but Greek nationalism, which fears that Turks will come as imperialists again. We think we liberated them, but they think we’re imperialists. That’s a different world of history. So nationalism plays a role.

In Malaysia, there are great problems about conversion from Islam to Christianity. The problem is how to keep the Malay nation intact, because Malays are, by definition, Muslim. It’s an ethnic group, actually. So in that sense, religiously grounded nationalism creates a major obstacle as well.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: You talked about a kind of European-based secularism. That brings us back to Europe. Sofia, you keep talking about consensus and civil society and governments working together. It sounds like everybody in Europe kind of agrees on this issue. And yet just yesterday I was reading Peter Berger’s new book with Effie Fokas and Grace Davie called Religious America, Secular Europe?, which makes the comparison between Europe and America. But one of the things that it says in the first chapter is that the data are really showing Europe to be exceptional for being more a secular place, whereas the rest of the world is more religious. This data reflects Central and Western Europe in particular. But nevertheless, one might wonder whether that would bring about some more skepticism or conflict. Are there people in Europe who are saying, “Why are we bringing religion into foreign policy? Wasn’t the world better and safer back when we were secular?”

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: I would add that we always add the word “belief” to freedom of religion or belief. This is a term that we use consistently within EU and policy circles. It’s very important that when we approach this issue—and it was also mentioned in the opening session—we deal with it in a very broad and inclusive way: freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief. I think that’s important. That means that it’s not only about including religion in foreign policy. It’s about understanding the role of religion or other belief systems and their impact on human behavior, and including that in our analysis of our foreign policy and our external action. And, wearing my hat as a development cooperation practitioner, it’s about understanding what we can do to promote environments that are conducive to freedom of religion or belief, and seeing where freedom...
of religion or belief goes hand in hand with other interrelated rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. I think this is key.

In his articles, Peter Berger refers to building or enabling these secular spaces. Along with pluralism in society, we also need institutions, which underpin the democratic culture. What type of institutions do we need? We need to have an independent judiciary. We need to have media that follow ethical codes and also give access to minority groups in society. We need to take into consideration education, school materials, and so on. I think from that point of view, the EU represents an approach to freedom of religion or belief that is embedded within promoting human rights and democracy. This is the very nature of the instrument that we work with.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Yes. Is there any danger at all that religious freedom may be too watered down in that kind of approach? I mean, you’re talking about development policies, long-term policies, and consensual approaches to religion and belief. What do you say to the Christians and Yazidis in Syria and Iraq who are being attacked and so forth? Is something more direct and forceful needed?

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: I think you need both. You need to have a horizontal policy where freedom of religion or belief is integrated, but you also need specific action and a systematic approach. I think these EU guidelines should not be underestimated. They have been discussed between the then-27 EU member states. In other words, that discussion was allowed in the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission was on board as well. We are committed to this. The document was adopted by the EU foreign ministers. I think that really gives the impression that this is an important issue. Of course, we also then need institutional setup on the EU side. We need people who work on these issues specifically. I’m glad to say that some of us are doing that. But indeed, we work in a broader horizontal scheme.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: It’s interesting that you talked about how this is incorporated into policy institutions. You know, America had one model coming out of the International Reli-
religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. We’ve got the office in the State Department and then the independent watchdog speaking truth to power, as Allen said. Allen, as the European countries and Canada are developing religious freedom policy, do you think the American model should be replicated? Or do you think there are lessons learned? What is the best way to incorporate religious freedom policy into a bureaucracy or into the structure of a government?

ALLEN HERTZKE: I think it is very valuable that there are multiple approaches to using foreign policy tools to promote religious freedom. It seems to me that it’s a good thing to have many different voices and different institutions make the case for how it’s beneficial for societies to defend broad religious freedom.

I think it was a problem early on when the United States was kind of alone, when it was perceived as an American initiative. The State Department produced its report. The commission produced its critique. It was seen as an American-led initiative. Now, I think we're in a healthier place with the European Union, with Canada, and even with countries like Brazil joining the effort. As some of you may know, Brian Grim has determined that Brazil, according to Pew data, is a country with some of the broadest religious freedom, both at the societal and governmental levels. Those countries are now starting to uphold their models around the world. So it seems to me that it’s a very positive time in the sense that we’re hearing this from a variety of sources.

I want to say one other thing about how to recast this discussion. Let’s put it in the language that policymakers and state actors really understand. Do you want economic development? Do you want economic growth? Do you want to be competitive around the world economically? Do you want to have a thriving economy? Then you have to protect religious freedom. You have to protect pluralism. Otherwise, you are going to undermine that economy.

FABIO PETITO: What about China?

ALLEN HERTZKE: That’s an interesting question. Brian Grim and his Religious Freedom and Business Foundation make the case that over time, China’s enterprise will be undermined if it represses religion. Religious freedom is related to free exchange, travel, and so forth. We know that religion is booming in China, and there are Chinese Christian business leaders who are given privileges. But here’s one statistic from the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitive Report: There’s a strong positive relationship between religious freedom and 10 of the 12 pillars of global competitiveness. Ten of the 12 measures are strongly correlated with societies that broadly protect religious freedom. That’s the language of statecraft. We ought to be able to make that case, it seems to me.

ELIZABETA KITANOVIC: I’m Elizabeta Kitanovic from the Conference of European Churches in Brussels. I have a question for Sofia. Do you have a list of countries of concern? If yes, how does this list look? If not, why not? Then the second question is for Mustafa. You have mentioned actually opening a mosque in Athens. How about reopening Halki Theological School in Turkey and other schools?

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: Thank you, Elizabeth. The EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief from 2013 do not include a list of countries of particular concern as we know them from the U.S. context. To my knowledge, there's no aim of including such a list. But we do have EU delegations working on the ground. In their regular reporting of what we call “human rights country strategies,” they analyze how the situation regarding freedom of religion and belief is evolving in a given country. So this is how we in headquarters receive updated information about the direction that a certain country is going. As such, there is currently no list of all the countries of concern.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Thank you for the question. It's good that you ask about Halki because I’m a passionate defender of reopening Halki. As I pointed out, the religious freedom problems on both sides of the Aegean are sometimes similar. When the governments see their minorities as somewhat questionable, minorities want to
redefine themselves in some different ways. Turks in Greece are not called Turks, but “Hellenes of the Muslim faith.” We wanted to call Kurds not Kurds, but “Turks who didn’t know that they’re actually Turks and whom we have to transform.” There’s this kind of nationalist madness going on in our geography.

Turkey certainly has its hall of shame. Not reopening the Halki Seminary, which trains priests of the ecumenical patriarchate, belongs in there. It was opened under the Ottoman Empire under the auspices of the sultans. There was no problem with it in the pluralistic millet system.

In 1971, our secular and nationalist generals decided that everything should be unified under a state. We don’t like the Greeks anyway because of Cyprus, and we wanted to teach them a lesson by closing Halki. The current government took some steps toward liberating Turkey’s Christian minorities, but not enough to open Halki and not enough to help the Alevi minority. So Turkey has its own major problems for sure.

It is a conceptual problem that is found in other parts of the world. Turkey and Greece, unfortunately, have a principle of reciprocity, which says, “We won’t take a step unless you take a step.” It’s a lose-lose principle. I think we should have a win-win principle. Let’s take all the steps needed and then ask you to take yours. But for some reason it doesn’t resonate with our politicians and bureaucrats, and even with some parts of our populace.

PATRICK DALY: I’m Father Patrick Daly, the general secretary of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community. In light of the discussion focusing on Europe, I will just share one or two observations. First of all, I think it’s true to say that internally the European Union, which was founded on profoundly Catholic and Christian principles some 70 years ago, has come adrift of its Christian moorings. I think religion, as a force in society, is a cause of some embarrassment and is generally overlooked in the policymaking of the European Union. I think the value system now is that of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution rather than of Christian social teaching—although Christian and Catholic social teaching is not totally overlooked.

Now, it has to be said that the European External Action Service as an instrument of EU foreign policy is still very much in its early days. It’s finding its feet. It’s a very weak instrument at the moment because, of course, it’s only just beginning. A commitment to monitoring and surveying religious freedoms under the guidelines of 2013 in countries where the EU is active is very, very welcomed. But it has to be said that there is a certain conflict of values which affects all people operating in the name of the European Union in third countries. There’s a principle of absolute equality across the board, which means that LGBT issues also have to be monitored in third countries.

I just want to sensitize our largely American audience to the slight ambivalence in the European commitment to religious freedom and belief in the third countries in which it operates. At this moment we are negotiating a commercial agreement between the United States and the European Union, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This is a corollary of that, because it’s a new and deepening relationship across the Atlantic. I would sincerely hope that some of those values like freedom of religion, which has been highlighted already, would be incorporated in the TTIP negotiations, albeit indirectly. Thank you very much.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Let’s take another question.

GUNNAR STALSETT: Thank you for this very enlightening and inspirational discussion. I’m the retired bishop of Oslo, Norway. It probably takes a bishop to raise this question. I missed in your presentation the elephant in the room—the churches and the church leadership in terms of religious freedom. You referred to civil society. We’ve heard examples referring to Halki and the ecumenical patriarch and so on. But if we look at the history, not only in Europe but globally, religious leaders and religions present a stumbling block in terms of majority and minority issues. Since we are focusing on Europe, I would like to hear your reflections on that.

You spoke positively and truthfully about the role of civil society. I consider religious institutions—churches, mosques, synagogues, and so on—as part of civil society. But they also represent something unique. Sometimes the assertion of a majority position of these churches stands against freedom of religion in general terms. Would you elaborate on that, both from the European Commission’s perspective and from the perspective of the Middle East? Thank you.

SOFIA LEMMETYinen: Just to clarify, when I referred to civil society, I also mentioned faith-based actors. I should have made it clear that indeed you have faith-based organizations that are more civil society-related, and then you have official religious institutions. To share with our American colleagues, the EU has in place a dialogue based on Article 17, which refers to the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union. Article 17 says
that the EU as such does not have a preference for how church or confessional organizations are registered in the EU member states, but that the EU institutions should engage in a regular and transparent dialogue with them.

This dialogue has existed since the 1990s, and there were elements of dialogue even before that. That dialogue will continue not only with religious institutions, but also with non-confessional philosophical associations. The EU gives the highest attention to this dialogue; the president of the European Commission, the president of the European Parliament, and the European Council are present at these meetings.

I would also like to add another element that came up recently. Last week in Brussels there was a first annual colloquium organized on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which included a very broad group of civil society organizations. Religious institutions were present as well. It’s just to show the strong commitment that the vice president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, has given to this topic and the importance of building social cohesion in Europe—even more important today, given the challenging situation that Europe faces with migrants and refugees coming to Europe.

I would like to also touch upon the issue of religion being generally overlooked. Besides this dialogue that has existed for quite some time now, I would like to highlight some of the concrete steps that the institutions are taking, including the European External Action Service, which you rightly said is a new organism. We have to see how it develops. It takes a bit of time.

But it is very positive, I think, that representatives of EU member states and the European Parliament can take part in a regular training course for diplomats on freedom of religion or belief. These trainings are organized in cooperation with civil society and academics. There’s also interesting work being done in other areas. Let me give one example of conflict resolution and mediation. There’s work being undertaken now on how to work with religious and faith-based leaders and communities in mediation processes. I think we have lots of things to learn, for sure. It’s a challenging time, but I think we are on the right track.
“Freedom of religion and belief is really about having an identity, having the right to hold thoughts and then being able to express them. It’s really more than just thoughts. It’s not just about rationality… Having that freedom to raise very important existential questions—who are we, where do we come from, where are we heading next—is what freedom of religion and belief is about.”

Sofia Lemmetyinen

ALLEN HERTZKE: I want to respond to the broader point you raised, which is a profound issue: majorities versus minorities and the way majority religious communities may want to use the state to harass competitors and so forth. Peter Berger described how in the early American experience, Americans discovered that in order to have religious freedom for themselves they had to grant it to all others. In the globalized world of today, every religion and every religious community is a persecuted minority somewhere. I think that growing awareness may lead majority communities in certain places to concede that they must grant religious rights to minorities in order for that reciprocity to take place elsewhere. That, in a sense, is the article of peace for the world. It’s for majorities to agree that we are not majorities everywhere. We will be persecuted somewhere. We must uphold the principle of religious freedom to make that not happen.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: In regard to the question about the role of church leaders in the Middle East, they sometimes have civil society roles. That’s very welcomed. The ecumenical patriarchate, for example, lately emerged as a great defender of environmental issues. I think that’s a contribution to Turkey and abroad. In that sense, it is important and certainly a contribution.

However, I think in Eastern Christianity, religion is not just civil society. It can be the political community as well. The head of a denomination is also the political leader of that denomination, or he strongly associates with the political leader. They didn’t get the Caesar-God thing exactly right. I’m speaking from an American Protestant perspective, if you will. That, of course, makes some Christian leaders political actors in political dramas. Sometimes there are a lot of consequences of that. In Greece, for example, the leader of Greek Cyprus was a bishop named Makarios. You wouldn’t expect that in America, but Makarios was the leader. Turks, who were angry at Greek nationalism, disliked him intensely. Unfortunately, that led to some violence against our Greek minority and especially bishops in Turkey, which was an appalling thing. Rethinking this civil society, especially where it is fused with the political sphere, may be something that is good for the future of Eastern Christianity. Of course, that depends on the civil society and politics in those societies in general.

MUSTAFA AKYOL: Well, that’s a great question. That’s a question Muslims faced when they conquered India. Here was something called Hinduism—well, it was not called Hinduism, but it’s a tradition in India. The Qur’an doesn’t speak about it. So how do we deal with it? The Qur’an speaks of the religions that existed at that time in the vicinity of Arabia and Mecca. It speaks of Jews, Christians, and pagans. Pagans are not very welcomed, but Jews and Christians are accepted and tolerated. It speaks of a group called the Sabaeans, whose identity is still debated—they obviously were not Jews or Christians, but a different group. It speaks favorably of Sabaeans, saying that those who believe in God and do right will actually go to heaven. It says the same thing for Jews and Christians, and that is troubling a lot of Muslims these days. They want to find a way to get rid of that because they want to make heaven exclusive to Muslims.

When Islam expanded to India and there were Muslim empires in India, the questions came: Who are these people? How do we classify them? There was this helpful ijtihad, a religious jurisprudential reasoning, saying that they are People of the Book, too, because they have a tradition and believe in God. Instead of defining them as pagan and therefore totally banning those
religions, the Muslim empires accepted them as People of the Book as well. Today, more progressive Muslims agree that People of the Book means somebody with a moral tradition. The most progressive would say even that the atheists have some moral traditions. It's a hard sell for a lot of Muslims, but you can work out that concept.

If we understand the Qur’an in its historical context, it is speaking about the communities that existed at the time it was written. It doesn’t speak about Sikhs, who didn’t exist then, of course. But you can make inferences in favor of them. You can see them as People of the Book and as equal citizens. It is an evolution of the jurisprudential aspects of Islam.

**AHMET KURU:** I'm Ahmet Kuru from San Diego State University. I have a quick question for Allen. When the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was passed 20 years ago, there was almost unanimous support in the Congress. After two decades of polarization between the two parties, would you imagine today there would be such a consensus on religious freedom? Thank you.

**ALLEN HERTZKE:** Thank you, Ahmet. This is something that I find personally very disturbing, as someone who writes both about global and American religious freedom issues. I was actually doing research in Washington, D.C. when the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was being deliberated. I was interviewing religious actors, the widest coalition I’ve ever seen before. The most liberal Jews were literally going office to office with fundamentalist homeschoolers to defend the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. It was that broad of a coalition.

To me, it reflected the best of the pluralist tradition in America, where all can see their interest in a broad protection of religious freedom—the kind of thing that Peter Berger was talking about. I think it is unfortunate and actually dangerous for the United States’ capability of promoting religious freedom abroad when there are those now in our academic community and political community who see religious freedom as a cover for bigotry or parochialism. One of my hopes, one of my quests, is to help reconnect religious freedom to the grand liberal tradition in the United States and around the world.

**FENGGANG YANG:** I’m Fenggang Yang, a professor at Purdue University. My question first goes to Allen. Talking about religious freedom as a foreign policy of the United States, how important is it in the overall U.S. foreign policy? There are economic, political, military, and other concerns when dealing with other countries. Is religious freedom policy a low priority that is easily compromised when there is a basket of foreign policy issues? Is religious freedom simply used as a pawn for economic gains? I think that is the way it is perceived by the Chinese authorities. Every time the United States has a long list of things the U.S. officials are interested in talking with the Chinese officials about, religious freedom is often the lowest in priority and may not even get on the table to discuss with the Chinese officials.

Second, I want to ask this question to Mustafa: How is this policy in the United States or the EU perceived in the Muslim world?

**ALLEN HERTZKE:** Well, it’s a fabulous question. Of course, my colleague Tom Farr has written about the fact that religious freedom is not treated very seriously at the high levels of the State Department or at the White House. On the other hand, the State Department’s annual report on religious freedom is a remarkable document when you think about the fact that it forces our diplomats to get to know religious actors in every country on earth and actually document what’s happening. It’s been getting better over time. That’s something David Saperstein once said. You should not discount the significance of the annual report as a source of empirical data on what’s happening in every country on earth.

I do think it’s not a high enough priority in the American Foreign Service. I think our Foreign Service officers need better training. They actually need a deeper comprehension of the centrality of religious freedom to the kind of world we want to live in. I think that’s where the empirical and the economic analysis have to come to the fore. In other words, our State Department officials, like foreign leaders, will not agree to promote religious freedom or defend it unless they see it as centrally focused on values that we hold dear. In fact, that’s why I think we need to make the empirical case that religious freedom is linked with economic flourishing, stability, peace, and so forth.

**MUSTAFA AKYOL:** How is American support for religious freedom seen in the Muslim world? There are diverse views, but I think there is a bias against it. It is being perceived and presented by some people as a cover for missionary activity. Missionary activity is a dirty term. They will come make all of us Christians and then occupy our lands and suck our oil. There’s a sort of conspiratorial understanding of the thing. Yes, religious freedom can help missionaries move forward in the Muslim world. But as a Muslim, am I horrified by that? No, because I think that they have a right to do that.
Second, if Muslim societies face more missionaries, they will face an intellectual challenge from a different religious tradition, which is a good thing. They will be forced to engage missionaries intellectually. I had this discussion with a conservative Islamic scholar who said, “Well, wait a minute. They have all these well trained, language-skilled people coming in. We don’t know these things.” I said, “Okay, let’s start to learn.” I mean, the free market should force us to be more competitive.

Of course, not everybody is convinced by this idea, but I think that’s how I would frame it. That’s why it should not be framed in a way that is focused only on that. That’s why I’m saying it should not look like a double standard. It should be concerned about Christian minorities, Christian missionaries, Muslims, and all of that. The principle is, I think, important.

CATHY COSMAN: Hi, I’m Cathy Cosman from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. I wanted to ask whether someone could speak to the very important, pioneering work of the Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Freedom of religion or belief was enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. But then it was sort of operationalized and institutionalized in 1990 and has been operating under various guises ever since in important ways. I was wondering whether someone could address that. Thank you.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: I think you are more of an expert than me on that topic, to be honest. To be very clear on the EU’s standpoint on this, the EU guidelines from 2013 commit us to work with other regional organizations and to maintain a dialogue and exchange on these issues. Also, in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy from 2012 and the new action plan from 2015 to 2019, we again have a commitment to work with the OSCE and the Council of Europe, of course. This scene of different actors remains open. The EU has engaged the League of Arabs States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and so on. It’s important that that dialogue is ongoing multilaterally and also at a regional level, of course.

I would like to add to something that Allen said earlier. We should be better at stressing the kind of positive outcomes that
freedom of religion and belief can give. That's true. I would also like to add that when we are part of the United Nations system and states have signed and ratified international covenants and important conventions on human rights, those states have then committed themselves to upholding these fundamental freedoms and human rights. It's not only about an economic analysis of what brings us furthest. We have legal obligations. I think it's important to remind states of that. That's where the EU member states and the EU admit that they are not perfect, either. We have things to do at home.

ALLEN HERTZKE: In fact, every state that signed these international covenants commits itself not only to upholding them themselves, but also promoting them internationally. I think it'd be a wonderful thing if other countries might, in some ways, critique what's going on in the United States. Are you upholding the International Covenant in terms of conscience rights, for example?

I want to say one other thing. It's not well understood or appreciated, but people who are involved in the legislative process for the International Religious Freedom Act actually cited the Helsinki experience as central to why we should integrate religious freedom in our foreign policy affairs. Human rights played an important role in the Helsinki process. It wasn't the American First Amendment. It was actually international covenants and the Helsinki Accords that inspired some of the legislative drafters of IRFA.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: We have time for one more question.

HU YEPING: My name is Hu Yeping from the Center for the Study of Culture and Values at Catholic University and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. Why do we talk about religious freedom? Why does religion need freedom? I think religion is politicized. If you look at Ancient Greece, when the citizens gathered together in the polis, the first one was the oracle. Religion is not separate. Religion is a way of life. We talk about the historical idea of freedom of religion. But in Chinese studies, there was no such term for religion or philosophy until the nineteenth century, when it was translated from Japanese. Religion was always a part of everyday life and practice. So why do we talk about religious freedom?

“Conscience has rights because it has duties. At some fundamental level, religious freedom is the freedom for me to fulfill my ultimate obligations or duties.”

Allen Hertzke

DANIEL PHILPOTT: That gets down to the most fundamental core principle. Could each of the panelists give just a brief response? What would you see as the best argument for freedom of religion?

MUSTAF A KYOL: Well, this is a subjective issue to some extent, because we are religious animals. It's a part of who we are. Even if you deny tradition and religions, we create new ones. We need to create deities. Chairman Mao becomes our god. So this is such a fundamental part of human nature. We value freedom of speech. We should value freedom of religion as well. Expressing ourselves is a part of our humanity. Having a higher goal and belonging to a higher cause, I think, is a part of humanity. It is politicized, yes, but what can you do about it? The healthy way of being politicized would not be through oppression.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: I'm very much on the same line as Mustafa here. Freedom of religion and belief is really about having an identity, having the right to hold thoughts and then being able to express them. It's really more than just thoughts. It's not just about rationality. As we heard from the first session as well, having that freedom to raise very important existential questions—who are we, where do we come from, where are we heading next—is what freedom of religion and belief is about.

ALLEN HERTZKE: Conscience has rights because it has duties. At some fundamental level, religious freedom is the freedom for me to fulfill my ultimate obligations or duties. In my sense, it's transcendent. What is so fundamental to human identity is a sense that we ought to do certain things. In some cases, we're commanded by God to do certain things. It's striking to me how we actually live in a historic moment. For millennia, philosophers and theologians have been making arguments about freedom of conscience, about freedom of the soul. Right now, we are actually living in a time when vast empirical evidence and events on the ground are corroborating the timeless principle that the protection of freedom of conscience, belief, and religion is central to the crucible of the twenty-first century: living with our differences in a shrinking world. That's a pretty strong case for religious freedom.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Let's thank these wonderful panelists for their great insights. That was a very lively discussion. [Applause]
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: I’m delighted to be moderating this panel conversation on “Overcoming Differences Between Western Democracies in Developing a Common Religious Freedom Policy.” It’s just magnificent to see so many people here representing a wide variety of organizations and academic institutions from all over the world. This is truly an extraordinary conversation, and we’re delighted here at the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown to be hosting so many friends and colleagues from around the world.

I’m Timothy Shah, associate director of the Religious Freedom Project here at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Thus far, we have heard a compelling case for religious freedom and freedom of conscience, as well as for the value of promoting religious freedom and freedom of conscience in foreign policy. This case has several parts, which we’ve heard in the course of the day. Peter Berger, Os Guinness, and Walter Mead made a compelling case that religious freedom provides a crucial context in which pluralism can flourish. So that’s one part of the case we’ve heard so far.

But we’ve also heard a second argument, particularly in the last panel moderated by my friend and colleague, Daniel Philpott. We heard a case that has to do with the effectiveness of freedom of religion and conscience in dampening, resisting, or countering extremism in general, and violent extremism in particular.

By the way, given that this is a Jesuit university and that we in Washington just hosted Pope Francis, a Jesuit pope, a couple of weeks ago, I’ll mention that when he was in the United States, Pope Francis made another kind of argument for religious freedom in his speech before the United Nations. He made what you might call a developmental argument for religious freedom, in which he argued that religious freedom or spiritual freedom is crucial for the multi-dimensional and sustainable development of the human person. Pope Francis said, “Government leaders must do everything possible to ensure that all can have the minimum spiritual and material means needed to live in dignity and to create and support a family, which is the primary catalyst for any social development… This absolute minimum has three names: lodging, labor, and land; and one spiritual name: spiritual freedom, which includes religious freedom, the right to education, and all other civil rights.” So we heard a compelling case for religious freedom from our own sociological pope, Peter Berger, and also from Pope Francis. [Laughter]
There are many different kinds of arguments for this, but now we need to ask ourselves: How do we get down to brass tacks? How do we practically develop a common, or at least coordinated, Western policy for advancing the cause of religious freedom in the face of many obstacles? Some of the obstacles are the differences between Western governments and societies themselves in terms of their understanding of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of thought.

Fortunately, to address this difficult question of developing a common, coordinated policy, we have four outstanding experts and practitioners who represent different parts of the Western world. They have enormous experience on these issues. I’m absolutely delighted by the composition of this panel. I’m going to quickly introduce the members of the panel, and then I’m going to ask a series of questions that will get at this issue of developing a common policy on religious freedom.

Thomas Farr is to my far left. He is the director of the Religious Freedom Project at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. He is an associate professor of the practice of religion and world affairs at Georgetown’s Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service, a former American diplomat, and a leading authority on international religious freedom. Tom has published widely, including a major 2008 article in *Foreign Affairs*, “Diplomacy in an Age of Faith,” and a comprehensive monograph on the importance of advancing religious freedom for national security, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security*. He came to the State Department as a diplomat after a distinguished career in the U.S. Army. It’s important to note for the purposes of this panel that Tom served as the very first director of the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom from 1999 to 2003. In that capacity, he traveled widely to promote religious liberty and engaged religious communities, government officials, and the victims of religious persecution. Tom was, therefore, a primary driver of American religious freedom policy.

I’m also delighted that we have Pasquale Annicchino to my immediate left. Pasquale is one of the world’s most outstanding experts and scholars on Western religious freedom policy. He’s written a book in Italian on the subject and numerous articles analyzing the details of international religious freedom policies of Western governments. He’s a research fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and a member of the European University Institute’s Ethics Committee. He’s been an adjunct professor of law at BYU Law School, and a visiting professor at the Catholic University of Leuven. He received his Ph.D. in Law from the University of Sienna.

To Pasquale’s left is Ahmet Kuru of San Diego State University. Ahmet Kuru is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at San Diego State. He’s also the director of the Center for Islamic and Arabic Studies. His research specializes in comparative politics, religion and politics, and Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. He is the author of multiple essays and books concerning policy and religion, including *Secularism and State Policies towards Religion: The United States, France and Turkey* (2009)—a book that I force my students to read, I might add, because it’s so outstanding. [Laughter] It won the Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in 2011.

AHMET KURU: And you need to force them to read it?

[Laughter]

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: I need to force them. It’s one respect in which consciences need to be forced, I think. In addition, Ahmet was the co-editor, along with Alfred Stepan, of *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (2012).

And then we have Ambassador Anne Leahy of McGill University. Ambassador Leahy is a former Canadian diplomat, and she is currently an adjunct professor in McGill University’s Catholic Studies Department. She provides regular media commentary on domestic and foreign policy issues concerning secularism and religion. In her vast career—she has 40 years of experience in foreign diplomacy—she held ambassadorships to the Holy See, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Poland, Russia, Armenia, Belarus, and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

To kick off our conversation, it’s useful to begin with the United States when thinking about developing a common, coordinated religious freedom policy. As Os Guinness noted very eloquently this morning, the United States has probably the longest running experiment with what one might call “robust religious freedom” among the Western democracies, which goes back to the eighteenth century. Of course, that experiment has encountered many problems along the way.

But as many of us must know, the United States also has had by far the oldest international religious freedom policy dating back to 1998. I want to pose this question to Tom initially, and then ask others to chime in. Tom, what lessons from this policy can be drawn for other Western democracies as they develop their
religious freedom policies? What aspects of U.S. policy in this area should be replicated and what aspects should perhaps not be replicated?

THOMAS FARR: We have had a policy for 17 years across three administrations and both political parties in the United States. It is very difficult to argue that during those 17 years religious freedom has improved anywhere in the world. That doesn't mean the United States is responsible for this problem. It does mean it's hard to argue that we have been successful in our statutory responsibility of advancing religious freedom and reducing persecution around the world. So the U.S. religious freedom establishment, our foreign policy establishment, and our political leadership need to accept some of these recommendations as well.

First, make it clear that you're advocating for religious freedom and not simply opposing religious persecution. These activities are two sides of the same coin, but they're not the same thing. I would argue that opposing religious persecution, which is a noble and a good thing to do, has generally yielded reports, lists, and speeches, but not policies that have improved things.

So what's the answer? We must promote religious freedom as the antidote to religious persecution, and that's a very hard thing to do. You've got to begin by being clear about what you think religious freedom is. Here we have a problem. What is religious freedom? Is it just the right not to be tortured? Surely it's more than that. Is it simply the right to worship? Both Os Guinness and Peter Berger mentioned that in the United States today, the “right to worship” is becoming a synonym for religious freedom. Surely it means the right to worship, but it must mean more than that. If so, what? We often talk about “religion in the public square.” What does that mean? It doesn't mean only the right to wear religious garb. It means the right to be involved in the public life of your country if you live in a democracy. Just because you're a religious citizen that has religious views doesn't mean you have to leave them out of your public and civic activities.

Peter was trying to make this distinction earlier today when he talked about same-sex marriage. He said that there are secular ways to talk about that issue. That's certainly true. But I was wondering if he was having a Rawlsian moment there in saying that you have to leave aside any religious argument. I think you have to be smart about your religious arguments, but I don't think it is right to say that you just have to take a religious argument and translate it into a secular argument. I don't think Peter was talking about a constitutional requirement. He was talking about a prudential reason for changing your argument. You may want to try to persuade somebody who doesn't buy your premises. So in that sense, you do want to change your arguments into ones that can be heard and understood.

But the right to bring your religion qua religion into the public square is very important to religious liberty. If you're going to promote religious liberty, you've got to figure out a way to entice those religious elements that are in a society into the public square in a way that is legitimate and consonant with democratic values. If you don't do that, you're going to fail in promoting religious freedom, and you're going to fail in reducing religious persecution. We have not done that well in the United States, but I would certainly recommend it to all of our European colleagues, our Brazilian colleagues, and anybody who wants to advance religious freedom.

So don't just curse the darkness of religious persecution. Actually advance religious freedom. It's very hard to do, but it's the only way to make this work.

Second, make it abundantly clear that you are advocating religious freedom and opposing religious persecution for everyone, not just for your own group. Now this may seem obvious to many, but it is something that I think all religious groups struggle with to one degree or another. We all support advancing religious freedom for minorities, of course, because they're the ones that are in the eye of the storm. But we also want to defend the religious freedom of the majority. People who belong to the ma-
The majority community—whether they’re Christians in the United States or Muslims in Turkey or anywhere else—have an equal right to be involved in the public life of their nation as citizens. Everybody has a right to be involved on the basis of his or her religious beliefs.

But we also have to make it clear that religious freedom imposes limits. This came up in Mustafa’s comments. A lot of people ask, “Well, if you have religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, does that mean that the majority Wahhabis get to impose any rule they please? According to Wahhabis, for example, women can’t drive cars, vote, or move out of the country if they choose to.” No. Religious freedom does not mean I get to do whatever I say my religion obligates me to do.

Properly understood, religious freedom imposes its own limits, the most important being full equality under the law. This is the limit on everyone’s religious freedom: You have the same right to religious freedom that I do, even though we follow two different religions.

Third, integrate religious freedom into the fairly secular diplomatic service of Western democracies. Let’s face it: Most Western diplomats are not attending Baptist prayer meetings. [Laughter] They’re usually fairly secular. I think this is true in all of the Western democracies, including the United States. The State Department is a fairly secular institution. It always has been.

So what? If they view the religious freedom office and the religious freedom ambassador and the people who work there as something that’s been imposed on them by religious groups from the outside, it will not work. The Office of International Religious Freedom has to draw on some of the arguments made by Allen Hertzke and others today. It has to be seen as something fundamental to the interest of the country or to the EU. Otherwise, it won’t work.

Finally, give authority and resources to the people who are in charge. Don’t stick them in an office somewhere and tell them to go out and make speeches and meet with religious people. That may be fun. It’s not a worthless thing to do, but it is not advancing international religious freedom. So give them authority and resources.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, Tom. The United States is an example of some good ways and perhaps also some not-so-good ways to promote religious freedom. Pasquale, can I...
turn to you? You studied the different religious freedom policies of Western countries.

PASQUALE ANNICCHINO: First of all, thank you very much for inviting me to be on this panel. I just want to elaborate on a couple of the points that Tom made. I agree with him on the main distinction between promoting religious freedom and avoiding religious persecution. This distinction should be made clear from the beginning. The problem I have with it is that sometimes we don’t even agree on the need to avoid religious persecution. For our own Western states, the classic case will be Saudi Arabia. This is not only the case with the United States, but with Europe as well. For instance, the only foreign minister that stood up against some policies in Saudi Arabia was the Swedish minister of foreign affairs, and very few European prime ministers or colleagues supported her when she criticized those policies.

If we pretend to defend fundamental rights and religious freedom and then we remain silent in those moments, I think that we run into serious problem of incoherence. Therefore, I think that before we engage in the issue of promoting religious freedom, we have to solve this issue. This is still something that we cannot take for granted in the Western world. We need to have a serious conversation on this issue of terminology. In the United Kingdom they would say that British and Americans are divided by language, even though they more or less agree on the issue of religious freedom. If you look at official documents, you will find it’s very tricky and hard to translate religious freedom, religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion and belief from a legal point of view. Brits and Americans do not simply have different versions of the same content. Behind this terminology there are different normative worlds that sometimes conflict.

I agree with Tom that even we in the Western world need to have a serious conversation about this. For instance, I found out that many Catholic scholars, especially those in the United States, would prefer to use the terminology of religious liberty instead of freedom of conscience. There is a very deep and important reason for this. Religious liberty comes from the Latin phrase _libertas ecclesiae_, which is the freedom of the Church that comes before the freedom of the individual. Individual freedom can only be within the freedom of the Church.

Furthermore, if we look at the internal debates in the United States—at a case like _Hobby Lobby_—there have been legal terms that are hard to understand within the European legal order, be-
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, Pasquale. I want to turn to Anne. Canada is such an interesting case. It’s one of the few countries that actually has, in a sense, replicated some aspects of American policy by formally having an Office of International Religious Freedom, including an ambassador for international religious freedom. It is now filled by Andrew Bennett, who’s been to Georgetown on several occasions. Anne, do you have comments? Given your experience in Canada, is it a good thing that Canada has replicated this aspect of American international religious freedom policy?

ANNE LEAHY: I’m afraid I’ll be a little dissonant. I come from Quebec. We’re a distinct society, anyway. [Laughter] I’ll speak in a personal capacity. I no longer have links to the foreign affairs of Canada. I was in Moscow for the first time in 1980, during the last real blast of the Cold War. I was the officer responsible for monitoring human rights and my job description included religious freedom, since some of the people we monitored were, of course, people who were persecuted for their religious beliefs.

As I followed the genesis of the Office of Religious Freedom in Canada in the first year-and-a-half, and analyzed the impact of the debate about the place of religion in the public square in Quebec and Canada, a few things came to my mind. We are hypocritical. We should preach by example. I’m not sure we need an Office of Religious Freedom because it is so open to being manipulated in terms of its interpretation. The permanent secretary of the British Civil Service said that human rights are now at the bottom of the priorities of the British Foreign Office. They’re all about trade. If religious rights are subject to that, the EU will draw the appropriate conclusions. So I think we do need to preach by example.

In terms of Canada, we like to think that we are a model in terms of reasonable accommodation of various communities, whether they’re the First Nations, the French, the English, or newly arrived immigrants. We are a model because people look at this from the outside and they see that it can work. We’re far from perfect, but we can make it work. This experience impresses more than another series of annual reports. It’s far better than putting out a tweet every 30 minutes and a press release every two hours. I think we should concentrate more on action than on preaching.

In terms of the Office of Religious Freedom, it was primarily a political act in Canada’s case. It came from the realization that there was a lot of persecution of Christians. All those statistics came out in 2010, 2011, and 2012, either from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or from others like Pew, which showed that the most persecuted religion was in fact Christianity. That led, of course, to some pressure to react.

The office was announced in 2011 or 2012. The ambassador was named just a year-and-a-half ago. Since the writ of the federal elections was dropped—we have an election on October 19—there’s been nothing but silence out of the Canadian Office of Religious Freedom. I don’t think that’s because there’s nothing to talk about. But on the other hand, I wonder how many people noticed.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Great. Thank you, Ambassador Leahy. Let me turn now to Ahmet Kuru. We are, in a sense, getting more deeply into the obstacles to having a coordinated Western religious freedom policy, and this is really an area in which Professor Kuru has worked quite a bit. I’d like to ask you, Ahmet, to talk about the domestic political religious experiences and the different trajectories of the different Western democracies with respect to issues of religion and state, their distinctive religious constituencies, and their distinctive domestic dilemmas dealing with religion. How did these kinds of things affect their international perspectives and their international religious freedom promotion? Of course, one thinks of France as having a relatively statist and explicitly secularist approach to religion, which you’ve written about. One thinks of the United States, which practices a very different sort of relationship between religion and state. How do these very different histories and different trajectories affect the institution of international religious freedom policy?

AHMET KURU: Thanks, Tim. I would like to start by quoting one of my favorite philosophers, Nasreddin Hodja of eleventh-century Anatolia. Hodja was a historical figure who wore differ-
ent hats. Sometimes he was the imam. Sometimes he was the qadi. Sometimes he was a community leader. When he was a qadi, a judge, two persons came accusing each other. He listened to the first one and said, “You are right.” When he listened to the second one, he turned to him and said, “You are right.” His wife was not impressed. She was outraged and said, “Hodja, how can two opposite arguments both be right?” He listened to her and said, “You are right, too.” [Laughter] I think we need such level of toleration and understanding. When it comes to the debate about whether the U.S. religious freedom reports are problematic or beneficial, I think both sides have good points.

But I think that a cost-benefit analysis can be very helpful. There is an enormous scholarly dataset. In my book I prepared an index of state and religion relations of various countries, and my main data source was the religious freedom reports of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. For example, people have been discussing Islam and the state for a very long time. The popular idea is that the two are merged. In most Muslim countries, there are Islamic states. But it was the commission’s report that first gave us the data that out of 49 Muslim-majority countries, 23 are secular states. That was a major breakthrough that most scholars of Islam didn’t know about.

The second reason I want to make a case for the shift toward greater attention to religion in U.S. policy has to do with the origin of the shift. It didn’t begin as a U.S. imperialistic foreign policy agenda. As far as I know, it started in Oregon. A Native American and his white friend went to a religious ceremony and used peyote, a hallucinogenic, but they happened to be working for a drug rehabilitation center. They were fired. They took the issue to court, saying that they used the drug for religious purposes. It became a huge debate and we ended up with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The origin is a very sincere debate about the importance of religious freedom, even if you are working in a drug rehabilitation center. The funny thing is that the friend of the Native American said that he was white, but he converted to the Native American religion, and that’s why he was using the drug.

As we deconstruct the idea of Islam and the state, we should also deconstruct the term Western secularism, because there are mul-
The type of secularism that has been dominant in the United States, as well as in countries like India and the Netherlands, is passive secularism. The state is supposed to play a passive role by tolerating religious or secular discourses if they appear in the public sphere. When the U.S. religious freedom reports started to be issued, there was a series of debates in Turkey about passive versus assertive secularism. At that time, a major debate was on the issue of the headscarf. It was as big an issue as abortion in the United States. For Turks, there were two sources of Western opinion on this issue. One was the European Court of Human Rights, which upheld Turkey's decision to ban the headscarf in universities, saying that an adult Muslim female's headscarf constituted peer pressure and a threat to Turkish democracy. Therefore, the state's prohibition of headscarves was perfectly compatible and even a necessity to protect democracy. Given the fact that about two-thirds of women in Turkey are wearing some sort of headscarf, that was extremely discriminatory. That was really disappointing because it was followed by another decision with the same court that upheld crucifixes in Italian classrooms. The court ruled that the crucifixes did not constitute peer pressure whatsoever.

The Turks were shocked. But at the same time, the U.S. religious freedom reports emphasized that the headscarf ban was a restriction of the right to education and a restriction of religious freedom. Not all European institutions are filled with assertive secularists or have double standards when it comes to Islam. But at least in the United States there is a passive secularism that tries to promote a more mutual understanding between Islam and Western values and norms.

One more thing I would like to emphasize is that assertive secularism in France has become a source of coalition building between the left-wing secularists and right-wing anti-immigrants—you may call the latter Islamophobes or the far right. Interestingly, these two polar opposites, who fought against each other for over a century, came together when it came to Islam on the particular issue of the headscarf. Left-wing secularists and right-wing anti-immigrants agreed on the ban. In the United States, we have seen the opposite: The GOP and Democrats came together on the agenda of religious freedom. A passive secularism, which emphasized inclusion and understanding, became a basis for the two parties to agree with each other. I think it's very healthy for democracy and for a more inclusionary understanding of state-religion relations.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** Thank you. Could you just talk a little bit about how differences between passive and assertive secularism affect the implementation of international religious freedom policy? Do they have an effect on the way these countries look at the rest of world and engage the issue of religious freedom?

**AHMET KURU:** First of all, in order to teach a lesson to other countries, you should solve the problem at home. So in the United States, for example, Muslims have the freedom to open mosques and wear headscarves. There are also many gestures. For example, on each Muslim holiday, the U.S. Postal Service issues an Eid stamp with Arabic calligraphy as a gesture. Recently a Muslim imam preached the opening prayer in the U.S. Congress. Presidents since Clinton celebrate Muslim holidays, and Obama had an iftar dinner.

We do not see these kinds of gestures in France. Therefore, if France had such a religious freedom office, 49 Muslim-majority countries would not even read the reports. They would say, “You didn’t solve your problems at home. How can you teach us?” In the American case, I think there’s a significant difference between passive and assertive secularism. Since passive secularism is not imposing itself as a comprehensive doctrine, it gives more space for both majorities and minorities.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** Great. Thank you very much. This takes us back, Ambassador Leahy, to the powerful point you were making about the importance of setting an example. So I want to turn to you. We've dwelled quite a bit on problems and obstacles. Given your long experience, Ambassador Leahy, I'd like you to address the question: How can we, as Western democracies, better pursue global religious freedom in concert? What can Western governments practically do despite the differences, obstacles, challenges, and areas where, of course, they will never be perfect in the way they implement religious freedom at home? What can they do better in terms of promoting international religious freedom together?

**ANNE LEAHY:** Well, I think we should go back to really promoting, defending, and funding the effort to promote human rights in general. That includes the right to profess publicly one's belief. It includes the right to freedom of expression. Implicitly...
we've talked about international religious freedom in the world, but there are two levels, really. There's always a bilateral relationship, like between Canada and the United States or the EU. Then there is the conversation that takes place in international and multinational forums, not only at the OSCE and the UN, but also at the Organization of Islamic States and at the African Union. We should not forget that they also have debates. They also have charters and contribute to this discussion. We should encourage them and perhaps give them more visibility when we look at the foreign policies of each of our countries working together in these international forums. It may sound very bureaucratic, but these resolutions and charters that get debated form the basis for mandates that are given to observers or rapporteurs.

Members of civil society—women's groups, faith-based groups, and humanitarian organizations—all have something to do with faith-based rights or situations. For these organizations, these agreements are instruments that can help them in their work, particularly when they encounter difficulties. There are fascinating debates right now in the UN. There is one about whether or not religion is worthy of being defended; one on whether blasphemy laws to protect religion trump protection of individual rights; and one on the dichotomy between freedom of expression and protection of one's belief.

As an example of dealing with conflicting principles, the Quebec government amended its Charter of Rights and Freedoms to put equality of men and women above every other right. Islam conveys for some people the idea that a woman wearing the niqab is submissive to a man, and she must always walk behind her husband. These cultural and religious characteristics of Islam in our own communities are real issues that we should pay a lot more attention to in discussing freedom of religion at the multilateral level.

In terms of bilateral relationships, the EU talks about the funds it has available to invest with its partners in all sorts of society-building projects. Often there is a religious dimension. It's often one of several dimensions, like empowering youth or women's groups, building legal institutions, and so on. Practitioners of our development assistance cooperation—and I was the Canadian delegate to the Development Assistance Committee at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in the mid-1980s—have known this for decades, so this is nothing new. But we didn't put big, bold religious labels on projects. If we un-bolded them, we would probably achieve the same results. In a nutshell, I'd like to know what we are trying to achieve with an international religious freedom policy, and whether or not we achieved it.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Speaking of multilateral organizations, I want to ask you, Pasquale, about the relative merits of pursuing religious freedom through the policies of individual governments, perhaps including alliances between governments, versus incorporating religious freedom into the foreign polices of bodies like the European Union, the United Nations, and the African Union. What are the merits of these different approaches?

PASQUALE ANNICCHINO: Well, this is an old controversy in the sense that even if you look at the records when IRFA was approved in 1998, there was this classic debate on multilateral versus unilateral approaches. On this very specific issue, I would side with Jeremy Gunn, who is not someone who is suspected to be a hard Republican. Jeremy Gunn wrote an article one year after IRFA was approved. He argued that we can combine both multilateralism and unilateralism for a better promotion of freedom of religion or belief, and that these are complementary approaches.

From my general perspective, the more states that are involved, the better. But this is not always obvious and easy. Look at the UN. There is a special rapporteur who does a great job on mapping, reporting, and promoting religious freedom. However, when you look at the UN Human Rights Council, it's kind of hard to develop a shared line on the protection of religious freedom. The controversies raised in this council are partly due to the policy of Western countries. As we know, Saudi Arabia got a seat in the UN Human Rights Council because it made a deal with the United Kingdom. So it's a very complex bargain.

Again, there is the issue that the ambassador raised before: Perhaps we in the West are not preaching by example. This is very important if we want to be credible actors when we promote and protect freedom of religion or belief, or even when we tell other countries that they should not persecute people because of what they believe or because they changed their religion.

There is also another thing that I want to stress, which affects both internal politics and multilateral organizations. I very much respect what the United States has done for the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief, but the situation from 1998 to today has deeply changed. I mean, in 1998 we had an act approved by both parties unanimously. I do not believe that today IRFA would have been approved with unanimity in the U.S. Congress, because religion and religious freedom have become highly partisan issues in the United States. It is often associated only with one political party, and there is no common
denominator. It will be quite difficult for the United States to lead a global coalition for freedom of religion or belief, because it’s hard to find a shared internal agreement, even within the country. If we are not able to find a common position within the United States, how can we assume that other partners in the world can have a common understanding of freedom of religion or belief?

Of course, there are things that can be shared and common actions can be envisaged between Europe and the United States. But at the global level, I think this is becoming more and more of a civilizational issue. Religious freedom will be one of those Huntingtonian dividing lines on which the world will divide and on which we will all need to take a firm position in the next few years because of the increasing amount of religious persecution. It leads to the need for more events like this one.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. Tom, I’d like to turn to you again. Would you comment on the discussion we’ve just had about unilateral versus multilateral approaches? Pasquale has just made some interesting observations about the fractured state of American views of religious freedom as a barrier to more effective promotion of religious freedom by Western countries. Do you have any comments on that?

THOMAS FARR: Well, I think at some level multilateralism is good simply because there are a lot of people and a lot of groups that are at least rowing in the same direction. The problem is that if you have a group of people who do not agree on what it is they’re doing or where they’re rowing the boat to, it’s going to be a bit less effective.

It’s very interesting to hear the criticism coming from Europeans on the United States’ disarray when it comes to religious freedom. I happen to agree with that criticism. In fact, I think it’s very hard for the United States as a policymaking entity to advance religious freedom if it doesn’t believe in it and if it doesn’t understand what it is.

Earlier in this discussion, Pasquale mentioned Saudi Arabia’s position on the UN Human Rights Council. If you read the U.S. International Religious Freedom Report on Saudi Arabia, it hits hard. It’s very clear in saying that Saudi Arabia lacks religious freedom. It talks about how the Shi’a minority and women are disadvantaged by particular Islamic interpretations, specifically Wahhabism.

But here is my point: Those are words. That’s not a policy. This is an example of focusing on religious persecution rhetorically without advancing religious freedom. Having said that, I believe every country represented in this room has a national interest, and this is a legitimate exercise of state sovereignty. Saudi Arabia is a country with huge religious freedom problems. I don’t believe that we can simply sweep aside all of our other interests and focus only on religious freedom in Saudi Arabia.

However, I would add this: I do believe that the advancement of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, if it is done the right way—probably not even using the phrase “religious freedom”—can advance American interests in that country. I would say the same thing about Iran or China. They are all different, but in each case arguments can be made that speak to the interests of that country. It doesn’t involve waving Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in front of them.

So how do you do this? The only common-sense answer I have is you figure out what they see as their own interest, and you ask: Is the advancement of religious freedom—or religious toleration, or getting along with neighbors, or equality under the law—possible in that country? Is it possible for the opinion-shapers and the policymakers in a given country to see it as in their interest? And I think the answer is often “yes.” In China, it has to do with sustained economic development. Saudi Arabia is a tougher case, but the day may come when we have the answer. I think it is easier for countries of the Muslim-majority world that have opted for democracy or self-governance in some fashion. That would mean Iraq, Pakistan, or Egypt—although Iraq is in a terrible state now.
So promoting religious freedom multilaterally is a good idea, but you can’t be going in different directions. You have to understand what it is you’re promoting and how to do it. I think this is a good thing to do. We should be doing more of it, and that’s why we’re having this conversation.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, Tom. Ambassador Leahy?

ANNE LEAHY: I’d like to introduce a distinction here. We’re talking, of course, about governments. We’re talking about the U.S. government and the EU. In terms of leading a discussion on the benefits of allowing freedom of religion—and, speaking of Saudi Arabia, sectarian freedom within Islam as well—I think the best-placed people are not government officials, but parliamentarians. An interesting development in terms of the dialogue on international religious freedom has been the formation of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, because they have legitimacy. Most of them have been elected, so they speak for society. They don’t decree social values. I see limits to “cognitive recognition” or “cognitive contamination” when it comes to some fundamentalists—to use Peter Berger’s expression from this morning—but overall it does work. This is probably a more fruitful avenue. I just wanted us to remember the elected representatives.

THOMAS FARR: That’s exactly right. It goes beyond governments, and it even goes beyond parliamentarians. We had a lot of talk this morning about civil society. It goes to the faith-based elements of civil society. When I say “advance religious freedom by determining the interest of a given country,” it isn’t just about old guys with white hair. Have you ever seen any of those in the State Department sitting across from other guys and gals with white hair? The point is, it’s not just about government-to-government interactions. Advancing religious freedom on the part of the United States— with its allies or by itself—must involve more than simply government-to-government talks. It must begin there. It must involve that. But it’s got to empower those within any given society who see the advantages of religious freedom in their own societies. If we can’t figure that out, we can’t advance religious freedom. And if we can’t advance religious freedom, we can’t reduce religious persecution.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: We have numerous officials from Western governments in this room right now who are responsible for, or at least partly responsible for, the international religious freedom policies of their governments. We have Ambassador David Saperstein. Thank you, Ambassador Saperstein, for all that you do. He is the head of the International Religious Freedom Office of the State Department. We have Sue Breeze of the British Foreign Commonwealth Office working on religious freedom. We have Sofia Lemmetyinen working in the European Union. What is one thing that these officials could do tomorrow that would serve to advance a more coordinated, effective policy for promoting international religious freedom?

PASQUALE ANNICCHINO: In Europe and the United States I see people increasingly talking to each other and sharing best practices. This is something that they can do to better implement their policy. I would strongly encourage sharing, and I know that there are informal groups that have been created that have been working very hard. So I’m quite confident that this kind of sharing of best practices can be improved.

AHMET KURU: A legal and practical basis for a meritocracy, in which people are hired and promoted based on their merits rather than religious identities, is vital. That’s the genius of the U.S. Constitution prohibiting a religious test. In the Middle East, for example, there is this widespread idea that if you do not hire someone of the same religion or sect, somehow the other sect will capture the state’s power and eliminate you. The idea of capturing the state’s power and then using it against the other group creates mistrust. In the Middle East, that’s the basis of the violation of religious freedom. If you ask people personally, they say, “Oh, why not? Of course, it’s good thing.” But when it comes to practice it’s much different. For example, in Iraq, when a Shi’a becomes prime minister, he makes each and every
cabinet minister, police chief, and military general Shi’a. This is a vicious circle, and the sectarian conflict turns into a bloody fight. Western governments could do a better job of promoting meritocracy.

ANNE LEAHY: Well, those people should attend meetings with their respective ministers of the interior responsible for migration, for hiring practices, for newly-arrived people, and so on.

THOMAS FARR: On the principle that you can't sell a product by yourself—let alone with 10 other people who disagree over what the product is that you're selling—I would argue that we need a transatlantic covenant on the meaning and value of religious freedom so that we can agree on what it is we are attempting to advance.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Fantastic. Now we'll take questions.

COLE DURHAM: Tom articulated the importance of appealing to national interest. Does that get in the way sometimes? Reading some of your work, I understand how persuasive it would be within the Western foreign policy establishment. But I'm wondering if other countries would see it as a vindication of the notion that what's really behind religious freedom is national interest. So how does articulating things in terms of national interest get in the way of things?

Then I have a second question. We need a common approach. But to what extent are our different approaches sometimes helpful? Sometimes people in some countries will better relate to Europe than to the United States. I've heard it said that the United States leads by irritation. [Laughter]

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: That's a great question. I actually recently heard that Ambassador Bennett, the Canadian ambassador for religious freedom, likes Canada to play a good cop to America's bad cop on international religious freedom promotion. So maybe there is something to your question.

THOMAS FARR: Let me first say that my argument that this is a U.S. national interest issue has not become a big bestseller within the United States. We have a ways to go. There are Americans who are writing that that's exactly what we're trying to do: that we're trying to impose religious freedom on others as a national interest. But my argument is beyond that. It is that we need to appeal to the national interest of other countries in the way that we do this. If we can combine the notion of religious freedom, however we articulate it, with their understanding of what their interests are, then and only then can we succeed in doing this.

As to your second point, I could not agree more that a diversity of approaches, tactics, and strategies is very important. But the real issue here is that even with the differences in strategies and tactics, if you don't agree on what it is that you're doing—which hill you're taking, to use a military analogy—a diversity of tactics is not going to help you.

PASQUALE ANNICCHINO: On the issue of the national interest I subscribe to what Tom has said about the national interest of other countries. But sometimes advancing policies on religious freedom or supporting civil society can also be the unintended consequence of Western states promoting their own national interest. I have seen this recently in my own country, Italy, which has had a quite active foreign policy in Africa. If you look at the case of Meriam Ibrahim, for instance, the people in Sudan didn't really like the U.S. diplomats who were trying to free Meriam Ibrahim. Italy had developed some connections with the Sudanese government because of other national interests, and the U.S. diplomats turned to the Italians to free Meriam Ibrahim. So it was an unintended consequence of Italy advancing its own foreign policy interests in...
Africa. Even when you talk to policymakers, you should always be aware that the advancement of religious freedom, or at least the prevention of religious persecution, can be a kind of unintended consequence of other policies.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Yes, Ahmet.

AHMET KURU: It should be goal-based rather than means-based. The end result is more important. For example, the United States has separation of church and state. To a certain extent, the United Kingdom has an established church. Germany is collecting church taxes. So the institutional structures of these states may differ, but the end result should be the freedom of human beings as evaluated and expressed by themselves.

THOMAS FARR: Ahmet said America has separation. Depending on what he means, he’s absolutely right. But by that some people mean that America has no religion in the public square—that it’s literally privatized. I’m not sure that’s what you mean; I doubt it. But the separation in that sense is nowhere in the American constitutional experiment. The American First Amendment invited religion into the public square. That is the whole basis of our understanding of religious freedom. This is what I think can appeal to Muslim-majority countries and other religiously-based countries. We’re not saying that you have to take your religion and throw it out as a citizen of your country; quite the contrary. You do have to accept limits. One of them is you can’t pass anti-blasphemy laws because you’re using the powers of the state to silence criticism of your own religion, both by your own people and by others. It doesn’t work well. But religious freedom can work well for you.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: I would argue that the kind of American model of passive secularism may be more exportable.

ANNE LEAHY: I would shy away from trying to export any specific model to another country and another continent with a different culture. For example, Canada has blasphemy laws, and we’re your neighbors. I think this is the underlying principle in the universal document. It was the basis for the discussions in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the East-West discussions that brought down communism. We are not exporting a specific model.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Cole’s questions sparked a long colloquy here. We have about 10 other people who want to ask a question.

ANNA DILLON: Thank you. I’m Anna Dillon from the Church of Scientology. My question is for Mr. Farr. It’s a corollary to your recent comment on blasphemy laws, but it’s also about the point you made that it has to be clear that there is a limit to religious freedom. Do you have a suggestion about a more proper way to do it at the public policy level, if it should be limited at the public policy level at all? My background is Russian. My country is a very bad example of attempts to limit religious freedom by infringing on the rights of very peaceful communities that don’t mean to be extremists at all.

THOMAS FARR: In Russia, you have to look at what Russians will respond to—not just the minorities in Russia, because they are not going to be able to change this, but the stakeholders, the opinion shapers, the government—and make arguments to them. In this case, it’s almost as hard as some of the other countries because it’s an authoritarian regime. If I were trying to chart a strategy for Russia at a public policy level, it would be to try to wean the Russian Orthodox Church away from its tendency to want to maintain a monopoly on religion in its own country, which is harming not only Russia in my view, but the Russian Orthodox Church. I wouldn’t put it quite that way. I would try to talk about Russian interests. That’s just an example of trying to play to the interests of the country. In this case, the Russian Orthodox Church is a very important civil society organization. I hope that helps.

“A legal and practical basis for a meritocracy, in which people are hired and promoted based on their merits rather than religious identities, is vital. That’s the genius of the U.S. Constitution prohibiting a religious test. In the Middle East, for example, there is this widespread idea that if you do not hire someone of the same religion or sect, somehow the other sect will capture the state’s power and eliminate you.”

Ahmet Kuru
THOMAS FARR: Next we have Sofia Lemmetyinen of the European Union.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: Thank you. I have a question for Tom. You mentioned this transatlantic covenant on freedom of religion or belief.

THOMAS FARR: Not belief, just religious freedom. I didn’t add that word.

SOFIA LEMMETYINEN: Oh, sorry. That’s my line, I’m afraid. But my first question is: Why do we need that? We have the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We have the General Comment 22, which explains what this right is. So why do we need a new religious freedom policy? Second, what would it include?

THOMAS FARR: Why do we need it? We have Article 18. We have the European conventions. We have the Muslim conventions. We have a lot of paper. A lot of people signed up to a lot of things that say they believe in religious freedom and belief. There is a famous line by James Madison about a parchment barrier. They are just words. I don’t believe that anyone can argue that religious freedom isn’t anything other than in a crisis around the world. If you look at the Pew Research reports, or if you just look at the television, listen to the radio, or read the newspapers, you know that it is in sad shape in virtually every region in the world. There are different symptoms of it. There is violent religious persecution in Iraq and Syria. There are periodic, vicious crackdowns in China. There are big problems in Russia. There are problems in India with radical Hinduism. There are problems in Sri Lanka and Burma with radical forms of Buddhism. I would argue that there are problems in the West and in the United States, including growing government restrictions and social hostilities with respect to religion in the public square.

We have signed up to all of these covenants, and some of them intend to be binding, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 18. Countries have signed up to that, and that’s supposed to be binding. It hasn’t worked. I’m not arguing for doing away with them, nor am I arguing for a binding covenant. I am arguing for a covenant among our governments in which we would agree on what it is we’re doing.

And here I come to freedom of religion or belief. I don’t have anything against belief. I just don’t know what the heck it means. But I do know what religion means. There is a famous line in a footnote in Dignitatis Humanae, the Catholic declaration on religious liberty. It deals with this issue. Nowhere in the Catholic declaration on religious liberty is the word conscience used as frequently as it is used nowadays. Since 1965 it has gotten worse. A footnote written by John Courtney Murray says that conscience means I get to do whatever I want to do just because I say my conscience says I can do it. Conscience un tethered is meaningless. But religion, as I define it, is what a human being does when he or she is seeking truth, when he or she is seeking the answers to the ultimate questions.

A person can have a belief in the Democratic Party or a conviction that he’s got to do this or that. Those are all beliefs. I fear that the term has been cooked up by people who don’t want religion in the public square. So that’s why I think we ought to have a covenant on freedom of religion, because religion is definable. You don’t have to like it. There are a lot of religions that I don’t particularly like. But I believe every human being has the right to pursue the religious quest. That’s not the same thing as pursuing belief, whatever that means.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, Tom. We’ve got about 10 minutes, and I know there are many, many questions.

FABIO PETITO: I actually think that when you were talking about all the problems that we face in the world, you’re very much talking about religious persecution. I think that’s where we now need to focus, even in the transatlantic and multilateral dialogues. I want to suggest that one of the reasons why the promotion of religious freedom in American foreign policy has failed is that it was unclear what you were promoting.

In this respect, we need to understand that the United States is the exception. It has a model of church-state relationship, a wall of separation, that is unique in the world, and that poses a huge problem in even talking about promotion. I would argue contrary to what you are saying. All the models of religion-state arrangements that you find in Europe are much more useful and compatible with Muslim-majority countries, because in some ways it’s impossible to think of a model of state-religion separation in many other parts of the world.

In other words, I think it is very important to know what we mean when we promote religious freedom. My feeling is that, with all the discussion going on at the moment, it’s much better to just focus on religious persecution. The other thing called religious freedom is too complicated, too different, and has many counterproductive results.
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, Fabio.

JEAN-ARNOLD DE CLERMONT: I speak from the French European context. I’ve been the president of the French Protestant Federation for eight years. I put this as a question to Ahmet Kuru, but also as a comment. When you speak of active secularism, are you speaking of the Law of Separation of 1905? It’s seen by Catholics, of course, as the result of an active secularism. They don’t like the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment was fundamental for the understanding of the world for religions. But if you look at it from the Protestant side, it’s really a law of freedom for all religions.

So if you go to 2011, the context is totally different. It’s a religious-political context. I agree with you that from the left to the extreme right, there is an anti-Islamic position in France. Sarkozy was following popular opinion much more than his own head when he accepted the law banning headscarves. But if a Muslim in France has the courage today to go to the European Court of Justice, France will be condemned on that issue, because this position of banning the scarf is totally contrary to all freedom of religion laws—even the European one. So I must say that in our active secularism, religion and philosophy are present in the public square.

As for Tom Farr’s comments, when Europeans say belief, I agree with you it’s not clear, but in all the other texts, it means all the philosophical opinions. It’s coming from Belgium. We are having a great discussion with Belgium about what is laïcisme. They always say, “Well, you can be religious, but you must accept those qui croient aussi que les ne croient pas”—“those who believe as well as those who do not believe.” This is why we agree with this text.

But the freedom of religion in the public square is present. Religious freedom is present for everyone. Religious freedom with limits is present. The only thing that a diplomat from France will not do is introduce religion in his diplomacy. That’s where we have to work together to find another way of speaking about the role of religion. Maybe it can be through full citizenship or liberty of conscience. We have to work on that. We cannot avoid religion or block the discussion about the understanding of religion. But I would not, in the European context, say that religion is for everybody.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. How would you respond to Monsieur Clermont?

AHMET KURU: Let me start with the American model and then the French model. American passive secularism has been a very complex, evolving thing. But there are two basic things. One is that the lawmaking process should be secular. That’s what Muslim countries should accept. The second thing is that the states should not try to eliminate religion from the public sphere. Many Muslim-majority countries—and I mentioned that 23 out of 49 are secular—emulated French assertive secularism because they are former colonies of France, the Soviet Union, and the Netherlands. American passive secularism is a very good alternative because of these two main pillars.

If we look at the history of the United States, initially it was neutral toward Protestant denominations. It was discriminat- ing against Jews and Catholics. Then it embraced Jews and Catholics, and now we have problems with Muslims, Mormons, and some atheists. But look at the U.S. Supreme Court. Out of nine members, there are six Catholics, three Jews, and no Protestants. For a Protestant-majority country—and one with some anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic history—this is a great achievement that we do not see anywhere else. I fully support importing this evolution to any country.

Regarding France, I agree with you on many things. The 1905 law was very much anti-Catholic, and it closed down
Many priests had to leave the country. It's a long debate. I understand the Protestant perspective may be different. Let me give you one simple example: the halal food for Muslim kids in schools. I've been engaging with the local authorities in the San Diego area about how to integrate Muslim kids into American society. They tell me that they are encouraging Muslim kids to ask for halal food in schools in order to express their identities. They see it as a value, as a contribution, and as hospitality. But in France, Muslim kids are forced to eat pork sometimes. Maybe it happened in just a few small cases. But there is still unfortunately a difference between the two countries.

**THOMAS FARR:** By way of answering my French colleague, let me address what Fabio and Ahmet said. I mean, I think we need an American covenant on religious freedom before we do the transatlantic one. Fabio says that religious freedom in the United States is represented by the wall of separation between church and state, which Ahmet translates into the idea that lawmaking should be secular, or a form of passive secularism. Depending on what you mean, I may agree entirely, but let me tell you what I think it means properly.

The wall of separation is to protect religion from the state, not to protect the state from religion. It is nowhere in the American Constitution. It's only mentioned in a letter from President Jefferson in 1802 to the Danbury Baptists. But it has become an article of faith for some to mean keeping religion out of politics. This is where I think America is quite unusual, although I think it is losing some of this—as Os Guinness said this morning. The American settlement was to invite religion into the public square—not just in terms of what you can wear, not just in terms of whether you can have your churches and your synagogues and all the rest of it, but so that people can make religious arguments in lawmaking.

Ahmet, you said that law making should be secular. Well, depending on what that means, I may agree with you. But there is a radical religious, theological truth claim at the root of American democracy: All men are created equal. That is a religious claim. That is not a secular claim. It has to do with the nature of God and the nature of what a human being is. So if you're going to remove public religion from the American democratic understanding, you are turning it upside down, I would argue. I'm not sure we're disagreeing; perhaps we're not.

My final point is this: I don't think this represents what you would call religion in the public square. I do think this does not happen in France, as it has historically in the United States, and the examples are legion. Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, the anti-slavery movement, the prohibition movement—all the great movements in American history, some of them going in the wrong direction—were all motivated by religious arguments, many of them explicitly so. People were quoting from their sacred scriptures to change the laws. I mean, Martin Luther King was a Baptist minister writing from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama and quoting the Bible. By the way, both Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine were Catholics, but we'll leave that aside.

**PASQUALE ANNICCHINO:** I just want to make a comment on one thing. Actually, the invention of the sentence that Tom just mentioned, “All men are created equal,” in the Declaration of Independence is actually not an American invention. It's a European and Italian invention. Thomas Jefferson paraphrased that from Filippo Mazzei, an Italian who was his neighbor in Monticello. He was also expelled from the Catholic Church in Italy. There is a U.S. Congressional resolution stating this just for the sake of showing that we can actually cooperate transatlantically.

**THOMAS FARR:** All right. There is the beginning of the covenant.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** If we keep talking long enough, we might be in danger of having real agreements despite what we're showing. [Laughter] Thank you. This was an extraordinary panel. We generated a wonderful, vigorous, and illuminating conversation. [Applause]
THOMAS FARR: A lot of scholars are writing about the relationship between religion and violence. But the central issue of this panel is less well-trodden: the relationship between religious freedom and violence. To put it more pointedly, can religious freedom, as has been asserted by Allen Hertzke and others, play a role in undermining religion-related violence, religion-based civil war, violent religious persecution, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, religion-related terrorism?

We are immediately in a contentious field, because we’re talking about people’s religious beliefs, and in particular how there are radicals within particular religions today. Today we have a potentially virulent form of Hindu nationalist extremism in India. We have in Burma an odd but virulent fusion of Buddhism with nationalism that is harming people, particularly the Muslim minority and some Christian minorities. But the largest problem is violent Islamist extremism in the form of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and others.

If you’re going to talk about other people’s religion, you’ve got to do it with respect. We pride ourselves in doing that at the Religious Freedom Project. But we talk about it. We don’t shy away from it. We don’t say, “You just can’t say that.” As long as you say it with respect, you have to say it. So we’re not attacking Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, or any other religion in talking about the relationship between religion and violence, and we certainly aren’t criticizing anybody’s religion when we’re talking about the relationship between religious freedom and religion-related violence.

Let me introduce our panel briefly. I’m not going to read their whole bios, but again, as in all of our panels today, we have a really good combination of different points of view and representatives of different countries. Monica Duffy Toft is a professor of government and public policy at Oxford University’s Blavatnik School of Government. Monica is a colleague and friend of the Religious Freedom Project. Prior to going to Oxford, she served as a professor at the Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School. Her research interests include not only international relations, but religion nationalism, ethnic conflict, civil and interstate wars, the relationship between demography and national security, and military and strategic planning. Monica was an associate scholar with our Religious Freedom Project from 2011 through 2013. Monica, I’m delighted you’re here today. Thank you for coming.
Next to Monica is Sue Breeze. Sue is a career diplomat in the United Kingdom. As it happens I am a recovering diplomat from the American Foreign Service. [Laughter] Sue, there is a wonderful life ahead. Is that a funny joke in the United Kingdom? I hope it is. [Laughter]

Her most recent posting was as deputy ambassador to Venezuela. She has served as assistant private secretary to four ministers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and she currently heads a team responsible for the United Kingdom’s work in promoting freedom of religion or belief, as well as other equality issues such as the rights of women and children. All of these are relevant to what we want to talk about today.

Next is Pasquale Ferrara, who joined the Italian Foreign Office in 1984. Pasquale has spent much of his career in Italy and abroad, including overseas postings in Chile and the United States, so he knows the American system. His time in Europe includes a position in Brussels, so he knows the European Union. He was involved, among other things, in the launching of the European Convention. Recently, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he served as head of the press office, and subsequently as the director of the ministry’s Analysis and Planning Unit. So he’s had a lot of experience on the ground, but he’s also had a lot of experience thinking through how the Italian Foreign Ministry should articulate its goals and how it should present itself, as well as do its job. It would be interesting to talk about this issue of national interest.

And last but by no means least, I want to welcome for the first time to the Religious Freedom Project Nilay Saiya. Nilay is a student of our colleague and friend, Dan Philpott, whom you’ve heard from this morning. Nilay is an assistant professor of political science and director of international studies at the State University of New York in Brockport. His research concerns the influence of religion on global politics, and he’s done some groundbreaking research on the relationship between religious freedom and religion as it relates to terrorism and religion-related violence. His scholarship has appeared or is forthcoming in Conflict Management and Peace Science, Holy Land Studies, International Journal of Human Rights, and a whole host of other scholarly journals.

Welcome to you all. I’m going to pose a question to all of you, but let’s start with Monica and work our way down the panel. To what degree does religion cause violent extremism, terrorism, and even civil war? Is there a certain kind of religion or a certain kind of political theology that fosters violence by its nature? What implications does the relationship between religion and violent extremism have for religious freedom? We’ll leave that last part off until we get a little further. But let’s talk about this relationship between religion and violence.

MONICA TOFT: Sure. So as a good academic, I want to reframe the question or just ask it slightly differently, because I don’t think we want to implicate religion. Religion operates within a context, and if you look at the violence that we’re witnessing around the world, there are sort of three aspects that you want to be thinking about.

The first is that you want to actually look at the ideas that are motivating people in the public sphere. The second is the political institutions or the political environment in which religious actors are acting. And the third is the religious actors themselves. We’ve heard a lot of discussion about the varieties of secularism. We’ve heard about the different kinds of states, including repressive and democratic states, and how violence will usually emerge when there is some repression happening to a religious group. It may be perpetrated directly by the state itself, and there are two variants of that. There’s a hyper-secularizing state, if you want to call it that. Turkey would be an example. There’s a campaign to impose a particular variant of Islam, and the Kurdish nationalists don’t abide by that. It has created tensions. It’s not exclusively about religion; there’s also nationalism mixed in with it.

The second is where you have a state that’s trying to impose a particular form of religion. If you think about Tajikistan after the end of the Cold War, there was a group that wanted to impose very strict sharia law. They were fought by former communists and we ended up having a civil war. Similarly, Sudan has its Islamization campaign. I’ve done a lot of work on Sudan. The question there is: Was it really against the Christians, or was it just against non-Muslims? One of the things I think we should talk about is being very clear about the categories. If we talk
about this repression dynamic and the cycle toward violence, we need to be really clear about what is being repressed.

In the case of Sudan, Khartoum was carrying out this Islamization campaign by trying to impose sharia law throughout the land. It wasn’t necessarily repressing Christianity per se, though people can disagree. It was trying to impose a particular variant of a faith across the whole land—in this case, a very Wahhabi style of Islam. You can think about Sudan as an empire with a lot of different constituents who didn’t abide by those norms and rules.

Then the last is actually communal violence, which we don’t talk about very much. The state is actually unable to pull conflicting parties apart and implement peace. It is often a bystander to that kind of violence. The paramount case here is India, where you’ve got Muslim-Hindu violence and rioting on a regular basis.

And so, with the connection between religion and violence, you really have to look at the context and the demands being made. It doesn’t happen instantaneously. Scholars know that there are periods in which there are demands being made, in which people or religious actors are saying, “We don’t agree with what the state is doing.” There’s some time to maybe pull back and have some conciliatory measures or accommodations. But if it gets to the point where the religious actors feel as if their rights and privileges are being abrogated in some way, they feel they may have no choice. This is the case for the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East. They were put in jails, and they felt as if they had no choice. The origins of Al-Qaeda have been traced—Thomas Hegghammer has a brilliant book on this—to the repression and imprisonment in Saudi Arabia, and now we have a transnational network perpetrating violence and an even more extreme group, ISIS, that’s an offshoot of it.

So I’d say that it’s not religion per se. It’s the interaction of political institutions and the state; how they’re dealing with religion; the degree of independence of religious actors; how repressive the state is; the ideas that are being promulgated; and whether those ideas can be freely engaged within the state or polity that’s involved.

THOMAS FARR: Thank you, Monica. So it’s not simple. It’s complicated.

MONICA TOFT: Yes. And the other thing is that often it’s not religion alone that’s implicated, which is why this is so complicated. When we start talking about democratization and economic growth, religious actors are often the impoverished class. So it’s about economic issues, too. It’s extraordinarily complicated. But I think it’s understandable if you are clear about the categories, the actors involved, the ideas that they’re trying to advance and protect, and the state’s reaction to it.

THOMAS FARR: All right. So it’s never simply about religion. I think that’s exactly right. I mean, the Kurds are a very good example of that. I can remember back in the State Department when we were trying to sort out what was happening in the Balkans with Milosevic and to what extent this was a religion-related war. After all, it was Serbian Orthodox Christians fighting against Muslims in Albania and elsewhere. We had a big fight within the State Department, and we ended up deciding that if religion played a significant role in the persecution, then we should call it religious persecution.

But let me just push back a little bit on your notion that Al-Qaeda was primarily the result of oppression in Saudi Arabia. If you look at Osama bin Laden—and maybe he isn’t the best example, but he’s the one we tend to associate with Al-Qaeda—he was, so far as I know, not oppressed as a youth. He was raised in Wahhabism, a particular interpretation of Islam. He sort of graduated from that. He sat at the feet of one of the Muslim Brothers, Sayyid Qutb’s brother. He doesn’t appear to fit the prototype of somebody who has been repressed, becomes outraged, and then moves into violence.

MONICA TOFT: I agree. I mean, there are different interpretations of Islam. We can talk about jihadism. Qutb changed what it means to have a jihad, that it actually was now an individual obligation and not just an internal call to go and help the collective. But I think some scholars make the case that had they been able to vent and actually be heard within Saudi Arabia, rather than be completely repressed, that there could have been opportunities or punctuated moments where Al-Qaeda could have been denuded as an organization. Instead it got pushed out.

And then you had Ayman al-Zawahiri, the actual ideologue. There were big debates within Al-Qaeda about what it was trying to do and what its ultimate objective was. Was there going to be a war, a fight from within? Or were they going to have to take it from without? Zawahiri was assassinated—we still don’t know the details of that—and bin Laden became the person who decided he was going to take the fight to the West, in part because he did not have the capacity to challenge it within Saudi Arabia. Then he went to Sudan and Afghanistan, and
now here we are today after the fiasco in Iraq and Syria with the emergence of ISIS.

So I think the argument I’d make, Tom, is that had there been the ability for some of these ideas to be vetted much more so in the public square and the public arena, those ideas could have been publicly challenged rather than allowed to fester. The Iranian Revolution was quite similar. There was a huge transformation in the ideas of what it means to be a Shi’a, the pacifist versus the non-pacifist or quietist tradition. It was sort of pushed down by this very secularizing Iranian state, and then all of a sudden you have a revolution against the Shah. It seemed to come out of nowhere, but experts who studied this saw it coming for a decade. These ideas said, “Yes, we actually have the right and responsibility to challenge the state and maybe take over the state.” These are still very controversial within Shi’ism, but because they were not able to be debated within Iran, there was this explosive revolution in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979.

THOMAS FARR: Well, that’s interesting that you say a lot of people saw it coming, because the American foreign policy apparatus was not part of that group.

MONICA TOFT: No. They didn’t see the revolution coming. What they saw was a shift in the political theology about what it means to be a Shi’a against what they perceived to be a state not serving the citizens that it should be serving. You’re absolutely right. It’s quite clear that it was the “revolution out of nowhere,” as Timur Kuran argues.

THOMAS FARR: There was a study by a CIA analyst in 1977 or 1978 in which the analyst tried to make the argument that there was a religiously-motivated revolution brewing. It was rejected by somebody high in the CIA, who wrote contemptuously across the top of the analysis—I wish Peter Berger was still here—the word “sociology.” By this the high official meant to say that this was a waste of time, a study of things that have nothing to do with the real world. But in fact 1979 turned out by some interpretations to be precisely that—a religious revolution. My only point here is that we have often failed to understand that religion has an impact—for better or worse.

But let’s get back to the question of religion and violence. I don’t want to get completely away from this question of what caused
not only Al-Qaeda but ISIS today, and it seems to me very difficult to argue that this only comes out of oppression. Sue, give us your views on this.

**SUE BREEZE:** Okay. So Monica came at it from an academic perspective. I come at it from a policymaker’s perspective, which is to look at what’s going on, to try and understand it, and then to decide what to do about it. I always come at it from a very practical focus.

You just asked whether we saw these various things coming. As policymakers, I think we often don’t see things coming because we don’t understand enough of the religious mindset. It’s very tempting for diplomats based in Western secular states to dismiss religion as irrational, to rule it out as an influence, to treat it as sociology or something that you don’t really need to engage with. And I think that’s a fundamental error.

We need to look at what people are saying. You mentioned ISIS. What is ISIS saying about what they’re doing? They’re using very Islamic terminology. If you don’t understand what a caliphate is, if you don’t understand the basis on which ISIS has based its ideology, then how can you deal with and counter it?

We’re thinking in the United Kingdom about radicalization and what leads people to be radicalized. It’s not just people who have a lack of opportunities. There are people in the United Kingdom, some of whom are quite prosperous, who are abandoning their families and traveling out to fight for the Islamic State because they get caught up in the messages that it’s putting out. And if we don’t understand the appeal, then how can we possibly hope to counter it or engage it? It’s difficult for those of us in the West, partly because of the media. I think the media has a very responsible role to play. And if you look at the way that incidents that I would regard as religious violence are described, the religious aspect is often downplayed from the very beginning. And for people who don’t have an understanding of religion, how can they understand what’s behind something if the media doesn’t report the facts fully?

There’s also a question about how we deal with the Islamic State. Do we try to negotiate with them? Do we believe that the Islamic State is willing to negotiate, that they’re going to come to some sort of compromise based on getting better economic well-being for their people? I’m not sure that’s right. In fact, I would argue that it’s not. And if we don’t understand religion, the temptation is to say that you can negotiate with these people, that you can reach a compromise.

This leads to the view that military action is the only way to get rid of the scourge. People should say what they want about that. But at some point in this conversation, we’ll come to the hopeful position that one day ISIS will be eliminated by some means, and then the real work begins.

**THOMAS FARR:** Very good. People may disagree with Sue, but I tend to agree with her that it’s impossible to negotiate with these people. She called for other voices; including all voices, of course, is another way of talking about religious freedom. But there remains this problem of what to do if you can’t negotiate and you can’t use diplomacy. I would think it’s obvious that you’re not going to undermine ISIS by developing voices around the area that counter them. Some of those voices already exist within Islam and elsewhere within that community.

I will add this: It is true that because of what ISIS is doing, the Christian and Yazidi and other communities are being inten-
tionally exterminated in Iraq and Syria. There's been a big debate in the United States over whether this is genocide; if it isn't, I'm not quite sure what genocide is. The problem with that word is that if a legal entity adopts it, it has to do something about it, and that something, of course, would probably mean military action. Even this morning, I got an e-mail reporting that three more Assyrian Christians who had been captured by ISIS had been brutally executed on video.

This is bad stuff. We want to talk about human dignity and human rights. We're having a big problem in our own country even talking about this, let alone deciding what to do about it. But it's really related in some fashion to religion and violence. That is what we want to put on the table.

Nilay, you have written a lot about this, particularly the issue of religious freedom. Hold off on that for the moment—I really want to get into your work in just a few moments. But maybe you can deal with this issue of religion and violence as we're talking about it now.

NILAY SAIYA: Sure. Many of those in policymaking and academia tend to hold one of two conflicting views when it comes to religion and violence. Some are quick to blame religion. They see religion as something akin to a mental illness that's prone to violence. And of course, if this is what you think about religion, then the solution is obvious: You try to control it, and maybe even eliminate it. To be sure, religious belief can motivate a range of different religious pursuits when it comes to violence. For terrorism rooted in fundamentalism, the objective is to return religion, state, and society to a proper golden age that existed at some point in the past. In contrast, for terrorism rooted in apocalypticism, the goal isn't to return to the past, but rather to hasten the end of days through the initiation of a cosmic war. The idea is that this war will be followed by a period of peace, in which all of earth's inhabitants will live peacefully under the rule of the one, true faith. Sometimes religious terrorists can pursue much more concrete and limited ambitions, such as ending abortion, establishing religious law which would be binding upon the rest of society, removing a political leader from office, or even establishing a caliphate.

All of those goals can be rooted in religion. What ties all of these different groups together is that they ground their actions specifically in the theological commands, divine duties, and imperatives of their faith.

Now, while religion obviously matters, it would be incorrect to assume that violence is the inevitable outcome of religion. Although the grouping of the words religious terrorism is common, there is not necessarily a natural relationship between the two. For instance, some of history's greatest human rights activists—Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dorothy Day, Sheikh Jalal Said, Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Pope John Paul II—were all motivated by their faith. At the same time, some of history's greatest mass murderers—Pol Pot, Stalin, Hitler, Mao—were all staunch atheists. So there's not necessarily a relationship here between religion and violence.

There's also a second camp which sees religion very differently. It sees religion as something that is inherently peaceful. When religion turns violent, it is the result of external causes, such as foreign occupation, a legacy of colonialism, a lack of development, or poverty. I believe that this is the approach to religion that has been taken by successive American presidential administrations. It might also explain why recently a State Department spokesperson suggested that the best way to defeat ISIS is through a jobs program for the Middle East.

I'm not suggesting that these factors can't be contributory. They certainly can, but again it would be a mistake not to take religion seriously here. Take ISIS, for example. ISIS is very serious about establishing a caliphate and hastening the apocalypse, and it's also serious about initiating a divinely ordained cosmic war. You can't explain ISIS' actions and atrocities apart from its theological views.

I would argue for a third position here, or a middle ground. I would argue that while religion obviously matters, violent political theology is much more likely to gain traction in conditions of pervasive repression. The reason why is fairly straightforward. Religious freedom promotes a diversity of views within and between religious traditions by allowing religious individuals and communities to believe in private and to practice in public as they see fit, free from interference. In these kinds of settings, religious extremists will have their claims challenged in the marketplace of ideas, and they will have to defend their views. Religious freedom, therefore, can serve as a force for diminishing the attraction of religious extremism. Now, this isn't to say that religiously free settings are free of religious terrorism or extremism, but the environment of religious freedom can serve to detract the necessary logistical and ideological support that these groups need in order to carry out acts of violence.

THOMAS FARR: I want to come back to the relationship between religious freedom and violence. You say that violence-inspiring political theology is more likely in situations of repres-
sion. If that’s a term that is not familiar to you, it sort of defines itself. Dan Philpott has written a great deal about political theology, and in fact I use one of his essays on this subject in my class.

De Tocqueville said that every religion has some political opinion attached to it by affinity. So it simply makes sense that religions have political views. They may be liberal political theologies, but they also may be violent political theologies. And I take it that your point is that the latter is more likely to rise in positions of oppression. But is it theoretically possible for them simply to arise in university settings, and not as a result of torture or oppression? Can they arise simply because of a conviction that is embedded in the theology, that isn’t the result of oppression?

NILAY SAIYA: Sure. Religious radicalism can exist anywhere. We have our own religious terrorist groups here in the United States. Think of the Hutaree militia or the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord; these are both religious extremist organizations. But what’s interesting is that in the United States, these groups are not very powerful. And one of the things that we need to take into account is how little religiously motivated violence there has been in the United States, despite these religious and even extremist groups. My argument would be that environments with religious freedom have served to deprive these groups of the support that they need to carry out attacks, including ideological support.

THOMAS FARR: I think that’s a very interesting argument. It has its detractors, though. Having made that argument myself, I know not everybody buys it. Pasquale, let’s hear from you on this subject of religion and violence.

PASQUALE FERRARA: Thank you. From this point on, I will give my take on the relation between terrorism and religions. When last year there was a terrible attack in a school in Pakistan at the border with Afghanistan, a very interesting campaign was launched on social media that may appear a little bit simplistic if seen from an academic or diplomatic point of view. The campaign had a motto: “Terrorists have no religion.” And these very simple words made me think in a more articulated way of this connection between religion and violence. We talk about religious extremists, religious violence, and so on, but I think that we must concentrate much more on violence and on terrorism, rather than on religion.

I’m not suggesting that religions are inherently peaceful, but accepting that there could be some sort of theological justification of violence from any religious point of view, I think, should be contested radically. Otherwise, we are doing a favor to the ones that use violence just to advance a political agenda. And this is what you need in order to transform a religion into a violent activity: You need a political agenda. In the case of ISIS, we should not forget that the political agenda is not only the creation of a caliphate, a reminder of the past, but it is to re-draw the borders in the Middle East, to re-write the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. So it is a political agenda combined with a motivation that is presented in terms of religion.

And in order for a religion to become violent, you need the second element, which is some sort of weird politics of identity. When you attach to religion the very deep meaning of who you are, what you want to do, and what kind of community you want to create—especially an exclusive community—this may become violent.

But the third element, which is much more important, is what I call the “weaponization” of religions. For example, when you have a nuclear program, you say it is a peaceful nuclear program, but you can easily turn this program into weapons. And I think that the same process can happen with religion. You need to consider that violence can be a tool to advance a political agenda. This is the reality we have to face.

And also I would like to make the case—I’m a diplomat but I’m currently on leave at the European University Institute—for collaboration between academics and diplomacy. We live in a very complicated world. There are many elements and very complicated scenarios to evaluate, and I think collaboration between the academia and policymakers is absolutely crucial. I tried to start this once when I was the head of policy planning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When I arrived there—in a country that hosts the Vatican, you may believe that religion is the order of the day for diplomats—I discovered that there was no real connection between the foreign policy of the country and the increasing role of religions in the international arena. So they started a small program imitating the French. It’s not true that the French diplomats today do not care about religion. They created a special unit that has the task of studying the influence of religion in foreign policy. And I think that this is really, really important. We must work toward religious literacy with the diplomats and incorporate the arguments of intellectuals and thinkers that do not have a political agenda or a governmental priority. They can help create a better foreign policy strategy.

THOMAS FARR: Thank you, Pasquale. I want to make sure I understand what you’re saying here, because I thought I heard
a contradiction. You began by noting that “terrorists have no religion,” that it is a mistake to attribute violence to religions. For those who commit terrorist acts, we should focus on the violence, not on the religion. And further, you seemed to say that, in further evidence of that proposition, terrorism has a political agenda and therefore has less to do with religion.

I would pose two questions to you. If in fact terrorism has nothing or little to do with religion, then how do you account for the very deeply religious rhetoric of terrorists groups? Do we simply say that it’s a bunch of nutcases that are expropriating religion? And I also want to address this idea that religion that has a political agenda is somehow not a religion. I see the influence of France in your thinking here. I’ll paraphrase de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who came to America, who said, “Every religion has political opinions attached to it necessarily.” Can you respond to that?

PASQUALE FERRARA: Well, religion can turn to violence exactly as ideologies of any kind can turn to violence. I’m just suggesting that we should concentrate on the violence. The role of the international community, including the religious community, is to work together in order to eradicate violence from the face of the earth. You cannot find in any religions, if you read their texts, any particular incitement to radical violence or extermination of other religions, except in some interpretations that are contested within the same environment of those religions. So my suggestion is to concentrate on violence. And the causes of violence can be different. It can also be a weird interpretation of a religion. But there is no direct connection, in my opinion, between a religion as such and violence. Actually, if you look deeply into any religion, there is some universal claim of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” So it is something that should be taken into account. We should work on this part, I think.

I believe that, of course, violence is a problem, but the way you deal with violence is a common endeavor of the international community. I don’t think that this can be done in a dialogue with religious leaders alone. You cannot expect from religions what religions cannot deliver. So if the international politics are failing, it is the responsibility of the international community. This is the same reason why I react when I hear, “Oh, Somalia is a failed country. Libya is a failed country.” Where was the international community if not contributing to this failure? I think we have to be very clear on this.

THOMAS FARR: Alright. That’s very good. I’d like each of you to respond to what Pasquale has said, but also, as you do that, please begin our conversation on the relationship between religious freedom and this phenomenon we’re talking about. Talk about whether you’re aware of any evidence or examples of where religious freedom might have a positive or a negative effect on this kind of religious violence. And I would just add that if Pasquale is correct, that the religion-related analysis of this violence is not quite on point, then I would argue that religious freedom might be a less relevant antidote. Let’s begin with Monica.

MONICA TOFT: I want to take up that point precisely, because actually I’ve done a lot of work trying to differentiate between motivations of insurgence. Does it matter what the insurgents are fighting for? And it turns out that in some cases, they are fighting for religious beliefs. So it matters in terms of ideas, whom they’re targeting, how they’re targeting, whether they’re willing to settle the fight, and how they’re going to settle the fight. And it turns out that religious actors are less willing to settle. They’re more likely to target civilians because everybody is seen as an infidel or an apostate if they have a very narrow conception. They tend to wage more expansive fights compared to nationalist insurgents. Nationalists are very constrained. You asked about repression and violence. In these cases, violence begets violence.

The sad news is that religious extremists are actually very hard to deter. So the United States and its allies really need to think
about containing and killing, because terrorists do not want to negotiate. They’re less likely to negotiate as the war goes on. Nationalists are very different in that you can conciliate and accommodate them with greater rights and greater independence.

So in ideological terms, I think it’s important to understand what’s motivating them, and then in practical terms, it’s important to understand the social base. Religious fighters are living in the United Kingdom these days, and there are well-educated, well-to-do middle class people—largely men, some women, some brides—unfortunately going into Syria as part of this transnational network. And they really don’t have any local ties, which is very different from fights over national territories.

In some cases, these fights morph. The war in Chechnya started as a very national fight in the 1990s, but it became more extremist. Moscow refused to negotiate. That is a case where it did not have to become Islamic, but it did by the mid-2000s. Moscow had negotiated with the Chechens in the early 1900s, but later on it refused to acknowledge that the Chechens had grievances that could be dealt with. So from 1994 to 1996 they fought a nationalist war, and then from 1996 to 1999 there was this peace when Russia was actually supposed to help rebuild the republic. But they didn’t.

That’s when you started seeing the transnational movement. There were not a ton of fighters, but they did start influencing the play of politics. What ended up happening is that all the moderate players—the political and religious players in Chechnya—fell out of the political arena or were killed, one by one. First there was Dzhokhar Dudayev, who was killed. He was eventually replaced by Doku Umarov. Their beards just got longer as they really took on a religious tint. You can actually see this transformation in pictures.

The post-1999 war was actually fought differently from the first 1994 war, and we still have a conflict happening now. So I think it’s very important to be looking at the kind of violence, the ideas behind it, and how it influences the structure of the fight that’s actually happening on the battleground.

“It is true that because of what ISIS is doing, the Christian and Yazidi and other communities are being intentionally exterminated in Iraq and Syria. There’s been a big debate in the United States over whether this is genocide; if it isn’t, I’m not quite sure what genocide is.”

Thomas Farr

THOMAS FARR: Can religious freedom play a role in undermining this violence? For example, if we are fortunate enough to get rid of these terrorists by whatever means—and I support the means that you were talking about—in a post-conflict society in, say, Iraq and Syria, can religious freedom play a role in preventing ISIS from coming back?

MONICA TOFT: Yeah. We’re not economists—they’re the crème de la crème of social scientists—but there is one law in political science. We are not absolutely sure why it’s the case, but it turns out that democracies tend not to fight other democracies. There’s something about the democratic system. With the case of religious freedom, you could see it as an indicator or a proxy for the protection of rights within a state. So there does seem to be evidence that supports it. And one of the arguments for why we’re seeing this resurgence or increase in violations of religious freedom is that states are going through the democratizing process. If you’re a democracy, your likelihood of having a civil war is much reduced. And then if you’re very autocratic, you’re not likely to have a civil war unless the state loses the capacity to keep it back. This is what’s happened in the Arab Middle East.

THOMAS FARR: Very good. Sue, do you want to respond to Pasquale but also to the question of religious freedom?

SUE BREEZE: Absolutely. The way that I look at this is that nobody becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It’s a gradual process of radicalization. If you don’t step in until you’ve got the violence, then you’ve missed a lot of the intervening stages.

The way that I look at this is that nobody becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It’s a gradual process of radicalization. If you don’t step in until you’ve got the violence, then you’ve missed a lot of the intervening stages.

You talked about my wide-ranging portfolio, but you didn’t mention the fact that I also cover anti-Semitism and post-Holocaust
issues. This means I draw parallels a bit between the Holocaust and other genocides. There are 10 steps toward genocide in academic research. The first step toward genocide is labeling somebody as different, as the “other.” It starts with rejecting people because they’re different from you. It then moves toward denying their rights and their humanity. You must drive groups apart before you get to violence. So I think it’s really important to step in early. When you’re looking at people who start off being radicalized, they often start with believing in the so-called Jewish conspiracy. Then they develop hostilities toward the West and fundamental liberal values. Finally, they become more extreme in their views.

Again, focusing on the very practical, in the United Kingdom we’ve been looking at where multiculturalism and the integration versus assimilation of different communities still need some work. It’s something that we’re still learning how to do, and we’re looking at people who’ve been radicalized. Often, they come from sectors of our communities that are not well-integrated, where maybe people go to a single-faith school and don’t mix very much with people from other communities. The U.K. government has therefore been looking at ways of tackling that in terms of school requirements and the ways of bringing people from different communities together at a young age. So don’t just focus on the violence. Go right back to the beginning and look at education. Education is really, really key. Looking at the link with religious freedom, if you are teaching people about tolerance and nondiscrimination, about the right to have a faith, to share it with others, to change your faith, or to have no faith, then it’s much less likely that extremist views are going to take hold.

THOMAS FARR: Would you add the right to change your religion? There are all these other things associated with freedom of religion. There’s the right to criticize other religions publicly; the right to criticize your own religion publicly; the right to say whatever you want to say about religion publicly; or the right to take your own religious beliefs into the public life of the nation. That could arguably make radicalization worse, but it’s part of religious freedom.

SUE BREEZE: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the right to religion is very closely bound up with freedom of expression. I spoke earlier about empowering voices. If you’re shutting religion out of the public sphere, you shut out those very voices that we want to amplify.

But again, as you said earlier, there are limits. There is the requirement to behave responsibly and not advocate violence against others. At that point, we would draw the line. The United Kingdom does have a strong body of law to criminalize hate speech and hate crime.

THOMAS FARR: All right. That’s a very important issue. Suppose I preach in my church that people who don’t agree with me are going to go to hell. This issue has been there for a long time; I didn’t just cook it up. Is that hate speech?

SUE BREEZE: I think it depends on what sort of response you’re proposing. If you’re proposing to go out and kill them, then that would count as hate speech. If you’re proposing to share your faith with them in such a way that you encourage them to want to join your faith because it’s a wonderful thing, then that’s not hate speech.

THOMAS FARR: It might not work very well. But you’re not going to stop people from saying that as long as it isn’t directly related to violent action?

SUE BREEZE: Absolutely not.

THOMAS FARR: Okay, Nilay, we’re really in your wheelhouse here, so let’s hear you talk about the issue of religious freedom and violent terrorism.
NILAY SAIYA: Sure. In a recent project, I teamed up with a computer scientist to look at this question specifically, and what we did is we created a data set that included every identifiable act of religious terrorism since 2001. In addition to each country’s religious freedom score, we also included other variables that might account for alternative theories of terrorism. We included poverty, GDP per capita, number of minority religions, institutional democracy, regime durability, and a number of other variables that might explain why terrorism occurs. We analyzed this data set using some novel computer science techniques. What we found after we did the analysis were four interesting things.

First, the most important variable in predicting the onset of religious terrorism is a government’s restriction of religion. In fact, this variable was more than twice as important as the next most important variable in the data set, which is a country’s geographic size.

The second important finding is that the algorithm that we created predicted with 99 percent accuracy that countries with low levels of religious restrictions would not experience any religious terrorist attacks. And what’s interesting about this finding is that when religious restrictions are low, the values of the other variables had no effect. What this suggests is that there is a causal relationship here between a lack of religious restrictions and religiously motivated terrorism.

The third thing we found is that the algorithm also predicted with 95 percent accuracy that populous countries with high levels of religious restrictions would experience religious terrorist attacks. But we’re not suggesting here a mechanical relationship between religious restrictions and religious terrorism. There are cases where highly restrictive countries have been able to effectively thwart religious terrorism, and there are also cases where religiously free countries have experienced religious terrorism. But those cases are very few and far between, generally speaking.

The fourth finding is that religious restrictions often interact with a number of other variables in complex ways to predict the onset of religious terrorism. So the most troubling combination that we found after analyzing the data is that countries that have high levels of religious restrictions, large populations, and un-
stable political regimes are the most likely to experience religious terrorist attacks.

So on the whole, the evidence seems to be clear: Religious restrictions serve as a necessary, if not always sufficient, cause of religious terrorism.

**THOMAS FARR:** Terrific. Does the opposite also hold true? That is to say, if one were successful in advancing religious freedom in a culture, would it have the effect of undermining religion-related terrorism? Is that a fair inference?

**NILAY SAIYA:** I think it would be fair to say that over the long term. This is not something that happens overnight. And in fact, as Monica mentioned, as countries are transitioning, that leaves them open to these kinds of attacks a lot of times. So over the long term, yes, but probably not overnight.

**THOMAS FARR:** Okay. Pasquale?

Then we’re going to go to the audience.

**PASQUALE FERRARA:** I have a quick reaction on the issue of systematic violence and genocide. Of course this is a process, but there is one example that really puzzled me: the case of the genocide in Rwanda. You have Tutsi and Hutu, both Catholics, killing each other. So there must be some other reason beyond religion there.

The second point that I would like to make, which is quite interesting from a European point of view, is that racism, homophobia, and hate speech are prosecuted as crimes now in Europe, but at the same time offending religions is not a crime. How can we conceptualize that in the systematic framework of human rights and liberties?

In regard to religious freedom and violence, I think that there is one outstanding initiative that was taken recently by the State Department: the creation of the Office for Religious Engagement. I think it is moving in the right direction. It is not about monitoring, assessing, and reporting. It’s much more demanding. I think that is the new frontier of religious freedom, because it’s a more articulated and more comprehensive approach.

**THOMAS FARR:** Well, religious engagement is precisely what I’d argue we should be doing with respect to religious freedom. You really raised an important point. Let’s go to the audience.

**JIM WALLACE:** My name is Jim Wallace of Boston University. Monica, in the past, you have written about religion as a proxy in situations of violent extremism. Pasquale used the term the “weaponization” of religion. Do you see religion increasingly being a causal factor, or is it still in many situations a proxy factor?

**MONICA TOFT:** Well, religion itself is never a causal factor. It’s humans who invoke interpretations of religious faith—that’s the causal factor—and then they bring it into the political arena. I think it’s fair to say that different texts and different interpretations are instrumentalized for people to achieve political objectives. And what’s striking is that prior to the 1970s, there were few religiously inspired civil wars. They just didn’t exist. They were based on communism or ethnicity, like Rwanda. Not all violence that we’re witnessing today is religiously inspired. Some of it is still based on good old-fashioned nationalism, and some of it is still based on class-related issues, like Nepal.

“**What’s striking is that prior to the 1970s, there were few religiously inspired civil wars. They just didn’t exist. They were based on communism or ethnicity, like Rwanda. Not all violence that we’re witnessing today is religiously inspired. Some of it is still based on good old-fashioned nationalism, and some of it is still based on class-related issues, like Nepal.”**

Monica Toft

So in the case of religion and its “weaponization” as a proxy, I’d come back to humans, the actors within the public space who have particular interpretations of religion and manipulate it for political objectives. This happens often, but not always. Communal violence is usually just spontaneous. It erupts. But the large scale, sustained kind of violence is usually a political fight. You’ve got elites with different interpretations trying to outbid one another and trying to prevail within the political setting that they’re operating.
THOMAS FARR: Next question, please.

WALTER GLAZER: Hi. I’m Walter Grazer and I teach a course here at Georgetown. I’m formerly with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. When people are more desperate and oppressed, it would seem to me that it’d be logical to fall back on what’s most existentially important, like religion. Obviously it could be distorted, but it seems natural to fall back on that.

What is the role of regional actors in the relationship between religion and violence? I’m thinking about Pakistan’s influence on the Taliban, Qatar’s and Saudi Arabia’s influence on the Syrian conflict, Iran’s influence, and so forth. There are bigger national political interests operating here. How much of it is manipulated by regional actors? It looks like some of the ISIS leaders are former Baathists. I don’t think their motive is very religious, but it’s a great way to frame it. They think to themselves, “I’m in an area where religion is important, so I need a justification for terrible actions.”

PASQUALE FERRARA: The case of Pakistan is particularly telling, because Pakistan was born with both a strong Islamic identity and a national one. Now, what we’re witnessing in Pakistan is that there is still Islam, but a sort of transnational Islam. The Pakistani government, the Pakistani authorities, and not even religious authorities in Pakistan have complete control of that. And this is a problem. But it also has to do with globalization. Religions tend to become more global. They have influence outside of the scope of the Westphalian state.

So it is happening, and how you deal with that has much more to do with interpretations of Islam, as Monica said. This can come from religious authorities. So to an extent, imams have the authority to foster the right interpretation of Islam in this case and prevent it from being instrumentalized.

THOMAS FARR: All right. We’re going to go to the gentlemen in the back. I’m trying to get some people who have not had a chance to ask a question. Then we’ll get to others as well.

ARKADY DUBNOV: Speaking through a translator. Thank you. I have worked for over 20 years in Central Asia, and I have mostly been occupied with studying the relationship between Islam and official policies. I’d like to turn to ask Monica about her comment on Tajikistan, which she compared to the situation in Sudan. I think today one can actually say that in Tajikistan the situation is like the one we observed in Syria three or four years ago. On September 29, the Tajik government banned the Islamic Renaissance Party and proclaimed it to be a terrorist organization. The effect of this ban on a party which espouses moderate Islam will have an extremely radicalizing effect on the general situation in Tajikistan. What specific actions can the United States take to prevent the situation in Tajikistan from devolving into a situation like the one that now exists in Syria?

THOMAS FARR: Thank you. Monica, do you want to answer that question?

MONICA TOFT: It’s a great question. I think that the U.S. government needs to take Tajik officials aside and say, “You’re going to have a situation like that in Syria.” Because once you start isolating groups, people get frustrated and they feel as if there are no more alternatives. They’re not going to be loyal. They can’t exit. So what they’re going to do is voice their frustration, and they may end up voicing it through violence.

Unfortunately, once a state has a civil war, it’s more likely to have another civil war, because organizational structures are still in place decades later. People still know how to fight; it’s not a pretty picture. So I think the United States and others need to impress upon the Tajik government that this is going to be extraordinarily expensive. The probability of another civil war coming is greater given the country’s history, and they’re probably going to face more extremists. This is what happened in Chechnya. It did not have to get as extreme as it did, but it did because of the lack of negotiation.

The other case that actually might be more similar is Algeria. Algeria wouldn’t allow the Islamic Party to come into power after they’ve been democratically elected into power. Then it faced civil war and massive killing.

THOMAS FARR: All right. Let’s get a couple more questions.

LAUREN HOMER: Thank you. I’m Lauren Homer. I’m an international human rights lawyer working on religious freedom. I want to make a couple of observations and then ask a question. We’ve heard a lot about radical, violent religion arising in a context of persecution, but I want to posit that it doesn’t arise in a context of persecution. It starts with an idea. If you look at Russia, Karl Marx was a German. If you look at Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden was a Saudi. So you have somebody who has this idea to violently overthrow the existing government and impose a totalitarian regime on everybody that’s there, and they kill or suppress everybody who doesn’t agree with them. So naturally the government that is in charge
is going to try to repress them, because they want to overthrow the government.

Once this idea has appeared, there’s a contagion phenomenon. People who are feeling unhappy for various reasons, including people in countries with very liberal religious freedom and civil society laws, want to join in. Right now we have a globalization of radical Islam, for example. That’s certainly the case in Syria, but it didn’t start in Syria. These are ideas that came from somewhere else.

If the central issue is the spread of these ideas, and if 30,000 to 50,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq believe in them—of course, there are many more around the world—how do we reach them? Is it possible to get them to change their minds? Should we respond through an alternative religious philosophy? We can round them up, kill them, and try them for their crimes, but the ideas are still out there. So how do we combat them, and can we do it through laws on religious freedom? Or do we have to do something else?

THOMAS FARR: Okay. Thank you, Lauren. The gentleman in the back has a question.

KISHAN MANOCHA: Thank you. My name is Kishan Manocha and I work for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe on religious freedom issues. Clearly there’s been attention given to the issues under discussion in a range of fora. What tends to emerge after the analysis and the discussion is the framing of various strategies and measures, including those addressed to religious leaders. They often amount to a wish list of everything under the sun. People ask, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if religious leaders could actually re-invent and re-create their religion so that it preached peace, brotherhood, happiness, and well-being for all?”

The serious point I’m trying to make is those calls are entirely understandable and appropriate. But how reasonable are they? How practical are they? More importantly, what are we learning from efforts to engage religious leaders on both sides of the Atlantic that will help us address the issues that we’ve been discussing this afternoon? Time is passing; this has been in the ether for the past decade. What insights have we learned in this respect?
What have we done well? What haven't we done well? And the big question is: Who is the “we” that should be doing this?

THOMAS FARR: Okay. Let’s end with that. That’s a wonderful practical question. Why don’t we start with you, Pasquale, and then we’ll give our closing remarks in the course of answering these questions.

PASQUALE FERRARA: I have some thoughts on ISIS and how to defeat it. Of course, there are political options on the table that are now being evaluated among the capitals, not only in Europe but also here in Washington and in Moscow. But I think that one element is sometimes missing: the fact that ISIS, despite the fact that it has presented itself as a state—by the way, this is a Western category; it’s not a caliphate in this case, but a state—and the fact that ISIS has presented itself as a unitary actor hides the fact that it is a galaxy of groups that have been merging over time. Thanks to external intervention, it also has financial support from several international actors. For instance, there are Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Syria that are not aligned with ISIS. They are fighting their own battle. These are things that need to be considered in terms of complexity.

And then there are always these fundamental questions about the causes of religious violence, which are often justified by religious pretext, I would say. Before he became famous, Osama bin Laden had a political agenda, which was to get rid of the Americans from the Gulf, because they were crusaders occupying the holy land of the prophet. Maybe we need to go a little bit deeper into this international crisis to discover that there is a layer that we do not consider much apart from religious pretext. This level of analysis could be at least the beginning of the answer.

THOMAS FARR: Can you end with a happy thought, Sue?

SUE BREEZE: Yeah. I just want to build on our discussion about the spread of ideas. There are societies that teach children from the beginning that one religion is superior to others, or that one religion is inferior. Again, going back to the Holocaust, the Nazis didn’t kill all the Jews across Europe by themselves. There was a very active facilitation of what they did because of the anti-Semitism that was prevalent across Europe at that time. It wasn’t being checked. So we need to learn the lessons of the Holocaust for our own societies and look at the societies that are fertile ground for extremists at the moment.

NILAY SAIYA: So there is a question about ideas and whether or not it’s possible to change the minds of radicals. My answer would be that it’s probably not possible. But the real question is: Why is it that in some places a lot of people are attracted to these ideas, whereas in other places they’re not? I would argue that religiously restrictive environments facilitate radical political theologies by stifling open debate and discussion and by closing off the channels for discourse. Pluralism and diversity of ideas do not flourish like they do in religiously free settings.

I also want to close by saying one thing about international forms of violence. We’ve been talking a lot about domestic forms of violence, but scholars like Monica Toft, Dan Philpott, Timothy Shah, Brian Grim, and Roger Finke have been making a case for several years now that religious restrictions are tied to domestic forms of religious violence, including civil wars, domestic terrorism, and violent religious persecution. I think you can also make a case that these forms of religious restrictions also give rise to transnational forms of violence, including international religious terrorism and even conflict between states. So I think that’s something that needs to be looked at a little bit further.

Until recently, scholars of conflict have tended to ignore the importance of religious freedom on conflict, but we can’t do that anymore. Religion remains an important source of one’s identity, and religion’s influence on politics and society is increasing. At the same time, we know from reports by the Pew Research Center that religious hostilities and government restrictions on religion are also increasing. This does not bode well for the future of religious violence, either domestic or international.

THOMAS FARR: Can you end with a happy thought, Sue?

Sue Breeze: Yeah. I just want to build on our discussion about the spread of ideas. There are societies that teach children from the beginning that one religion is superior to others, or that one religion is inferior. Again, going back to the Holocaust, the Nazis didn’t kill all the Jews across Europe by themselves. There was a very active facilitation of what they did because of the anti-Semitism that was prevalent across Europe at that time. It wasn’t being checked. So we need to learn the lessons of the Holocaust for our own societies and look at the societies that are fertile ground for extremists at the moment.

“Religious engagement means that you have to be in the field; you have to open this conversation on equal footing; you have to be committed; you have to follow. It’s not just about monitoring, assessing, and reporting. It’s much more demanding.”

Pasquale Ferrara
Kishan asked about the importance of religious leaders. I think we need to be careful of putting too much emphasis on religious leaders. Tom is being controversial in saying we’ve achieved very little with our religious freedom policy. That’s because it’s so difficult. It’s not something that governments can solve by themselves. It’s not something that religious leaders can solve by themselves. We need a comprehensive approach from governments to take action against discrimination, to ensure children are taught from the very youngest age about religious freedom, and to make sure that equality and non-discrimination are included in legislation and in courts. We need an independent judiciary. We need religious leaders to also promote these ideals. It’s an enormous task.

I want to end with two quick points. The whole point of this discussion is transatlantic dialogue. The premise is that there is a slight difference between the United States and Europe which prevents us from working effectively together. I just want to challenge that, because I think we do work very well together, and when I sit down and talk to U.S. counterparts, we don’t have a fundamental disagreement about what we’re trying to achieve. It’s just an enormous task.

Now we’re broadening our scope beyond the transatlantic relationship. We are thinking about the different resources we can use to engage other people. As Peter Berger said this morning, we are trying to have that secular conversation about common values. I think that this particular initiative might help to do that, because you have 53 different nations with very different histories coming together.

THOMAS FARR: Great. Alright, Monica, bring us home.

MONICA TOFT: Okay. I do think we are learning. I think we’ve learned that this is not necessarily an American initiative. It’s grown over the past 17 years, though not as forcefully and fully as Tom would like. I just joined an initiative with Baroness Elizabeth Berridge in the House of Lords, which is an amazing project. I joined onto it because it’s bringing together the 53 nations of the Commonwealth, including autocracies, monarchies, parliaments, and democracies. The idea is to talk and to learn from one another, because what happened in the first iteration of this is we didn’t actually understand who our interlocutors were and what language they were using.
THOMAS FARR: We’ve held a lot of conferences in this room over the last five years, and I have never seen so many people at the end of the day. I think I know why. We have now come to the crux of the day. We spent much of the conference discussing and debating the issues surrounding international religious freedom policy: what it means, whether it’s a good idea, and if so, how Western democracies can cooperate in opposing religious persecution and promoting religious freedom. I am deeply honored to introduce to you the man who heads the American effort to advance international religious freedom: Ambassador-at-Large David Saperstein.

David is the fourth person to hold this vitally important position, which was created by a law that has been mentioned several times today—the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. IRFA requires the government of the United States to advance religious freedom as a part of our foreign policy. The ambassador and his office at the State Department are the executive agents of that policy. The buck, as it were, stops there.

Now, others are clearly important to this policy, especially the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom—which has, I’m happy to say, now been reauthorized by Congress. I don’t know if the president has signed the bill, but after a rather contentious debate over the commission—which is vital to this effort—yesterday it was reauthorized by both houses. The commission’s job is to make policy recommendations to the president, to Congress, and to the secretary of state, and as such it is very important to this effort.

But the man I am going to introduce to you is literally where the buck stops. He is the one who was confirmed by the Senate as the U.S. official charged with carrying out U.S. policy. He is the one who travels the world officially representing the government and people of the United States of America to defend those persecuted for their religious beliefs and to advance the habits and institutions of religious freedom.

Ambassador Saperstein was confirmed by the Senate in December of last year and was sworn in and assumed his duties on January 6 of this year. Prior to becoming ambassador, he served for 40 years as the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, overseeing national social justice programming for the largest segment of American Jewry. A rabbi and an attor-
ney for 35 years, Ambassador Saperstein taught seminars in First Amendment church-state law and in Jewish law at Georgetown University Law Center. So he is very much at home here.

In 1999, David Saperstein was elected by his peers as the first chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and this is where I had the honor of meeting him. I quickly came to have a deep respect and affection for this man. He is savvy, he is intelligent, he is persuasive, and as you’re going to see, he is courageous. Most important of all, he is a man of his word. I was proud to support him for the position in which he now serves with such distinction and I’m honored to call him “friend.” Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the Honorable David Saperstein. [Applause]

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: Tom, you know it’s mutual. I’ve had the pleasure of being able to acknowledge that publicly before and I do so again today. It is rare to find someone who combines relentlessness and grace as well as Tom does and I deeply appreciate it.

I really want to thank you for this invitation. Before I came on, Tom said, “You know, let’s agree that we’re going to look for an opportunity for you to really have a chance to speak at the center about the core issues of your work.” This was the forum in which we decided to do it.

What a fascinating forum. First of all, it’s a great mix of people in attendance and on the stage. This is really remarkable. Some of these folks gathered here are folks from around the globe whom I’ve had the opportunity to work with over many years, but more intensively now that I hold the position of ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom. And the institutions that are hosting and co-sponsoring this event are kind of the “who’s who” in the realm of religious freedom, and that is a great honor for me as well. And certainly I am deeply indebted to the Berkley Center for the contribution you’ve made to this cause, as well as to almost every one of the entities that is co-sponsoring this vital work.

The work in front of us, those of us who care about religious freedom, is daunting. Let me deal with three different rubrics of issues.

First, I want to share a little bit of a reflection on the eight months that I’ve been working at the State Department, including the work of our office and our interaction with the rest of the department. Second, I’ll talk about the general architecture of the concerns about religious freedom that we have across the globe. And finally, I want to talk about the lessons that we can learn from each other in this transatlantic alliance—some of the similarities, some of the differences, and whether those differences are good or counterproductive. So let’s go through it together. A lot of these themes have been picked up during a day of fascinating and invaluable conversations.

First, like so many of you in this room, I spent a good part of my time building partnerships with other nations to advance religious freedom together, as these global challenges require a global response. And thanks to the good work of my Canadian counterpart, Ambassador Andrew Bennett, we have forged the Inter-Governmental Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief—executive branch folks who share common concerns—which brings together like-minded nations to devise strategies to promote and protect religious freedom for all, to look for areas of coordination and cooperation, and to develop reinforcing strategies and tactics. This is parallel to the creation of the parliamentary network familiar to you, which brings together parliamentarians from across the globe and from different political and religious backgrounds.

These action-oriented fora represent new opportunities to push this fundamental freedom forward. Both of these vital international undertakings draw from the global community, from the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere, from every populated continent and from countries of diverse religious populations, with full cognizance that their effectiveness is going to depend on getting beyond just the transatlantic alliance that cares so deeply about these issues.

Second, allow me to comment on how reassuring the extensive support that I’ve received from the secretary and from the department has been. Many of you were there when I spoke at my confirmation hearing and again at my swearing-in on the themes that I laid out as being my priorities. They’ve been realized because of the support that I’ve had from the State Department.

“We need to find ways to help those civil society and religious groups without delegitimizing them through our very embrace. I think it’s one of the central foreign policy challenges that we face.”

David Saperstein
The State Department has significantly increased the staff of our office, allowing us to expand our ongoing work, to devote staff to thematic issues like the relationship of religious freedom and countering violent extremism, the negative effects of blasphemy and apostasy laws on religious freedom, and the intersection of women’s equality and religious freedom.

What's more, the secretary's staff and the so-called “seventh floor,” where much of the power at the State Department resides, simply could not have been more supportive in assisting our work on matters big and small. They’re always accessible. And my presence at most regular, ongoing senior staff meetings at the State Department has guaranteed that our concerns and efforts are integrated into the broader agenda of the State Department.

Third, we have greatly strengthened our programmatic work. I mention this because it’s an often overlooked part of a vital aspect of our work. We think mostly about the policy and public education work that we do, but through the Human Rights and Democracy Fund and other funding sources at the department, the department increasingly supports an array of programs that directly impact religious freedom. First, these programs address intolerance; second, they increase public awareness of religious freedom issues; third, they train civil society and government officials on the legal and policy protections for religious freedom; fourth, they strengthen the capacity of religious leaders to promote faith-based cooperation across religious and sectarian lines on behalf of religious freedom or on behalf of other causes that we share in common, like social services; fifth, they empower religious minorities to participate in political processes; and sixth, they help combat religiously motivated discrimination and violence.

I’m going to come back to this because many of the countries that are represented in this room have similar kinds of programs, but most people don’t know about them. The reason for this is that most governments don’t talk about them. The very act of acknowledging what governments do in those countries could be counterproductive to the very people that we are trying to help, because where these programs are often needed most are some of the areas most dangerous to religious freedom. So it is kind of a catch-22. Nonetheless, I’m going to come back to this topic to develop a recommendation.

By the way, my discussion of these funds doesn't take into account the millions of dollars spent on issues like the rule of law and democracy building that benefit all efforts supporting human rights and religious freedom which we care about. And above all, I’m extremely proud that the administration supported the appointment of our special adviser for religious minorities in the Near East and South and Central Asia, Special Adviser Knox Thames. He’s the highly respected former director of policy and research at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, who will build on our existing efforts to address the plight of these minorities. I’ve talked frequently about what it would take to allow the displaced minority communities to return to their home communities. Knox Thames will focus on coordinating with government-wide efforts in this regard. As part of our ongoing work, he and other colleagues at the State Department are continuing to build an extensive network of contacts wherever religious groups face oppression. This is a major part of what we do—building a network of contacts on the ground in countries across the globe: contacts with their families, their friends, and their communities here in the United States as well.

And I think it is not a secret to many in this room that our work was extraordinarily beneficial to efforts to assist the minorities in the Middle East in the face of the scourge of ISIL, whether it was the Yazidis from the first days on Mount Sinjar or the Assyrian Christian communities on the Khabur River. I cite both of these in the context of the broader impact of the State Department’s work that saved a countless number of lives, yet knowing full well of the video that is circulating today of the killing of Assyrian Christian captives. They were captured at the very beginning of ISIL’s incursion into the area and have been held for ransom ever since, according to the stories. Too many Yazidis, Mandaeans, Christians, and others have suffered terribly and continue to suffer terribly, day in and day out, because of ISIL’s actions.

Finally, we had the support of the government in integrating our work into the ongoing work at the State Department. This was already started by Shaun Casey’s remarkable efforts in our Office of Religion and Global Affairs and continues in our work on religious freedom now: the interaction of religious freedom with development, democracy building, conflict resolution, counter-terrorism, and combating violent extremism. These interactions are all now incorporated into the ongoing work of the State Department in a way that wasn’t true even a couple of years ago. There’s been a profound change, a growing openness. We see this in other governments across the globe. But there are many governments that share our concern for religious freedom that don’t yet understand the connections of religious freedom with many of these other vital priorities that we share. And we shall return to that later in the discussion.

The support of President Obama and Secretary Kerry, the increased staffing at our office, the appointment of Knox, the
integration of our work with other departments, the ongoing programs that we have, and our new international partners—all these demonstrate the importance the administration places on promoting international religious freedom.

Now we must continue to expand our focus on religious freedom around the world for the obvious reasons. In too many countries religious freedom faces daunting, alarming, and growing challenges. These are countries where members of religious minorities contributed for so long to their own societies—often decades, centuries, or millennia. We have witnessed an unprecedented crisis as people are driven out of their historic homelands at an escalating rate. This is an area ripe for transatlantic cooperation. The Inter-Governmental Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief and the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief are unprecedented and hopeful signs of growing cooperation. However, we must ensure that these groups do not view just meeting as a victory, but that they look for ways to concretely advance religious freedom or belief for all, wherever it is challenged. These new networks couldn’t be more timely, as the challenges continue to grow.

Through our annual report and our broader work, we give a voice to all those throughout the world seeking to live their lives in accordance with their own consciences and religious beliefs. We strive to put a human face on this incredibly important human rights issue that touches so many lives and remains so central to the identity of people across the globe, including the American people.

The obstacles to religious freedom come in several different rubrics, almost all of which were discussed earlier. Let me just mention them.

The violence committed by terrorist groups and non-state actors is an alarmingly escalating phenomenon. We’ve seen terrible things from ISIL: the devastation to the Yazidi community, the devastation to historic Christian communities, and the devastation to the other minority communities in Iraq and Syria. Religious minorities are being driven out. They are being killed and butchered. They are being enslaved and raped. They are being forced into marriages and forced into conversions.

When we turn the focus from the Near East to Africa, we see Boko Haram having the same kind of impact: killing thousands
of people in indiscriminate acts of violence and deliberately attacking Christians and Muslims who oppose its radical ideology. It has subjected people of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to unspeakable acts of terrorism, sexual violence, abductions, human loss, and destruction, including fatal attacks on churches and mosques, often killing worshippers during religious services or immediately on the way out. It is done with intent, and it is a devastating development.

I also should point out in a second category the existing laws on blasphemy and apostasy. There isn’t a consensus in this room or in the transatlantic partnership of exactly how our concerns in these areas ought to be implemented. Blasphemy laws and apostasy laws, which around the world are used to oppress those whose conscientious religious beliefs happen to offend the majority, are frequently used to repress dissent, to harass political opponents, and to settle personal vendettas. The United States uniformly opposes such laws, and we believe they are inconsistent with international human rights and fundamental freedoms. We will continue to call for their repeal in any country in which they remain on the books. We remain concerned, for instance, about the continued imprisonment of Mauritanian blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould M’Kheitir, who was sentenced to death in December 2014 for apostasy after publishing an article that some deemed critical of the Prophet Muhammad. In another case from March 2015, Farkhunda Malikzada was beaten to death by a mob of men in Kabul in broad daylight in front of a mosque after they falsely accused her of blasphemy. Even when there are no blasphemy laws explicitly on the books, accusations of blasphemy can still lead to deadly societal violence.

The existence of these laws in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world helps create a culture of impunity that facilitates such violence, even when the violence is actually a result of individuals seeking to settle personal vendettas. In that context I know you all remember the brutal killing of a young Christian couple who worked at a brick kiln in Punjab, Pakistan.

The culture of impunity can make it nearly impossible to defend blasphemy cases in the courts, as evidenced by the May 2014 killing by unknown gunmen of Rashid Rehman, a prominent
human rights attorney who had been repeatedly threatened for defending a blasphemy case but had been unable to obtain protection from the police.

There's also the issue of repressing religious freedom in the name of combating terrorism in a number of countries. The challenge of confronting terrorism and violent extremism from groups claiming religious sanction for their actions has been responded to by broadly cracking down on religious groups and on non-violent religious activities, and by imposing broad restrictions on religious life. For instance, the government of Russia continues to use vaguely formulated anti-extremism laws to justify arrests, raids on homes and places of worship, and the confiscation or banning of religious literature of minority religious groups, including Muslims and Christians not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church.

In Ukraine, authorities in Russian-occupied Crimea subjected members of religious minorities to a campaign of systematic discrimination and harassment. In Central Asia, we see several governments cracking down on peaceful religious activities under the pretext of fighting religious extremism. In Uzbekistan, the government broadly banned Islamic groups, categorizing them as extremists without any reference to violent activities and detaining members of these banned groups. According to family members, some have died while in custody. And recently in Tajikistan, the largest opposition party—the Muslim Party—has now been banned as well. Uighur Muslims in China face increased controls on peaceful religious expression and practice, including bans of wearing beards and veils and interferences with Ramadan fasting. In the name of combating separatism, Tibetan Buddhists face government interference in the selection of lamas, their spiritual leaders. Monasteries face an increase in government management as part of such measures.

And then we have all kinds of repressive rules and regulations. Across the globe, repressive governments subject their citizens to violence, detention, discrimination, undue monitoring, and harassment for simply exercising their faith. As a result, believers are unable or refuse to register with their government or to identify with an unregistered religion or with no religion at all.

In North Korea, religious freedom does not exist in practice. The UN Commission of Inquiry report concluded that there was almost a complete denial by the government of the right of freedom of religion. Countries like Saudi Arabia completely deny any religious group other than Muslims the right to practice its faith openly. In the Maldives, only Sunni Muslims can worship openly.

And other countries enforce rules and regulations that restrict individuals’ ability to practice their religion based on age or gender. Tajikistan remains the sole country in the world that bans people under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. It also has restrictions on women as well.

In countries like Vietnam, regulations require religious groups to undergo an onerous and somewhat arbitrary registration process in order to legally operate. Even with such registration, groups must still obtain specific approval for almost all activities: clergy appointments, religious events, building renovations, and the establishments of seminaries or religion classes. Absent such approvals, persons undertaking these activities are subject to harassment, arrest, or detention.

In China, only the religious groups belonging to the five state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. Authorities have often pressured unaffiliated religious groups, including Falun Gong, to join the patriotic associations, and they used a variety of means, including detention, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups. Chinese human rights lawyers hired to defend these vulnerable groups face additional restrictions. One such lawyer, Zhang Kai, is under detention in an unknown location. He faces charges of endangering national security and disturbing public order due to his peaceful advocacy and representation of Christians in Wenzhou Province, where crosses are being removed.

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David Saperstein

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taken down in large numbers, as well as his representation of other faith groups. We have repeatedly called on China to release him and other church leaders and activists detained in this area. Chinese authorities detained Zhang Kai just before he was scheduled to meet with me on my trip last month to China.

Finally, there is societal violence and discrimination. In Western Europe, we see a rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and the violent targeting of Jews and Muslims. In Burma, some of the nationalist Buddhist networks that have denigrated Muslims—most particularly the Rohingya, as well as Christians and Hindus—are calling for national boycotts of Muslim-owned businesses and cautioning Buddhists against interacting with Muslims. All of this continues today.

Against this backdrop, let me focus on the role of the transatlantic partnership and suggest eight lessons that I would offer up for your consideration.

First, structuring religious freedom through law and through government entities dedicated to religious freedom helps ensure that religious freedom will not fall through the cracks. As is true in our country, in 1998 when the IRFA law was being considered, there was a great debate whether or not there should be a separate religious freedom entity. Why wasn’t it part of all of the other human rights groups? Why raise it above or differently from other human rights concerns? And the response of people in both parties—who voted almost unanimously for the legislation—was that of all the human rights, religious freedom was the most overlooked. It was overlooked by the human rights offices of most governments, overlooked by human rights organizations, overlooked in human rights courts, and overlooked in regional and multilateral bodies. It just didn’t get the same level of attention. In fact, people didn’t know quite how to talk about it or what to make of it. But whatever the explanation, it was kind of a stepchild to the broad scheme of human rights protections and concerns that governments and non-governmental organizations had. And this law seemed to be a kind of affirmative action program that would lift religious freedom up to the level of other core human rights.

On that level, we’ve made significant progress. The fact that the report comes out regularly—and the fact that there is this team of bright, dedicated people focused on this issue—have made a profound difference. There is no guarantee that at a macro level it will have a determinative impact on the policy of whatever country you are a part of, but it has helped significantly. I offer that impact for your consideration. And just so it isn’t forgotten, I will point out that we sharpened the focus of our work as effectively as we’ve done due in no small measure to the first ambassador for religious freedom, Bob Seiple, and the first director of the IRFA office, the remarkable Tom Farr, who sits by my side here.

Second, we are recognizing the importance of highlighting abuses. The report does that through the “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPC) mechanism. Currently there are nine countries that are designated as CPCs. We view the designation as a vital tool to help force improvements when other diplomatic initiatives have not succeeded. Our religious freedom engagement is multifaceted, and the CPC designation is one arrow in our quiver.

Another is the report itself. It shines a light on abuses, and it’s become a credible resource for many in the academic community, religious advocacy groups, think-tanks, and like-minded foreign governments who work on religious freedom. I remember that during the first trip that Bob Seiple and I took together in the 2000, we visited several European countries and spoke to many people. The foreign minister in one of the countries said to us at the time of our second report, “We could never produce a report like that, but you guys put it out. We just send out each of these chapters to our staff in embassies across the globe and say, ‘Here is your blueprint for addressing religious freedom concerns.’” We still hear over and over again that these reports are invaluable and often the basis of other efforts done by academics and think-tanks.

Over the last 17 years, we’ve created a cadre of over a thousand Foreign Service officers in embassies across the globe that have had to connect with religious groups who are often oppressed. On that same trip, Bob and I heard from religious groups who said, “We never had anyone to talk to before. But now this person comes to us to find out what they need to know about us for this report, and it develops a connection. We have a name and a telephone number to call whenever we’re in trouble.” And the embassies have now stepped up their engagement and involvement with those communities. So structuring these things in this way has had a profound impact.

Third, we are investing in professional diplomatic training in religious freedom. Our training is more than just learning on the job. At the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia, we provide training to U.S. diplomats and other government officials on religious freedom in different aspects of religion and global affairs. I think all of us who are engaged in this work would like to see this training mandatory, not just for incoming
Foreign Service officers but for the re-training that is given to the deputy chief of mission (the second-in-command) and to ambassadors when they go out as well. We are making significant progress with robust classes now. Just recently this past month, we launched another major initiative to go out across the globe and pull together staff from embassies to do training and talk about common problems that they share. We hope to hit every region of the globe with such regional trainings.

Fourth, we want to acknowledge the importance of independent oversight as embodied in the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which is led by a bipartisan panel of nine expert commissioners who volunteer their time and are supported by a superb professional and nonpartisan staff. The independent commission monitors religious freedom globally and provides policy recommendations to both Congress and the administration. At first blush, it might seem that USCIRF just duplicates my office at state, but in reality it complements and helps push the issue forward in unique and valuable ways. It can speak freely on issues of the day, stay focused on freedom of religion, challenge us to do more, and think about how the U.S. government can more effectively advance its agenda. As far as I know, there are no other entities like USCIRF that exist in the world.

But as is the case with our own Congress, where there are so many members passionately committed to religious freedom, parliaments in other nations can play a similar role in providing oversight and political momentum on these issues. In the United States, USCIRF does consistent work in highlighting abuses, and it is trying to build the international coalition of parliamentarians. I’m pleased that both the House and the Senate have wisely decided to provide a multiyear reauthorization of USCIRF. In whatever form it comes—an ad hoc parliamentary caucus or an independent, government-connected entity like USCIRF—such entities really help in terms of complementing the work we do in keeping the momentum going.

Fifth, we seek to coordinate programming, especially in multilateral fora but also in individual countries. I mentioned that we strengthened our programming efforts on religious freedom. What I’ve learned through my travel and engagements is that there are many like-minded countries, governments, and civil society organizations that are investing in similar initiatives. It’s in our collective interest to coordinate so that we are not duplicating our efforts at a minimum, and so that we are doing our utmost to maximize our effectiveness.

On one of my recent trips, the Canadian high commissioner convened the ambassadors of a number of like-minded countries in his embassy who were members of the Inter-Governmental Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief. By virtue of all of us being in the same room discussing how we’re advancing our religious freedom priorities, not just through policy but programmatic activity, we were stunned to learn that we were working on many of the same issues with many of the same local NGOs without even knowing it. Based on that insight, we’ve agreed that at the multilateral level, the contact group will be making religious freedom programming coordination a key focus of our cooperation. At the country level, we are requesting our respective missions to regularly touch base with each other to discuss progress on programming initiatives and to coordinate their efforts. This allows us to sequence our programs in a manner that allows our individual efforts to build on each other’s.

In my remarks to the international parliamentary network on freedom of religion last month, I discussed this approach that encouraged parliamentarians to pass legislation to fund international religious freedom programming in every country and to encourage their respective foreign ministries to prioritize freedom of religion and belief worldwide.

Sixth, we are implementing the consensus resolutions we have on combating intolerance. Now, there was a lot of fascinating debate earlier today about to what extent we mean the same thing by “religious belief.” Tom and I usually agree on things, but I want to toss on the table another way of thinking about

“You learn best about other faiths and learn to respect other faiths not just by talking about it, but by doing things together. Those things may be social service work, building homes, feeding hungry people, or tutoring kids in schools. These things are done by individuals, youth groups, or families. And you also learn by socializing together or sharing each other’s holidays, where you’re building real friendships and real understandings.”

David Saperstein
this, which relates to whether or not we really want to act only on a common agreement or covenant. It may well be that we will end up with a lowest common denominator in the effort to try to forge that kind of consensus. I recognize the positive consequences of doing that. I just want to point out a perhaps counterproductive impact.

We don’t all have the same ideas. But we do overlap; we agree on the vast majority of issues, including what religious freedom means. And I can see a very strong argument that says maybe we’re better off working together on an ad hoc basis through these entities, as well as through other organized, multilateral entities across the globe, on issues where we agree. But we should work separately where we disagree, knowing that each of us will pick up constituencies and address different concerns in a way that we wouldn’t do if we limited ourselves only to those parts of the definition of religious freedom on which we agree. So I just wanted to toss that on the table for us to think about and talk about as we go forward from this conference.

Now, while we’re ramping up our international cooperation and coordination, the United States has a very specific role to play internationally. The United States is unique in our approach to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. You heard this referred to several times. They go hand in hand by design, and they are both enshrined in the First Amendment of our Constitution. Too often we see countries interpreting international standards in a way that requires freedom of expression to be curtailed, sometimes quite seriously so, to fully protect freedom of religion or belief as defined by the majority. Many countries have laws in place restricting freedom of expression beyond the narrow restrictions permitted under U.S. law. Under the statute of Brandenburg v. Ohio, you can pretty much say whatever you want, so long as it does not provoke imminent violence and there is not a danger of imminent violence as a result of provocative speech. In the end, we have come to the determination that the best way to deal with hate speech or bad speech, however you define that, is by drowning it out with good speech. That’s what many of our interfaith coalitions, civil society groups, and government leaders work together to do.

Take the Qur’an burning. When one pastor talked about burning the Qur’an, he provoked thousands of leaders all across America to condemn it. When neo-Nazi groups marched in Skokie, Illinois (which has the highest concentration of Holocaust survivors in the United States), they were defended by a huge number of people, dwarfing the number of neo-Nazis marching. Religious, political, and civil society leaders all came to reject such speech. We all know countless examples, and we heard about the Shoulder-to-Shoulder campaign earlier today, which is an important example currently dealing with Islamophobia in the United States.

On the international front, one way the United States has advanced our view on the issue is through the implementation of UN Human Rights Resolution 16/18 on combating religious intolerance, a consensus resolution that simultaneously advances freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. In response, the Department of State, not wanting to just let it sit there, created a program to collaborate with other countries to implement the resolution by sending experts from across the U.S. government to discuss practical ways to deal with intolerance while ensuring the right to freedom of expression. We’ve had notable success with our partners in Bosnia, Greece, and Indonesia. We’re expanding this work to cover every region in the world. Given the multilateral nature of this effort, this is a specific area ripe for transatlantic cooperation.

Seventh, we are complementing religious freedom advocacy with a holistic understanding of religion and its effect on every area of foreign policy. I already alluded to this when I talked about the integration of our work into the broader agenda of the State Department.

“We’ve seen terrible things from ISIL: the devastation to the Yazidi community, the devastation to historic Christian communities, and the devastation to the other minority communities in Iraq and Syria. Religious minorities are being driven out. They are being killed and butchered. They are being enslaved and raped. They are being forced into marriages and forced into conversions.”

David Saperstein
I have one other area I want to talk about here, but before I do, let me just give a real example that I know is very much in the hearts and minds of every person in this room. Many of you have heard me talk about the vision that I have of what it will take for the indigenous communities in Iraq and Syria to be restored to their historic homelands and their historic communities. First, it will take keeping them in place and defeating ISIL. Second, they need a standard of living as displaced populations in which their children will have a decent education in their own languages, kids will finish school and have access to jobs, and families will have access to healthcare. Third, it’s going to require an effective security system that they’ll trust and that they’ll have some control over, which means they have to have their own militias integrated with the Iraqi and Peshmerga forces into a cohesive whole. They’ll need to have some decision-making about the deployment of those forces. Fourth, they’ll need a restorative transitional justice system. Many of these people will be going back to communities in which former neighbors were often complicit with ISIL or bystanders to ISIL’s crimes, and have been taking over the homes or businesses of their former neighbors. That’s a very tough road to travel to restore those communities, and there has to be a plan of restorative justice and reconciliation.

Then fifth, there has to be improved governance for minority communities in Iraq, which Prime Minister Abadi has committed himself to, so that these minority communities will have a real say in the future of their country. And finally, there has to be a plan for economic rebuilding. It is impossible for any one country to do that, and it is impossible for Iraq to do that. Iraq’s role, however, is absolutely indispensable.

All of this can be an international undertaking in which different countries can work together to pick up the pieces. We should begin to move now, because if we wait until the day—may it come soon—when ISIL is driven out and there is an option for people to return to their communities, there will be utter chaos that will descend into sectarian violence if we are not prepared for that day. We have to move now to plan for that. That is something that this transatlantic partnership can focus on. I give this just as an example, which brings together a number of the themes which I talked about.

And let me finally turn to the last issue, which is combating violent extremism. We do have different views on this issue. In the United Kingdom, we have Prime Minister David Cameron launching his initiative to confront and defeat this poison of extremism—not violent extremism, but extremism. In other words, he wants to prevent extremism from coming about by intervening early on to try and convince people that extreme forms of religion are illegitimate. On the other hand, we in the United States have focused more on the violent acts. People can have whatever religious views they want no matter how fundamentalist they are, so long as they are not using force to impose their religious views on others and they abide by the rule of law. It doesn’t matter how fundamentalist or how liberal their theology is. These are two different ways of dealing with this.

The Canadian prime minister called for a program similar to what David Cameron has. It may be one of those areas that is driven in the United States by the kind of aesthetic resonance of the separation of church and state. We don’t like the government deciding what religion is good religion, what religion is bad religion, or favoring one religion over another. It may be one of those areas in which our work complements each other. We both want the same thing: We don’t want violence and we don’t want extremist views that sanction that violence. However you approach it, and from whichever end you approach it, there may be different means. Maybe we can find ways to work together, and maybe we’re going to decide that we’re going to complement each other.

I want to point out as well that the question of how to support moderate religious forces—defined not by their theology but by their rejection of the use of force to impose their religious views on others and their willingness to abide by the rule of law—is a very difficult challenge for us. Very often the embrace of the transatlantic community, including its civil society and religious segments, undercuts the very religious groups that we want to lift up. This embrace is used by extremists to delegitimize their authenticity within the context of their countries and their religious traditions. This is a major challenge for us, and it’s one that we have to work on together to find ways to empower those entities that reject the use of force to impose their religious or political views on others. We need to find ways to help those civil society and religious groups without delegitimating them through our very embrace. I think it’s one of the central foreign policy challenges that we face.

So these are the challenges that we face. These are some of the differences and some of the similarities that provide opportunities for engagement.

Religious freedom at its core is directly related to freedom of conscience. It is a right of any individual to define their own relationship with the divine or to choose not to have such a relationship. It is a right for that individual not only just to worship, but also to practice his or her beliefs, to change his or her beliefs, to speak publicly and directly to others about his or her beliefs, and
to encourage others to share the same beliefs. There is little in life that is more intimate and personal than an individual’s right to believe in and relate to the divine as they choose, including the right to choose not to believe. And that’s why we interpret this fundamental human right so broadly; that is why it matters in so many ways, and why it is such an appropriate topic for this conference. Thank you all. [Applause]

THOMAS FARR: You described some remarkable changes that have happened very recently within the State Department, such as the relationship between religious freedom and counterterrorism programs. You don’t have a crystal ball and neither do I, but I applaud these new efforts. Do you think these efforts are sufficiently rooted and that they will survive the next election? There’s a pretty difficult culture down there at Foggy Bottom. How are we doing on that front? The point is not the new administration. The point is the movement of the time. You know you’re not going to get rid of the political division.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: First, I think it’s in our strong interest to work with like-minded people in other countries across the globe to make progress on religious freedom in the European Union and in other democratic countries. We need to show them that you cannot successfully counter violent extremism or terrorism, have a stable democracy, or have real conflict resolution if a country is going to descend into sectarian violence, or if one segment of a community is going to be shut out of governance and participation in that community simply because of their religious beliefs or their religious practices. If religious believers are driven underground in order to live out their religious lives, they give up on the hope that they can work within the system of a country. It becomes a fertile ground for extremists of all kinds to mobilize and say, “You’ll never get what you want working within the system. Come with us, we’ll change the system. We’ll create a different country.” This seems to be self-evident, but it’s not yet as widely understood across the globe as we would have hoped for.

I thought this would be the hardest task I had, to make this push when I came in. I spent a lot of time in my beginning months going around and meeting with everyone on this, only to find out that we have actually progressed quite far on it, that it was ingrained. Now, I can’t tell you that part of it is just the obvious situation in the world. I mean, it’s just an obvious point right now. No one can really look at the global situation without recognizing that religious freedom is something that has to be taken into consideration.

But in the government there is an openness to it. Is some of it idiosyncratic? Is it because of the particular people who happen to be in place now? Yeah, I think in part it is. But those people get it, and they want to see it entrenched into the entities that they run as well. So we’re moving in that direction. Will there be ebbs and flows? I think so. Is this something that will dissipate? I really don’t think so. I think for the next generation this will be kind of a given part of the way we think about the world. I’m actually optimistic on this. I can’t say that there are other things I’m not a little more pessimistic on, but on this piece I’m really quite optimistic.

THOMAS FARR: Okay. We have time for a few questions from the audience.

FABIO PETITO: I’m Fabio Petitto from the University of Sussex. Thank you for a fascinating speech. I have a comment and a question. I was very pleased to see that your office is thinking of the big challenges that we are facing in the reconstruction of religious coexistence in the Middle East. I agree with you that it’s a huge challenge. I was also very interested to see that you stressed the role of interreligious coalitions as a way of combating intolerance, as a way of creating the ground for reconstructing, reconciliation, and coexistence.

My question is this: Do you think that the promotion of freedom of religion today has to go hand in hand with the issue of interreligious dialogue, interfaith coalition, and growing interreligious understanding? I think this is an orientation that will be very much welcomed in Europe and will definitely help to strengthen a transatlantic common ground on how to protect the freedom of religion or belief. I would very much like to hear your reaction to that.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: Well, can I suggest a slightly different way of taking one more question here? We heard the theme of the role of interreligious dialogue, and we heard the theme of the Middle East communities and the restoration. Can I ask anyone else who has a comment or a question in that area to make it now?
TOM GETMAN: My name is Tom Getman. I’m an NGO executive who has recently worked mostly in the Middle East as a professional board member consultant to other NGOs, particularly church organizations. When interreligious or interfaith dialogue breaks down and begins to block real discussion on the difficult issues, what’s the step we can take through your office? For instance, one of the things we’ve seen of late is that some of the worst fomenters of violence are Americans who are calling Christians and Muslims idolatrous, heretical people.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: Got it. Are there any others?

ANNE LEAHY: Thank you. That’s an excellent question. I participated in the third Catholic-Muslim forum in Rome last November, and the most important point that was made is that we need to know each other better on the ground. That can be done through education. It was mentioned this morning, and I really wanted to say, “Bravo.”

So offices of religious freedom can help by being much more in sync in terms of the projects that come up for approval, using funds of the office that support the work that is being done in a given country. I have Egypt in mind, and perhaps Jordan. How are primary school curricula portraying the other minority religions? There is a lot that needs to be done practically. And at that meeting last November, every Muslim participant emphasized that point. Thank you.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: All right. First, education is crucially important. There are a lot of great efforts across the globe. Some are spurred by governments; the Scandinavian governments have been particularly involved with this work. A lot has been spurred by groups like Religions for Peace and other interreligious coalitions that try to address this question of curricula and what people are taught in the schools. If people are being taught to hate in their classrooms as a normal part of their educational experience, it becomes virtually impossible to overcome it.

So it is absolutely necessary, but it is not a sufficient part of it—any more than dialogue groups are sufficient. You learn best about other faiths and learn to respect other faiths not just by talking about it, but by doing things together. Those things may be social service work, building homes, feeding hungry people, or tutoring kids in schools. These things are done by individuals, youth groups, or families. And you also learn by socializing together or sharing each other’s holidays, where you’re building real friendships and real understandings.

Many people only get together in formal dialogue events. We have found—and I think it’s shared by many of the institutions I see represented in this room—that that is not solely sufficient to provide the kind of cooperation that you want. Sometimes those interreligious coalitions do break down, particularly when there are differences on core principles. That’s a tough thing.
There’s no short-term answer to that other than to shift your attention to where you can find common ground and begin to rebuild again. But there is no short-term answer to those kinds of issues. When people like the settlers on the West Bank say disparaging things about people of other faiths, it’s up to civil society, government officials, and interreligious communities to do something about it.

The transatlantic partnership was often mobilized in Europe over this past year in the face of some very ugly things that happened. But the problem is, in this day of new technologies, these ugly messages sweep the world very swiftly. Rumors sweep the world very quickly here, and that is a real challenge to us. The State Department has an entire program aimed at trying to find more effective ways to address that and to undercut the impact of the negative messages that sweep the globe through social media technologies. We’re making some progress in some areas, though less so in terms of disenchantment with ISIL and other groups. But we really are making some progress, and I do think that these interreligious communities in the Middle East are going to be absolutely vital. I talked about filling that void so there’s not chaos. Interreligious cooperation between the diverse tapestry of Iraq’s religious population is indispensable.

THOMAS FARR: Well, that was a terrific answer.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: I have one last observation here. It is simply this: I talked about how daunting this agenda is—and it really is daunting. My mentor, the remarkable Al Vorspan, used to observe that the difference between an optimist and a pessimist is that an optimist argues that this is the best of all possible worlds—and a pessimist agrees. [Laughter]

This was a daunting agenda that we heard today. I don’t know how anyone could have sat through this day surrounded by the people in this room without being more optimistic now than when they came in. I want to thank all of you for that, and thank all of you who made this possible.

THOMAS FARR: Thank you Ambassador Saperstein. [Applause]

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