Religious Freedom: A Conversation with Rick Warren, Robert P. George, and John DiIulio
About the Religious Freedom Project

The Religious Freedom Project (RFP) at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs began in January 2011 with the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation. The RFP 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. Our team of interdisciplinary scholars examines different understandings of religious liberty as it relates to other fundamental freedoms; its importance for democracy; and its role in social and economic development, international diplomacy, and the struggle against violent religious extremism. Our target audiences are the academy, the media, policymakers, and the general public, both here and abroad. For more information about the RFP’s research, teaching, publications, conferences, and workshops, visit 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 inter-religious 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.
On February 12, 2013, at Georgetown University’s historic Riggs library, the Religious Freedom Project convened two of the nation’s foremost public figures for an extraordinary conversation.

In one chair sat “America’s pastor,” the Reverend Rick Warren of California’s Saddleback Church. In the other sat one of the country’s foremost Catholic lay intellectuals, Robert P. George, Princeton University’s McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence.

The conversation was moderated by Professor John DiIulio, Frederic Fox Leadership Professor of Politics, Religion, and Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania.

Their discussion explored two primary topics. First, what exactly is religious freedom and why is it important for everyone (religious or not)? Second, in light of the global crisis in religious freedom, how can US foreign policy engage the problem with greater success?

While Pastor Warren and Professor George did not agree on all things, both described religious freedom as essential to humanity and productive of substantive social, economic, and political benefits. Each voiced concerns about the ineffectiveness of US foreign policy.

Finally, each expressed the fear that the United States itself is losing its moorings when it comes to religious freedom—a right once widely believed to be the “first freedom” of America, and the patrimony of all people everywhere.
THOMAS FARR: Welcome to our after-dinner conversation on the hot topic of religious freedom. What is it? And why is it important for individuals and societies? I’m going to introduce our moderator, and he will introduce our special guests. So strap on your seat belts and let’s get started.

John DiIulio is the Frederic Fox Leadership Professor of Politics, Religion, and Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania. Over the last quarter century, he has published many books and articles and won a whole host of major academic and teaching awards. Outside academic life, he has developed programs to mentor the children of prisoners, provide literacy training to low income communities, reduce homicides in high crime police districts, and support inner city Catholic schools that serve low income children. Sounds like an argument for religious freedom to me. During his academic leave in 2001-2002, he served as the first director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

JOHN DIIULIO: Thank you, Tom, and I want to welcome all of you to “Religious Freedom, A Barroom Brawl” [LAUGHTER].

No, “Religious Freedom, A Conversation.” Let me first just underline what Tom said. It’s very difficult to find fact-based analyses of faith-based issues anywhere. The Pew Forum is one place that does it, but Dr. [Luis] Lugo, you’ve got competition with the Religious Freedom Project. If you haven’t gone on
that website or looked at these publications, they’re capacious, they’re balanced, they’re thoughtful, and it’s a really remarkable thing, Tom, that you and your colleagues have done.

Now let me introduce, first, Pastor Rick Warren, who is rightly and widely regarded as the single most important spiritual leader in America. He is the author, as all of you know, I’m sure, of many books, but among them, *The Purpose Driven Life*, which is the best-selling hardcover book in American history. With his wife, Kay Warren, in 1980, he founded Saddleback Church in California. It is not only a place that has weekly attendees over 20,000, but it is a place that has spawned a remarkable array of more than 300 different community-serving ministries.

Pastor Warren, however, is not just a California guy, and a national figure, he’s a global figure. The Purpose Driven Network has trained more than 400,000 ministers and priests worldwide. In 2004 and 2008, he had roles at the presidential inaugurals. In 2008, he also moderated a discussion between the two presidential candidates, Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain.

Now to Professor Robert George, my colleague formerly at Princeton University. He holds the most distinguished chair at Princeton University, which is the McCormick Chair of Jurisprudence. He is the founder of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, and he is widely regarded as the single most influential Catholic lay intellectual in America. He’s a graduate of Swarthmore College as well as Harvard Law School. He also has a Masters in Theology from Harvard, and a Doctorate in Philosophy of Law from Oxford University. He has written more books and scores and scores of articles—provocative and profound, faster and better—than one could even keep up with. But among them I will mention, *In Defense of Natural Law, Making Men Moral, The Clash of Orthodoxies*, and recently, *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*.

Professor George has been involved in so many issues and areas significant to religious life, civic life, and public policy. For example, he served on the President’s Council on Bioethics, the US Civil Rights Commission, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, and was a judicial fellow of the US Supreme Court, among others. He has won numerous awards: the Presidential Citizens Medal, the Bradley Prize for Intellectual and Civic Achievement, and many, many others. He is one of the most revered, respected and beloved teachers at Princeton University. His pedagogy

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*Rick Warren*
transcends all the usual ideological and other categories.

We are here to talk about religious freedom, and by way of getting us started, 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? Why are you so impassioned about it?

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.

So religion involves everything in my life. Therefore, I would say freedom of religion is the freedom to practice—not just to believe—my faith and values, and to convert. That is an important part of religious freedom. 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 as long as you do it behind closed doors.” But you cannot convert, or convert anybody 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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At two different points scripture says, “Jesus went to every village, preaching, teaching and healing.” Preaching would be evangelization, teaching would be education, and healing would be healthcare. One-third of Jesus’ ministry was healthcare. God does not just care about our souls; he cares about our minds and our bodies. It is not by accident that in every country in the world, the first school and the first hospital were started by Christian missionaries, because we have a preaching, teaching, healing faith.

I was arguing with the administration once and said, “the audacity of you telling us how to do healthcare. The church has been doing healthcare 2,000 years longer than any government.” We invented the hospital. Do you know that? Christians invented the hospital. The church invented the hospital. That wasn’t a government decision.

So religion involves preaching, teaching and healing. Of course the Epistle of James said that true religion cares for the widow and orphan. Charity is part of my religion. Religious liberty does not only apply to my worship. It also applies to my charity, the way I educate, and the way that I help the sick.

JOHN DIIULIO: Professor George, same question. Is there any difference between you and Pastor Warren? Do Catholics approach this differently, does it have a different accent perhaps when Catholics talk about religious liberty and freedom?

ROBERT P. GEORGE: Well, first, John, let me say just what a pleasure it is to be back at Georgetown. I want to second all the fine things that have been said about Tom Farr and his colleagues
Robert P. George

here at Berkley Center. The work they’re doing is fabulous.

What an honor it is to be with you two guys. Pastor Rick is exactly what John said, a force of nature, and a tremendous force for good. Not all forces of nature are forces for good. Pastor Rick is a force for good. Now, I almost didn’t recognize him without the Hawaiian shirt [LAUGHTER].

RICK WARREN: I’m incognito [LAUGHTER].

ROBERT P. GEORGE: And John, my goodness, when I got the stunning news yesterday morning that the Pope was resigning, I thought, gee, well, you know, John might not be able to make it tomorrow evening, he might have a job interview in Rome [LAUGHTER]. We miss John at Princeton. John was my colleague for 13 years. We just miss him terribly, but he is doing literally the Lord’s own work at the University of Pennsylvania, not only at the university, although that’s very important, but as Tom emphasized, in the streets, with at-risk young people, in particular. John, too, as I have very often said, is a force of nature and a force for good.

Religious liberty—I’ve been thinking about the question of religious liberty and writing about it for many, many years. But my first time to sit down and think formally about what it is, formally in the academic sense, was when I was invited by Tom Farr and our dear friends here to give a public lecture at Georgetown. Later we had a dinner conversation with Sheikh Hamza Yusuf on the same subject. I entitled my lecture “Religious Liberty and the Human Good.”

And there I 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—as these unities of body, mind and spirit, as Pastor Rick reminds us, human persons. If religious liberty really is a right, indeed a fundamental right, it must be a protection of a human good.

Now, what good? Well, my friend Tim Shah has laid it out brilliantly in the little book that he did in relation to that conference—Religious Freedom: Why Now?—published by the Berkley Center. That good is the good of religion
itself. Now, what does that mean?

In its fullest and most robust sense, religion is nothing other than human beings’ 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 a harmony, a friendship, with the divine. Why do we strive like that? It is because of the way we are 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. It will not be able to explain the motivation or the enterprise of trying to get at the truth of the matter, as to whether 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 wellbeing 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 a 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

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Rick Warren
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.

The proponents of this narrow “public reasons” view claim that is the last thing they want to do. They depict themselves as great respecters of and promoters of and defenders of religious liberty, but you cannot do a halfway job here. If you are a defender of religious liberty, it must be in the robust sense, in terms of proselytization, advocacy, the right to convert, and the right to persuade one’s neighbors. This is something that our Church, John’s and my Church, got around to late. Our Baptist friends got there much earlier than we did. Now when we got there, we got there good and proper. I’d suggest even to our Protestant friends that there’s something to be learned by reading the magnificent document of the Second Vatican Council, Dignitatus Humanae, which lays this out.

In sum, a robust sense of religious freedom means being able to take religiously inspired convictions into the public square and vie, on terms of equality. This does not imply any advantage over unbelieving fellow citizens. There must be terms of equality. What I think is intolerable is for secular liberals to declare that their view is not a comprehensive view, but just a “neutral” view, and that neutral view is just a fair playing field on which Jews and Christians and Muslims can compete. That is like the pitcher for the other team suddenly declaring himself to be umpire.

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.

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Robert P. George
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 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.

If you do not have religious freedom, none of the other freedoms matter. If I do not have the freedom to believe whatever I want to believe, freedom of the press is irrelevant. If I do not have the freedom to believe whatever I want to believe, freedom of assembly is irrelevant.

Today people misuse the term “separation of church and state.” Jefferson was by no means an orthodox Christian, but he certainly did understand separation of church and state. He didn’t invent that term. Roger Williams used that term first in Rhode Island, and Jefferson co-opted it and used in the famous letter to the Danbury Baptists.

It is interesting to note that Jefferson wrote the letter, talking about the separation of church and state, to the Danbury Baptists on a Friday. The following Sunday, Jefferson went to church at the largest church in Washington, DC which was meeting in the Capitol, and he went there for the next seven years. Obviously, his idea of separation of church and state is not what a lot of people want it to be. Jefferson writes about separation of church and state and then sees no conflict going on Sunday to worship in a government building. What a lot of people do not know is that Jefferson wrote a second famous letter to the Methodist Episcopalians of Connecticut, and in that letter he writes that the government has no place in matters of conscience and religion.

JOHN DIIULIO: 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 re-
strictions 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 those 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 a 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.”

JOHN DIULLIO: Professor George, what is your view? Pastor Warren suggests that US policy has become somewhat adverse to religious freedom abroad.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is charged with the hard work of ensuring that religious liberty is given a high place in the

Dinner guests listen in as Robert P. George, John Dilulio, and Rick Warren debate religious freedom.
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 pros- testing 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, hu- man 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 guar- antees, economic and trade advantages and so forth. The commission gets a lot of criticism, and critics try to depict it as partisan, although members are as multi- partisan I think as they can possibly be, if you look at the makeup of our com- mission. But our commission is united across those partisan and ideological lines, because we all believe in the First Amend- ment. We all believe in religious freedom. We believe that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty—including religious liberty— and the pursuit of happiness.

Pastor Rick has raised a very serious is- sue, and there is not nearly enough dis- cussion 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 Marga- ret 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 where 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 for- eign 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.

JOHN DIIULIO: Let’s look at China, which obviously is a place that is under- going massive transformations of all sorts. Some say liberalizing, some say not. Some believe that it will be the economic colos- sus by the mid-twenty-first century. Oth- ers doubt that. But when you look at a particular country, like China, and you consider the concern about religious lib- erty that you have each expressed, what do you see the future holding? Do you see this crisis, this rising tide of restric-
tions, this rollback of religious liberty getting worse over the next several decades in places like China, or do you think that somehow things will get better?

RICK WARREN: About 15 years ago I invited the leaders of China to Saddleback Church, and they came. I did not tell the government, my church, or the media. Eighteen of them came to Saddleback and to my house for a barbecue. The guy who was in charge of the religious affairs department—one of the guys actually in charge of the persecution—said to me, “I actually got something out of that sermon. I am a parent. I have two kids. If that is your brand of Christianity, you are welcome in China.” Then they sent me a letter and basically gave me carte blanche.

I have had two state dinners in People’s Hall with the government of China. I have debated them on this very issue of religious freedom. On one occasion it got pretty heated and I said, “You know what your problem is? You want the economic success without the moral and ethical underpinnings of Christianity or the Judeo-Christian movement. You want free markets but you do not want freedom of information, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech. That is like cutting the roots off the flower. It will bloom for a while but it has no roots so it is going to die. Capitalism only works if there is a moral basis underneath it. By itself it can just lead to greed. Christianity encourages employers to treat their workers well, to pay them a good salary, to be kind to people, not to use slave labor. If you just take capitalism without the moral basis that we have had in America, you are going to get the same thing Russia did. You just trade one set of thugs for another and you get oligarchs instead of the politburo. You have to allow freedom of religion.”

What they actually fear, more than freedom of religion, is Western religious entanglement, whether it is from the churches in America, or from the Vatican, or some other place. They have actually seen that Christians make good workers, and we have lots of Christian business leaders who own factories in China. You can pretty much do anything you want to in a factory, as long as you are producing. I know guys who have 80,000 people in a factory, and they have a church on every single floor, and when people get their break, if you want to go to church, you can go at break. The Chinese government thinks nothing of that, as long as the factory is producing the widget. Their problem is not so much freedom of religion, but what they perceive to be the Western connection implicit in Christianity.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: What I would add to what Rick said is that the need for a moral foundation for our economic system to flourish is a lesson we in the United States have to relearn as well. It is not just the Chinese who need to learn it. We are paying a heavy price for neglecting it. In one dimension, we are seeing it in terms of the Wall Street scandals, the crony capitalism, and the plutocracy. On the other side, we are seeing it in terms of how difficult it is in some places to get economic renewal going, because the breakdown of the family, the failure of family formation, and family disintegration have brought the social pathologies
that lead to the inability to do business. Business firms cannot produce the people they need who are responsible and honest. Only the family can do that. Therefore, that moral foundation is really something we need to be pressing here in the United States as well.

In China the fear of religion is not so much ideological—it is not the old Marxism—as it is the fear of alternative authority structures. It is a fear of all of the institutions of a civil society but especially religion, because religion is very dangerous to totalitarian regimes. They know what happened in Poland. The Chinese government would let religion do the good stuff, from their point of view, like Pastor Rick was talking about, but ultimately they want control. For example, they want a domesticated, tamed Catholic Church, under the control of the state, which is not really a separate authority structure.

I would contrast that with the issues in some other parts of the world where theologically motivated violations of religious liberty are a great problem, where people do not like the competing religion or people who are of that religion. This is not just religious people against other religious people, or religious people against secular people. In some places it is secular people against religious people. The growing problem in Europe is secular hostility against religion. Just a couple of months ago I had the occasion to write a little piece criticizing the decision of a German court to essentially prohibit religious circumcision of male infant children. In the Jewish faith, circumcising male infant children is one of those things that is so important because it goes to the very heart of the covenant. This court ruling would prohibit the practice of a core element of the faith.

I actually thought that I would not get a lot of pushback on my piece because it seemed to me so outrageous to ban the circumcision of male children for religious reasons. I thought this is something where there would be unanimity. But I was deluged with hate mail from people both here in the United States and in Europe who thought that it was sinister of me to defend the right of our

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Jewish brothers and sisters to circumcise their children. The secular world’s point of view claimed that this was child abuse. It was really astonishingly hostile.

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. I said, “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, and 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 P. 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 licenses me to act 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.”

JOHN DIIULIO: Let’s turn to the question of whether we can have our domestic religious liberty fights, walk and chew gum, and disagree without being disagreeable. Let me give you a context, because I think context here matters a lot. When you talk about international religious liberty and you talk about what Pastor Warren, for example, has done in Rwanda, people are going to hear those issues differently. I mean, once you have those facts about the remarkable work you’ve done there, and the difference that it’s made in people’s lives, people are going to bend a little, on each side, frankly. And so, in the United States, here, and maybe I’ll get you to attack me now, okay? So, a very kind word for the Obama Administration.

There’s a wonderful story to be told that really hasn’t been told. They have actually done, through their faith-based center, some amazing work. For example, at the United States Department of Agriculture, a wonderful guy named Max Finberg, who was the chief of staff to Representative Tony Hall, a pro-life democrat and who has made a life’s work of anti-hunger—

RICK WARREN: Tony’s preached at Saddleback.

JOHN DIIULIO: Is that right?

RICK WARREN: I’ve had three Catholics preach at Saddleback: Peter Kreeft, Tony Hall, and Jim Towey.

JOHN DIIULIO: Wow, that is a triple play.

RICK WARREN: You’re next.
JOHN DIIULIO: You’ll be down to 3,000 congregants by the time I get done. But you know, Max Finberg, who’s the head of the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships there, has done a remarkable job of working with community-serving religious organizations and expanding the number of meals that are being served by Catholic organizations, other religious organizations, you know, doubling the number of meals going to children in the summer. They’ve done it quietly, they’ve done it below the radar screen. I’ve written and talked about that recently, and I can give you other stories. Now, this has gone on, this good work, this common good work, even as we’ve had very serious, knock-down, drag-out fights over religious hiring rights and the HHS mandate.

Pastor Warren, you talked earlier today about co-belligerency. Is there a way to have the discourse and the debate about religious liberty in America, as heated as that can be at times, with all that is bound up in it, and yet at the same time, push the envelope on problem-solving on issues that nearly all of us agree on?

RICK WARREN: As I mentioned earlier, Americans agree on much of the basics. We just disagree on how to get there. Everybody in America wants their family to be safe. Everybody in America wants their children to have a good education. Everybody in America wants to be healthy. Everybody in America wants a good job. Everybody in America wants to feel that our country is safe from terrorism. There is no disagreement on these things. The issue is how do we get there, and when that comes to disagreement, I think it is important not to say that somebody I disagree with is unpatriotic.

As a pastor, I believe in the Gospel and that Jesus Christ is who he said he was, died on the cross for the redemption of our sins, and rose again. But I also believe in the common good, and in America. I believe in pluralism. I do not believe in relativism, or the dictatorship or relativism, as Pope Benedict has talked about. Relativism basically says all ideas are equally valid. That is nonsense. To say the moon is made of cheese or the moon is made of rock are not equally valid ideas. Some things are true and some things are not true. But we do live in a pluralistic world, and it is becoming more and more pluralistic.

However, I am not willing to be a flame-thrower because I do not think that is going to be productive. As a pastor, I could get up every week and yell at people and tell them all the things they’re doing wrong. That is not going to change them at all. You have to use other forms of communication to get the kind of change that you want. The first thing we have to agree on is that freedom matters. The one thing history teaches us is that freedom is incredibly fragile. It never lasts forever. As Benjamin Franklin said, it is the duty of each generation to protect it. We lose our freedom for three reasons: neglect, license, and trading it for security.

And so for example, if we could start at that level and say, look, we don’t agree on salvation. I don’t agree on salvation with a Muslim guy, but I work with Muslims all the time, on issues that we can work together on.
Gays would not agree with my view on sexuality or my opposition to the re-definition of marriage. But I am working with gay groups around the world to end AIDS. That is what Francis Schaeffer termed co-belligerency. I do not agree with almost anything that the National Organization of Women teaches, but if NOW said, “We want to fight pornography and the objectification of a woman’s body,” I am in and I would work with the National Organization of Women on that issue. What I am concerned about is that we build a broad enough coalition on religious freedom so that we are not making it a narrow issue. Everyone needs to see, as Professor George pointed out, that it is a benefit for all to have religious freedom.

JOHN DIIULIO: Professor George, last December, talking about religious freedom and the HHS mandate, some people, taking a pretty dim view of the situation, talked about a war on religion. It is a funny war on religion when there is $4 billion of federal funding for Catholic charities, Catholic relief services, and expansion in federal funding for many Catholic community service organizations. Is there a way to have the real fight, which needs to be had about religious liberty, and yet at the same time, find common ground and good ways of moving forward to solve certain problems everybody agrees need to be solved in common?

ROBERT P. GEORGE: Let me just make sure I get this straight. So they are not waging a war on religion, but we are waging a war on women?

“It is a tragedy that we are so fractured in this country because the moral consensus has broken down. But here is the situation in which we find ourselves: So often, our friends on the other side, with their hands on the levers of power, in good faith and conscience, believe that our view must be marginalized. They believe that our participation must be conditioned on our assenting to, or at least not complaining about, matters that we, in conscience as informed by faith and reason, simply cannot assent to.”

Robert P. George

JOHN DIIULIO: Well, that was the discourse.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: The point was that when there was an election to win, we were waging a war on women. I think I see how the field of battle is shaping up here.

RICK WARREN: The key is whoever frames the discussion wins. You cannot let people frame it as “This is a war on
women.” That is nonsense. There is a much, much deeper issue than that. If you let people frame it according to their viewpoint, you are going to lose.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: I want to find things to praise in the current administration, and there are some things. But here I finally found something to disagree with Rick on because I think we need some flamethrowers. I mean this metaphorically. I think the kinds of flames that need to be thrown consist in calling something what it is, naming reality, and not pretending that it is something other than it is. Where there are violations of religious freedom, you have to name it by name. You cannot tiptoe around it, finding polite ways to frame the issue. When one side has its firmly held view and the other side has its firmly held view, and you cannot reach agreement, if our side believes that fundamental religious freedom is being violated, the flame throwing that I have in mind is what we do at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty: sue them.

RICK WARREN: My idea of flame throwing is civil disobedience. I would think nothing about civil disobedience if there was something that violated my conscience. I think that religious liberty is going to be the civil rights movement of the next decade and I think we could take some lessons from the civil rights movement. When the HHS mandate came out, I did two things. I called Cardinal Dolan and said, “I am in complete solidarity with you.” Then I tweeted to about a million people: “I stand in 100 percent solidarity with my Catholic brothers and sisters and I would be willing to go to jail for it.” I also agree with Professor George. You have got to name the issues.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: I think there is a deep problem here. Yes, we want to be able to work together. I am all for cobbelligerency. It is a tragedy that we are so fractured in this country because the moral consensus has broken down. But here is the situation in which we find ourselves: So often, our friends on the other side, with their hands on the levers of power, in good faith and conscience, believe that our view must be marginalized. They believe that our participation must be conditioned on our assenting to, or at least not complaining about, matters that we, in conscience as informed by faith and reason, simply cannot assent to. Chai Feldblum, who is very active in the gay marriage movement, said a

“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.”

Rick Warren
few years ago that there will be hundreds of points of conflict between gay rights and religious liberty. “But,” she said, “I have trouble thinking of any conflicts on which the religious liberty interest should prevail, over the sexual interest.”

Professor Feldblum’s view is the dominant view on her side of the street and in the current administration. That accounts for a lot of things. For example, government funding for Christian or Catholic organizations that provide social services to women who are trafficked into sexual slavery, is being conditioned on the willingness to provide or arrange for abortion counseling. Such organizations cannot do that. This agenda then disables an excellent soldier in the battle against human trafficking and there are real women’s real lives that are affected by that, and that is what gets me so upset.

JOHN DIIULIO: I’d love to take a few questions from the audience.

MICHAEL MAIBACH: If men are gay, they are gay. It is not a choice, it is what they are. Are you not a bigot if you do not want them to have the right to marriage, just like heterosexuals? What is the Christian response to that?

ROBERT P. GEORGE: On marriage, we are not going to get one centimeter toward understanding what fairness or equality demands with respect to an institution such as marriage, or any institution, until we decide on what the institution is. We cannot decide whether it is unfair to treat some relationships as marital and other relationships as non-marital, since some will certainly be treated as non-marital and others as marital, until we understand what marriage is. With my two brilliant young coauthors, Sherif Girgis and Ryan Anderson, I have written a book (with a wonderful blurb on the back from Rick Warren) called What Is Marriage?

I will tell you that marriage has something to do with children. The question is, when a baby is born, will there be a father somewhere in the vicinity to help the mother bring up the child in the context of the loving bond and commitment of father and mother? Nature does not provide that. It is provided by culture, where there are norms, pressures, and guidance. When culture provides that, we call it marriage. We start there, but then we have to add that it is a mistake to imagine that marriage is simply a means to the end of child-rearing. If you take this instrumentalist view of marriage and fail to see marriage as something that is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, good you are going to make a mistake on the other end.

RICK WARREN: That is a deep point: Do not take a merely instrumental view of marriage.

SCOTT HAMBERGER: It seems to me the problem is virulent secular humanism that will brook no debate of its own internal views. It seems to me that we are losing that debate because we woke up one day and found that our institutions had been taken over by secular humanism. As a practical matter, how do we regain our ground? What is the playbook, if you will, to defend our re-
religious freedom, and what must we be willing to do in order to accomplish that?

RICK WARREN: I have been doing a lot of thinking about that. I will tell you a couple things I am planning on doing. For 32 years, I have said “no” to doing a radio program, because I did not want to be a celebrity. I think that always being in the spotlight blinds you. I just wanted to pastor a local church. But when [The Purpose Driven Life] came out, it blew my cover, and I had more visibility. I have made the decision to go on national radio, on a daily basis, with a program called “Daily Hope,” because I believe somebody’s got to speak up about this. I intend to make this one of my theme issues. There is a real sense of discouragement in our nation right now, and I could give you a dozen reasons for it. Part of it comes from the economy, part of it comes from things like the shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, and natural disasters that we have had, and part of it comes from the coarsening of our culture. And I feel like the nation needs some hope.

I have also decided to chair and host the first National Congress on Religious Liberty at Saddleback. I plan to bring in about 50 speakers, a broad spectrum of different leaders. We will have plenary speakers and workshops dealing with smaller niche issues like zoning laws for home Bible studies, and any number of different ways that our religious freedoms are being eaten away. We are inviting institutional leaders, the leaders of colleges and universities and schools, the leaders of hospitals, the leaders of large churches, and the media. I intend to make a splash on this.

ROBERT P. GEORGE: Like Pope John Paul II, like Rick, we have to be witnesses to hope. In my profession, I occupy a little part of the universe in which the established religion is secular liberalism or secular humanism. I am, as the cover story of the Princeton Alumni Weekly once put it, “The Heretic in the Temple.” I have a lot of respect for my secular liberal or secular humanist friends. I dramatically and profoundly disagree with them, top to bottom. They have a worldview, and they believe in it, and they are prepared to defend it with arguments. Like anybody who gets power in institutions, especially overwhelming and dominant power in institutions, they are not so happy to share it or to tolerate much dissent sometimes. But what worldview, religious or otherwise, in the history of humanity has a spotless record when it comes to tolerating dissenters? They are a formidable foe. I do not see any way to effectively push back against the efforts to spread that pseudo gospel through the culture, using both private and public institutions as the media of transmission of values in that project, unless we unite religious believers across the lines of historical, theological, and religious division, in common witness to our common values.

For example, if you look at secular liberalism on the one side and Catholicism and Islam on the other side, it is hard to distinguish the Muslims and the Catholics. It is easy to distinguish either one from the secular liberals or secular humanists. It is
easy to work with Orthodox Jewish friends and Mormons, small percentages of our population, but people of enormous conviction, and willing to stand up and take risks and suffer consequences. We need to be standing together across these lines. On the Christian side of things, we tried to do this in the Manhattan Declaration. That was a case of evangelicals, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians uniting in a set of common commitments to the sanctity of life in all stages and conditions, the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife, and religious liberty and the rights of conscience.

The larger project needs to be even more comprehensive, bringing in anybody who is willing to come. To me it is crazy for my fellow conservatives to push our Muslim friends into the arms of the left. These are good, honorable, decent people. To treat them all as if they are terrorists is insane. Many of their values are our values, and if they are prepared to work with us, we should be prepared to work with them, on terms of equality. I want people of all different faiths, mine and other faiths, not only in the cause, but in leadership positions in the cause. Our movement cannot be just the Evangelicals or the Christian right, or just the Catholics. We have to unite across those historic divisions in order to have any hope of building a world in which the values that really are foundational to any decent civilization are secure for our children and our grandchildren.

JOHN DIIULIO: This has been a spectacular, heartening, and thoughtful evening, and let me just close. Speaking of hope, religious liberty does belong. Religious freedom belongs to everyone. It belongs to Quakers. It belongs to Catholics. It belongs to Muslims. It belongs to Methodists. It belongs to Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, atheists, and agnostics. When things happen in the world like happened in post-Katrina New Orleans, we see what Millard Fuller [the founder of Habitat for Humanity] used to call the “theology of the hammer.” Events like that bring people together who normally would not be working side by side or having these debates and discussions side by side, and that reference point makes a difference. When you know somebody and you care for somebody, you are more likely to give them that slight benefit of the doubt and that is why this has been such an important discussion.

“If I do not have the freedom to believe whatever I want to believe, freedom of speech is irrelevant. If I do not have the freedom to believe whatever I want to believe, freedom of the press is irrelevant. If I do not have the freedom to believe whatever I want to believe, freedom of assembly is irrelevant.”

Rick Warren