

Religious Freedom Project  
 BERKLEY CENTER  
 for Religion, Peace & World Affairs



Excerpts from [“Religious Freedom: A Conversation with Rick Warren, Robert George and John Dilulio”](#)

Georgetown University’s Berkeley’s Center for Religious Freedom.  
 Feb 12, 2013

**John Dilulio:** Thank you...I want to welcome all of you to “Religious Freedom: A Barroom Brawl!” [Laughter] No, “Religious Freedom, a Conversation.”....  
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**John Dilulio:** “Pastor Warren, when you use the terms religious freedom and religious liberty, what do you mean by it and why do you think it’s so important?”

**Rick Warren:** “Let us take the phrase religious liberty and define the words first. First, what is religion? Religion is far more than worship, but that is what people want to make it today. If you define freedom of religion as simply freedom of worship, then all my freedom stops the moment I walk out of mass, service, or synagogue. Religion involves every single area of my life: how I make my decisions, how I spend my money, how I use my time, how I raise my children, how I educate my kids, how I build my business. If I am truly a religious person, my faith affects every area. I cannot compartmentalize it as simply worship. If we stop talking about freedom of

religion and start talking about freedom of worship--then there will be a real problem. The problem is the constitution does not guarantee freedom of worship, it guarantees freedom of religion.... I have been in probably 164 countries, I think, in the last ten years. I've been in a number of countries that claim to have religious liberty, and what they mean is: "We do not care if you practice your faith so long as you do it behind closed doors." But you cannot convert, or convert anyone else. By this standard, Saudi Arabia has freedom of religion, because you can worship in secret there. The key is not freedom of belief. It is freedom to practice."

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**John Dilulio:** "Professor George, same question. Is there any difference between you and Pastor Warren? Do Catholics approach this differently...?"

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**Robert P. George:** "Well, first, John, let me say just what a pleasure it is to be back at Georgetown....What an honor it is to be with you two guys. Pastor Rick is...a force of nature, and a tremendous force for good. Now, I almost didn't recognize him without the Hawaiian shirt [Laughter]."

**Rick Warren:** I'm incognito. [Laughter]

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**Robert P. George:** ...[I have] made the argument that freedom of religion is not merely an abstract liberty. So much of our conversation about freedom has been formed in a certain post-Enlightenment context that we regard our rights, including our first freedom, religious freedom, as if they were abstract rights hovering in the atmosphere, not connected to our concrete good as human beings....If religious liberty really is a right, indeed a fundamental right, it must be a protection of a human good.

Now what good? Well....the good of religion itself. Now what does that mean?

In its fullest and most robust sense, religion is nothing other than human being's right relationship with God, or the gods, or the divine. In all cultures we find man striving for that. Even in those cultures that are not theistic, we find that striving for harmony, a friendship, with the divine. Why do we strive like that? It is because of the way we were made; it is because of the nature of the human being. Our most immediate experience as conscious and intentional actors is our experience of our own freedom. We experience ourselves as creatures who cause things that we are not caused to cause. We experience what philosophers call free will.

Of course a lot of secularist and anti-religious people want to explain that away, but they know they have to explain it away. They know they cannot defeat religion unless they can persuade themselves and us that that experience of being creatures who transcend the order of causality is merely an illusion. But it is not. Any effort to explain it away, so that we can reduce human behavior to material and efficient causes will ultimately be self-defeating....in fact humans are rational and free. If we are free, we are rational. Those are reciprocal. If we are free, we act for

reasons. If we are capable of acting for reasons that are more than merely instrumental to our desires, then we are free actors.

It is that experience of ourselves as--dare I say it-- spiritual creatures, self transcending creatures, creatures transcending the order of causality, that is responsible for the ubiquity of religion. It is responsible for the quest for harmony with the more than merely human sources of meaning and value, if there be such. That good of the human person, which begins with the quest, and which culminates in the ideal of perfect unity with God, which is unattainable to us fallen creatures. If that quest is part of our good, part of our flourishing, and an aspect of our integral well being as human beings, then protecting that is critically important. Therein lies the ground of our commitment to religious liberty, not as some abstraction floating around in the atmosphere, but as a real protection of real human good.

I entirely agree with Rick's view and I do not see any Protestant/Catholic divide there, but I would add one more element. Religious freedom includes all that Rick said, plus the right to take one's religiously informed moral convictions into the public square, and to vie on terms of fairness and equality with one's fellow citizens for their allegiance, when it comes to the making of public policy. The attempt to drive religion into the purely private sphere, out of the public square, to design a system in which the public reasons--to use John Rawls' famous phrase--are drawn so narrowly so as to exclude the religious witness, is simply to cut the heart out of the right to religious freedom.

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**Rick Warren:** "I absolutely agree with Professor George that it is a false dichotomy to set up belief versus rationality. The truth is that everything in the public square is done by believers, because everybody believes something. It is psychologically impossible to believe nothing. To live, you have to believe something. An atheist believes something; a secularist believes something. The issue is not between rationality and faith. The issue is between your worldview and my worldview. And so, as Robby just said, don't pretend that the secular is the neutral view. Everybody has a worldview.

I think there are several sources of the freedom of religion. First is the nature of man. Human beings are made in the image of god and are given the freedom to choose. That is free will. If God gives me the freedom to accept or reject him, to obey or disobey him, then I have to give that freedom to everybody else. I believe in conversion. I do not believe in coercion. They are two different things. The nature of man is one of the sources of the freedom of religion and that is why the founders and the framers called it an 'inalienable' right. The state does not give this right. It is an inalienable right, and it is endowed by our creator.

The nature of God, the nature of faith, and the nature of salvation also contribute to religious freedom. Faith cannot be forced. I have to choose to have faith; God wanted us to choose to love him. Faith requires freedom of religion, otherwise it is not true faith. Furthermore, as Americans, we have the 'first freedom.'" It is not by accident that the basis of our religious freedom is contained in the first phrase of the first sentence of the first paragraph of the First

Amendment. It is the first freedom. It is the founding freedom. It is the freedom on which everything else is formed in America. It is why the Pilgrims came to America. We have two sets of founding fathers: the Pilgrim fathers and the political fathers, and both of them were absolutely committed to religious freedom.”

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**John Dilulio:** I think you have established pretty well that religious liberty is essential to the human person and that there are issues and controversies surrounding it. A recent Pew survey showed that 75 percent of the world’s people live under severe or moderate restrictions on their religious liberty. Why is there a rising tide of restrictions on religious liberty abroad and do you think that US foreign policy could do a better job at rolling back some of these restrictions and expanding the universe of religious freedom abroad?

**Rick Warren** Yes, yes and yes. In the first place, it would be a fatal mistake if either party lets the other party co-opt religious liberty, in my opinion. This is an American issue, and regardless of whether you tend to be liberal or a conservative, you ought to care about the First Amendment.

I have been in a lot of countries. Interestingly, the attitude of many nations toward America has dramatically shifted in the last decade. Classic liberalism holds that, when we are going to go overseas, we do not want to impose western culture on other cultures. Today’s liberalism does the exact opposite. In every country in the world, US foreign policy says, “You want our money? You have got to have our view on abortion, homosexuality, and any other number of issues.” I cannot tell you how many countries I have been in where I have met with prime ministers and presidents who say, “America, no thank you for your money if you are going to set our moral agenda.”

**Robert P. George:** The US. Commission on International Religious Freedom [to which George belongs] is charged with the hard work of ensuring that religious liberty is given a high place in the formation of US foreign policy and being a thorn in the side of the State Department. Too often, human nature being what it is--you Protestants know all about that--

**Rick Warren:** Wait, let me stop right here. I’m not a Protestant. I stopped protesting the Catholic Church years ago. They’re my best friends. I’m an evangelical.

**Robert P. George:** See John, you were right. He’s campaigning for Pope. [Laughter] But you know, human nature being what it is, good guys, when they’re in positions of power, are going to be tempted to bargain away or to soft-pedal or to lay aside the religious liberty issues in return for security guarantees, economic and trade advantages and so forth....

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Pastor Rick has raised a very serious issue, and there is not nearly enough discussion of this in the American public square, mainly because the American people do not know about it. Western, secular, liberal ideology is pushing an ideological agenda that comes out of the sexual revolution. It is basically a Margaret Sanger, Alfred Kinsey, Hugh Hefner philosophy. This is

driven in US foreign policy and carrots and sticks are used to get other cultures to compromise on their religious beliefs in return for US aid or good graces.

This is a very serious issue, because we should be promoting religious freedom abroad. So for example, there are some countries, Muslim countries, not all but some Muslim countries, and some non-Muslim countries, where there are formal legal punishments for conversion. And even when there aren't, there is tremendous pressure on people against conversion. Sometimes governments stand by and allow retaliation with impunity against people who do convert. At the same time, as we are trying to promote that, we are quarreling with our own government urging that foreign policy respects the religious views of cultures that do not want planeloads of condoms. They want penicillin and we are leaving them without penicillin and dropping planeloads of condoms, because that fits the ideology of the powers that be. I think that has got to be turned around.

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**Rick Warren:** Let me go back to something Robby said. It's very important. He said that so much of the problem is based on the view of sexuality, and the promiscuousness, that came out of the 1960s. People would agree with most of the Bible. I could stand up and say, "You know, the Bible says take care of the poor." Everybody would say yes. It says, "Care for orphans." Everybody would say yes. "Always tell the truth." Everybody says yes. "Help people who are sick." Everybody says yes. But when it comes down to challenging one's narcissism, there is a problem.

Last August I sent a message to 20,000 pastors on the three sanctities: the sanctity of life, the sanctity of sex, and the sanctity of marriage because these are the three sticking points in our society. What we have done is we have reversed the Declaration of Independence. Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness have been reversed. We have now put the pursuit of happiness first, and life and liberty are secondary issues. I think there is a legitimate order to life coming first, liberty coming second, and then the pursuit of happiness coming third. But in the hedonistic society we have, the pursuit of happiness trumps everything else.

**Robert George:** I think that is absolutely right. Let me add a point to it. This goes to the concept of conscience, which is very integral to the idea of religious freedom. The relationship between religious freedom and the freedom of conscience is a very interesting question, both at the philosophical level and in terms of our own constitutional history. I think in any hedonistic society that has a concept of freedom of conscience, freedom of conscience gets reduced to the idea of conscience as "the permissions department."

What gets lost is the historical and correct idea of conscience, not as the permissions department that licences me to at on my desires, whatever they happen to be, but rather the idea of conscience as what John Henry Cardinal Newman called 'a stern monitor.' Newman made the point that conscience has rights because conscience has duties. To respect conscience is not to say people should be able to do whatever they want. It is not a kind of quasi-libertarianism. There is a presumption against interfering with conscience because to

interfere with conscience is to require somebody to do something that they feel obligated as a matter of morality and perhaps as a matter of God's own law to do, or not to fulfill some obligation that they feel it is necessary to do.

Now, as I say, there are limits to that freedom of conscience. We are not going to let neo-Aztecs engage in human sacrifice. But over a very broad range, and certainly presumptively, we protect conscience and should protect conscience so that people can fulfill their duties as they best understand them. We need to correct this mistaken idea of conscience that comes out of the kind of 'me' generation liberalism, that says, "I am entitled to do whatever i want unless my conscience tells me that I am not allowed to do it and I have a pretty relaxed conscience that is not in the business of telling me much about what I should not do."