

**AMDG****JMJ****America's Global and Multilateral Leadership****International Religious Freedom Summit****July 15, 2021**

Thank you!

To be in the distinguished company of prophetic leaders in the noble cause of defending religious freedom, at home and beyond, convened by a great patriot and promoter of human rights such as our own Ambassador Sam Brownback, is a genuine honor for which I am grateful.

My homework was to prepare a fifteen-minute talk on "Hope for the future: American Global and Multilateral Leadership." Here goes: but the lengthy title itself already takes half the time allotted to me!

My preparation for this theme led to three points. And here's ***number one***: A cause for hope in our efforts - - and, let's face it, frequently are we tempted to discouragement - - is that ***religious liberty is now rightly regarded as a human rights issue, not merely a creedal concern.***

See, I'm passionately involved in the advocacy for religious freedom not because I'm a believer, a Catholic, but because I'm a rational human being and a committed American citizen.

I'm energetic about defending freedom of the press, and I'm not a journalist. It's the same for religious liberty: This advocacy is driven by my belief that it is necessary for the protection of human dignity and for the flourishing of an enlightened common good.

True, my religion sure backs up my efforts to defend religious liberty. The Second Vatican Council expressed it well: "The human person has a right to religious freedom . . . this right has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself . . . It is a civil right."

I'm not here today because the ***Catechism of the Catholic Church*** charges me to defend religious liberty; I'm here because, as James Madison put it, "The transcendent laws of nature and of nature's God" tell me this first of the four freedoms is natural, rational, and critical to the human rights tradition.

This insistence that the defense of religious freedom, the call that got us here, is a ***human rights issue***, not a creedal one, is very essential, since our enemies - - and their name is legion, - - dismiss us as self-protecting, self-serving fanatics who simply want to protect our

narrow privileges and rights while suffocating enlightened progress; it's also essential because of the shrinking of the clout of religion in the public square.

And it's crucial because, as Pope Benedict XVI spoke before the U.N., "If religious freedom erodes, gone is the guarantee of all our other liberties."

Here's number two: A reason for hope is that ***our own government***, while from the time of George Washington has seen the guarantee of religious freedom as a domestic priority, and from the time at least of Woodrow Wilson as an international one, ***has now come to a heightened appreciation of how global affairs must often be understood through the lens of faith and reason.***

This has not always been the case, and, while there's been advances, there's sure a long way to go.

Mike Pompeo, a man whom I admire a lot, shared with me that, as director of the CIA, and then as Secretary of State, he was astounded by the illiteracy about the role of religion in world affairs among our intelligence and foreign service community. It's almost as if they were allergic to acknowledging the impact of faith and religion on the peoples of the world, he recalled.

Thomas Farr, who is here with us, one of the most astute scholars of religious freedom and the persecution of believing minorities, observes the same, noting that our diplomats tend to see religion as purely private, a matter of hidden belief, and are unlettered about the cultural, economic, and historic role of faith in the nations of the continent.

I myself experienced this when, on a visit to Lebanon and Syria, I asked one of our embassy officials if he had been in contact with the leaders of the ancient Christian communities of those troubled lands, only to hear him reply, "That's none of our business to meet with them."

A more embarrassing event, I am told, occurred in Mexico, when one of our past secretary of states was brought by the president of Mexico to the center of Mexican culture, the renowned shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. How shocked he was, and probably, insulted when our chief foreign affairs officer, the Secretary of State, asked "Well, that's quite an image. Who is this woman, anyway, and who painted her?"

To think that our Secretary of State would not have been briefed on Mexico's most important and cherished religious, national, cultural, and historic image is baffling.

But, there's reason for hope. "One of the most interesting challenges we face in global diplomacy is the need to fully understand and engage the great impact that a wide range of religious traditions have on world affairs," claims John Kerry. "We ignore the global impact of religion at our peril," as he sums it up.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu comments, "Religion is like a knife - - it may be used to slice bread, or stab your neighbor in the back. But, it cannot be ignored!"

It was Madeleine Albright who listed the names of Desmond Tutu, Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, and John Paul II as religious leaders who had towering impact on world peace, and areas such as Northern Ireland, Nicaragua, South Sudan and Afghanistan where recent progress could never have been gained without the direct involvement of religious leaders.

So, maybe we're finally learning. And, as our government grows in its sensitivity to the faith dimension in international discourse, so will it in its recognition that protection of religious freedom is a crucial component of our foreign policy . . . and, I might add, domestic.

And ***point number three***: not the least among contributions that religion can bring to international problems is ***hope***.

As Cardinal Pio Laghi, sent by Pope John Paul II to meet with President George Bush II to urge him not to invade Iraq, left the oval office after what we now know was a futile attempt to change the president's mind the reporters asked him, "Have you given up hope?" To which the cardinal replied, "I'm in the business of hope. We will not give up."

That religion can inspire, encourage, and foster hope in a world often thought desperate is a cause of optimism for us, as it keeps religion, and the insurance of its liberty, at the top of our agenda.

To realize that rare is the church, synagogue, or mosque in this "one nation under God" that does not often intercede for the preservation of our religious freedom, and for the liberties of persecuted believers, gives me hope.

And, my cherished colleagues, you and I need hope. I'm hardly alone when I get frustrated by unremitting assaults on our first freedom here at home, by groups and a



government that ought to know better, and to a worse degree all over the planet, and I need that dose of hope that prayer, attention to God's Word, and the solidarity I unfailingly get from gatherings like this.

As Pope Francis remarked last year, "How, then, do we undertake a journey of peace? How do we shatter the mentality of threats and fear? Only by pursuing a genuine fraternity built on our common origin from God, and exercised in dialog and mutual trust. The desire for peace lies deep within the human heart, and this hope will eventually triumph!"