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Is Religious Freedom for Everyone?

Michael Novak

DR. KIM R. HOLMES: It is an honor to be here with all of you this morning to introduce today's special guest and speaker, who will deliver the third of the Margaret Thatcher Freedom Lectures.

These lectures are part of a series that we kicked off last year, the purpose of which was to bring greater clarity and attention to the values, principles, and policies that undergird freedom.

The first lecture was given by Natan Sharansky, who explored a question at the heart of the debate on the future of the Middle East, "Is Freedom for Everyone?" He looked mainly at the question of political freedom and civil liberties.

The second lecture, by renowned Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, explored the question "Is Economic Freedom for Everyone?"

For this third lecture, we will be examining the question of whether religious freedom is for everyone.

This is a burning question not only for parts of the Middle East, where extremism tries to ban all forms of religions except one's own. It is also a question for Western societies. How do we, for example, in America and Europe, react to politically charged religious movements that attempt to carve out special legal and political protections in the name of religious freedom? And what happens when doing so infringes on the religious and civil rights of others?

We couldn't think of anyone more qualified than Michael Novak to answer these hard questions.

Talking Points

Is religious freedom for everyone? Consider:

- Religious justifications supporting freedom of religion are grounded in the Judeo-Christian principle that an individual's duty to worship God must be exercised freely and without coercion.
- Non-religious justifications for religious liberty emerge from the existence of a social contract by which the state guards individual rights, and of the right and responsibility to make decisions of conscience for oneself.
- Where a justification for religious liberty has sprung neither from religious justifications nor from human reason, some have nonetheless arrived at upon seeing the tyranny and misery that occurs in its absence.
- While a philosophy of liberty within Islam has yet to become evident to those outside of that faith, any religion based upon reward and punishment must have buried within it a theory of liberty.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/worldwidefreedom/hl1022.cfm
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Michael Novak is one of our country's most esteemed political scholars. He is the George Fredrick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute.

It is fitting indeed that Michael deliver this lecture in Lady Thatcher's honor. Michael has been a fan of Lady Thatcher from the moment he first met her at Heritage many years ago, at a lecture shortly after President Reagan took office. Over time, the favor was returned by Mrs. Thatcher as she grew to know Michael's work. When asked about *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* a couple of years ago, she called it "a marvellous book," showing how capitalism is "morally superior to any other economic alternative."

Because this book helped eviscerate the allure of socialism and communism, Lady Thatcher presented Michael Novak with the Anthony Fisher Prize in 1992. And two years later, he received the 24th Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion at Westminster Abbey.

Michael Novak, of course, is many things besides being an insightful author. He's a gifted teacher; he's been an advisor to presidents, a public servant, and a very successful editor. Indeed, he co-founded several important magazines that look at religion, economics and culture, including *This World*, *Crisis*, and *First Things*.

He has written 26 books on the philosophy and theology of culture and the roles of capitalism and religion in free societies. They include: *The Universal Hunger for Liberty: Why the Clash of Civilizations Is Not Inevitable*, and *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*. He also has published two novels.

Michael tells us he is writing a book on the limits of secularism and the future of religion in the face of today's "new atheism." I certainly look forward to reading that book as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in welcoming a very good friend of freedom, Michael Novak.

—Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D., is Vice President for Foreign and Defense Policy and Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

MICHAEL NOVAK: Thank you all very much. It is wonderful to be with you.

I want to talk a little bit about three different approaches to religious liberty: one in atheist countries such as France and two different approaches within the United States. Then I will conclude with a few words about Islam—a story not yet fully developed but of great importance to the rest of this century.

Atheists in Europe have their own approach to religious liberty. In personal life, they take religion seriously, as a dangerous social reality that needs to be curbed. Politically, the atheist aim since the French Revolution of 1789 has been to expel religion from public life, and to confine religion to the private sphere. They have attempted to place the state firmly over the church, synagogue, and mosque, in such a way that the state dominates all spheres of public life. They keep religious bodies on the margins. This process goes by the name of "laicization" (in Europe), and in America as "secularization." The secularists' unexpressed hope is that religion over time will wither away, along with other "old-fashioned" things that are inexorably being abandoned. They think that the future will be less religious, more secular than today—and that that will be a good thing.

In America, the pattern has been somewhat different. Some Anglo-American atheists do share the sentiments of the French atheists. But most have recognized that religion has a serious place both in the public and the private life of nations. The Anglo-Americans have developed two different defenses of liberty of conscience, one of which is based on non-religious premises, open to atheists, too—at least those atheists who value philosophical argument for its own sake. The other is based upon religious conceptions, and expressly on the Jewish and Christian vision of a Creator and Sovereign over all things.

The non-religious view has two versions. The first is that in the state of nature, humans are a danger to one another. For their own safety, therefore, they form a social contract by which they eschew personal and private violence—in exchange for a "social contract" by which the state guards their rights. This reason grounds rights in fear and has a base in pragmatism. Humans are a danger to one

another, we need to be afraid of one another; therefore, we need to make a practical arrangement for our safety. That's the social contract reasoning.

The second reason is that, by nature, each human person is responsible for accepting or rejecting evidence presented to his or her own consciousness; and each is responsible for deciding upon his own way of life. This responsibility gives rise to a human right—where there's a responsibility there's a right—to make such decisions and choices. And this right is inalienable. No one person can make those decisions or choices for any other. In this sense, the conscience of all must be respected as inviolable.

While these two non-religious defenses—one in terms of nature and rights and one in terms of fear of one another in the social contract and the emergence of rights from civil society—do not specifically mention “religious” liberty, they do defend liberty of conscience, and in this sense respect religious liberty as one serious option of conscience. Even if atheists reject the religious option for themselves, they see the social merit, and the intellectual consistency, in respecting it in others. They may not approve of the choices of religious people, but they respect their freedom to make those choices.

The religious defense of religious liberty or, more generally, liberty of conscience, is somewhat different. Here I follow the reasoning of Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, James Madison, and other Virginians who had a hand in drafting, arguing for, and passing the Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776. I have described this logic in more detail in the epilogue of my book, *On Two Wings*. The epilogue is called “How Did the Virginians Ground Religious Rights?” Allow me to state the argument briefly.

These Virginians expressed the belief of most persons in America at that time (and also today): that the world was made by a benevolent Creator and Governor of all things, Who wishes to extend His friendship to men who are not slaves but free men, and Who wishes to be thanked and worshiped in purity of conscience and in spirit and truth. It is self-evident, Thomas Jefferson wrote, that a creature recognizing a creator owes an unpayable debt of awe and thanks, and indeed of worship of a power so far beyond his own.

This God cannot be deceived by mere gestures or rituals, but sees directly into the human heart. Here is how they expressed the nub of this argument in expressing the underlying principles of the Virginia Declaration:

That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other.

Now, try as I might, I don't see that quite as a deist declaration—that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each another. I find it difficult to read through these documents and not recognize that you're not talking about the Islamic god, and you're not talking about the Buddhist god, and you're not talking about the Hindu gods. The only god who meets this description is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. And it is essential to founding the principle of religious liberty in their view, because God offers friendship and wants humans to be free. And freely accepted or not, He leaves up to them the decision they make with it. And there's no use trying to fake it. You're not going to do it by mere gestures or showing up at the right rituals, because He reads the heart and He needs to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. That's a quite original and unique conception of God in history—and it is not universal. Its effects are universal, but the recognition is not universal.

In brief, the outlook behind this argument includes four affirmations: the *benevolence* of the Giver of life and liberty (His offering friendship); the *duty* of the creature to recognize and be grateful to that Giver; third, the *freedom* of soul that the Creator deliberately and freely endowed in humans for exercising that duty; and fourth, the *friendship* with humans that God desired, and invited humans to share, which explains the divine gift of freedom to every woman and every man.

With these four background affirmations in mind, the Virginia Declaration, and also the famous

Remonstrance against the Governor of Virginia circulated for signatures by James Madison some years later—a Remonstrance, by the way, that George Washington refused to sign—made the following argument. Every rational creature, contemplating the great gifts bestowed on him by the Creator, is conscious of a duty to give due worship to that Creator, in spirit and in truth, in the pure light of conscience, under no coercion whatever. Almighty God, Who could have obliged the human mind, Jefferson said, freely chose not to do so, but allowed the human mind to work in the light of the evidence available to that mind. Since this duty is *sacred, and prior* to all other duties *either to civil society* (even to one's own parents or friends) *or to the state*, since it is a duty owed by the creature directly to the Creator, without intermediary, *this duty also implies a right*.

In other words, contrary to Locke, this right does not arise from the emergence of civil society, and contrary to many moderns, it doesn't arise from the state. It arises from a direct link between the free human conscience and its Creator. And the creature, the human, is free to do with that whatever he or she wants. But if you have a duty to recognize the greatness of the Creator then you must also have a right to do it or not, to recognize it or not. But that right is grounded in a particular conception of God and of conscience, and their relationship. Now, it must entail *a right to exercise that duty, which may be abridged by no earthly power whatever. It is an inalienable and an inviolable right*. It is directly between the human soul and its Creator. Your mother and your father cannot say “Yes” for you, to the Creator. Neither can your brother nor your sister nor your uncle nor your aunt—you alone. It's inalienable. You can't shirk it off onto somebody else. And it's inviolable. No one dare sit between the creature and the Creator. This duty is prior to every other duty. It must be exercised in conscience and without duplicity or coercion, in the direct sight of the Creator.

The religious foundation for religious liberty, therefore, begins with (1) the nature of God (the sovereign Creator, who wishes to be worshiped in spirit and truth, without deception or coercion; and who offers to humans His friendship, to accept or to reject in inner liberty, but with full responsibility for the eternal consequences of their choice), and (2)

the nature of human beings: that man was born free, and equal to all other men in his freedom before God. We're not equal in anything else—I would love to have a singing voice but I can't carry a tune. By nature we are not equal; in fact, we're unique, unrepeatable, with different strengths and weaknesses. But where we are equal is in the sight of God. No matter how great or how powerful or how rich or how successful any person is, in the eyes of God that's nothing, it's not impressive. He sees into the heart directly for something else. That's the way in which we're equal.

That is, I think, a very important note. The Enlightenment takes liberty, fraternity, equality as self-evident. But they're not. They come out of a certain set of preconditions of thinking about God and human beings, which the Enlightenment gets from Christianity—and Christianity from Judaism. One of the political effects of Christianity is to spread knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the whole world. So man was born free, equal to all other men in his freedom before God, and independently of the state or even civil society, each owes duty to his Creator.

Based upon these two convictions—about God, about man—the religious justification of religious liberty as expressed by the Virginians is founded upon the natural rights of human beings, as these have been endowed in human beings by their Creator.

I want to point out that this is a philosophical argument, but what it borrows from Judaism and Christianity is its conception of God and its conception of human beings. So it's not purely a philosophical argument, but in another sense it is. You do not have to be Jewish or Christian to see the merit of it, or to see the practical effect of it. But it is important to recognize, I believe, that it was reached by Jews and Christians. Once they have seen it, anyone can make use of it. You don't have to be Jewish or Christian to make use of it. But it's significant to understand the historical genesis; otherwise you easily lose the foundations of the argument.

This justification is particularly beautiful because those who first proposed it for formal ratification established it for all other human beings equally, far beyond their own immediate circle. One of the provisions of the Declaration talks about the divine

author of our religion and in the Virginia legislature a motion was put to say it was Jesus Christ; why beat around the bush? It was defeated on the grounds that, no, this applies to everybody. It's sufficient we say the divine author of our religion shows the genesis of this. There was no need to spell it out more. It's open to Mohammedans, they say expressly: Buddhists, atheists, and others. So the rights they are talking about do not belong to Englishmen and Americans and Christians and Jews alone. They belong to everybody. That, I think, is particularly beautiful as a conception—a very generous conception.

They claimed nothing for themselves that they did not recognize also belonged to all other human beings. That is why they named it a *natural* right. Such rights are founded not in culture nor ethnicity nor tribe nor religious denomination, but in all human beings equally. Their historical root may have been discovered by one particular religious group in human history, but their philosophical and practical application (if they are true) is universal.

In the early days after World War II, Friedrich Hayek argued at Mont Pelerin in Switzerland that if liberty is to prosper in the new age, all who believe in liberty, whether believers or unbelievers, will need to end the fratricidal feuding they have indulged in since the French Revolution. The proponents of liberty are not too many, but too few, he said. These few must learn to cooperate on behalf of always fragile, always endangered, yet also hardy liberty. In other words, atheists, non-believers, believers, Christians, Jews must cooperate to defend liberty. Liberty has lots of enemies. It's an always-fragile achievement; it can be given away by a single generation. A single generation can think that it is too onerous and give it away. That is why liberty is the most fragile, most precarious regime. It needs to be freely understood and freely accepted by each generation in turn. The chain can break down at any point.

In most of the world, fortunately, the love for liberty has two main sources. The first springs from human experience, common sense, and human reason, the second from those religions that address the human conscience in its radical liberty.

Of course, even today, freedom is not understood everywhere in the same way. Right after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, to mark the return of freedom to the Czech Republic, the first thing that opened up was a pornography theater in Prague's Wenceslaus Square. It broke your heart. The point is: freedom does not mean the same thing to everybody, even in our own (as we imagine it) free society.

On the other hand, by a kind of *via negativa* (the negative way, the way of hardship), the wars, oppressions, holocausts, and other cruelties of the 20th century have taught practically the entire world a revulsion against certain "crimes against humanity." Many have been driven, in ways they did not foresee, into clear opposition to flagrant violations of their human rights. In addition, the bitter sufferings inflicted upon hundreds of thousands by recent tyrannical regimes in every part of the world have given many peoples an understanding of democracy they had never received in a more positive way. In other words, they are driven into it by the effects of its absence.

These revulsions against real abuses, in turn, have given new currency to moral and religious reasoning about the deeper nature of human beings. What is it within us that leads us to scream: "This is not right! This cannot stand!"? These revulsions have raised questions about the grounds of human rights, and the deepest origin of human conscience.

This is exactly the sequence by which Natan Sharansky—whom I am deeply honored to follow as a lecturer in this forum—came to return to his faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When he was in prison, someone slipped him the book of Psalms. (It was in Hebrew and apparently his censors couldn't read it, and they let it through.) He was stunned by reading of sentiments and ideas from thousands of years ago that spoke immediately to his condition. And he suddenly recognized that there is a community of conscience of not just generations but millennia in which we share, and its roots are mysterious and profound. This rediscovery of conscience was not positive. He was driven to it by punishment.

Further, it has become clear that in order to appeal to all peoples and all cultures, a merely secular articulation of these questions would be too

narrow, too non-inclusive, and altogether unsatisfactory. It would leave unattended the religiousness of the great majority of people on the planet. Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher who describes himself as an atheist, was shocked on September 11th to suddenly glimpse the fact that atheists are a small island in a huge sea of religiousness on this planet. He had not looked at it quite that way before. Therefore, a point of view that is aimed only at atheists is inadequate for defending liberty.

By the same measure, the intellectual and linguistic traditions of no one among the world's global religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the main religions that even claim to be universal in their purpose) would alone be satisfactory. Nonetheless, all nations on this planet need a way of thinking and speaking about religious and moral reasoning that is open both to believers and to unbelievers. Taking religion into account in a fair and open fashion is now required. It is required by the necessities of building free societies open to all, and by the necessity that all of us, believers and unbelievers alike, must live together in reasonable amity and mutual respect.

I want to return to something I just alluded to in the large prison literature of the 20th century. It is one of the unique aspects of the 20th century that there is a large number of journals and remembrances and reflections on the prison experience. Most of the Christian Democratic leaders in World War II had spent time in Nazi prisons, and hundreds more thinkers and writers were to spend time in Communist prisons. I have made the main point, so I am going to abbreviate that they learned from their own experience.

There was something in them that forbade them to lie, to be complicit in that. All the jailers wanted them to do was to sign a statement: "Not true, but just sign it. Who is going to know? It's going to go in a big file. No one is ever going to read it." And here Sharansky was again protected by that idea of the community of conscience. He was reminded by his jailer (or more exactly by his cellmate, who was no doubt put up to this by his jailers) that even Galileo, his great hero, lied in order to get the inquisition into his work set aside. He knew what was at stake, and he just lied and it passed. So this

guy is saying, "Galileo is your hero—just lie." Sharansky thought to himself the reverse of that—this is that community of souls again: "Galileo has been dead between four hundred and five hundred years, and they are still using his example to corrupt me." So the effects of his life are felt for centuries afterwards, and everybody they break in prison they use to break the others. So your surrender is not just for you. It is for others.

This is how Sharansky came to the proposition that "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and give to God that which is God's" is the great obstacle to totalitarianism. It says that Caesar is not responsible for everything or does not have command over everything. The power of government is limited.

I want to come as quickly as I can to some pure reflections on Islam. You heard Sharansky's argument that in the contest between dictatorship and democracy, the freedom of all is unsafe so long as dictatorships abuse the rights of their own peoples and try to stir up violence elsewhere, as the countries of the Middle East do, disguising their own tyrannies by preaching hatred against Israel, and shuffling all the dissatisfactions and hatred and sense of rebellion against Israel to deflect the attention from themselves. This, Sharansky says, is a fatal property of dictatorships. They must create enemies and they must deflect the blame onto them, lest they lose their own power.

So this is why President Bush, the Heritage Foundation, and other friends of liberty have committed themselves to spreading knowledge of democratic principles in every culture of the world. They want to give assistance to democratic associations and individuals in all cultures on earth. For it is the hard-earned conviction of Americans, for reasons of both philosophy and faith, that the same natural rights we declare for ourselves belong to all other human beings as well. After all, these origins have their origin in the Creator of all, and these rights belong to all who share in the same human nature. Moreover, where they are absent, their absence becomes a tremendous danger to us: to our own security and our own circle of life.

In our time the world must either live in fear of terrorism or in freedom. Freedom for the individual is not likely to be secured, nor the rights of individ-

uals kept safe, except in democracies constituted for that purpose. Nor is freedom from terrorism likely to be secured except by offering to the young the alternative of prosperity, opportunity, and freedom. In any case, the maxim bears repeating: Democracy is the new name for peace.

Democracy does not banish human sin and folly. On the contrary, it was with human sinfulness in view that democracy was invented, with its checks and balances and limited powers. One of the sources of the idea of democracy as we now understand it is the Calvinist notion of the omnipresence of sin. We condensed this on our coins and the dollar bill. We say “In God We Trust,” whose operational meaning is “Nobody else—for everybody else there are checks and balances and limited powers.”

In conclusion, I am trying to learn about how to think of freedom in Muslim terms. Some Muslim friends have told me that these are days in which there is a great deal of turmoil in the breast of Muslim peoples, a longing for public recognition of the dignity of the individual conscience of each of them. They have insisted that this is a profound search, in four different dimensions: personal, religious, philosophical, and political.

I have heard Muslims say that they wish to be devout Muslims and live under the protection of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both. They want to remain devout Muslims and they want those protections. They want to enjoy the same liberties, dignity, and economic opportunity as other peoples. It can't be true that liberty and dignity and opportunity are restricted only to Jews, Christians, and humanists—that they don't also count for Muslims. It's just not believable on its face.

I have been told that there is a great inward pressure driving this longing for liberty. It comes from the last hundred years of bitter suffering, repression, the failure of many dreams, and the painful reality of much bloodshed among Muslim peoples.

For decades, the human rights and sense of personal dignity among Muslim peoples may have been more seriously neglected by the world community than those of any other people. This *via negativa* is a harsh road, but a powerful incentive. When I was at the Human Rights Commission in 1981–1982, I think only once—and then only tan-

entially—did anyone bring up the abuse of rights in the Muslim world. The Soviets did not want to do it because it was a powder keg on their southern border, and we did not want to do it because of the strategic importance—not only the oil but the straddle across the crossroads of civilizations of the Middle East. But in any case, by a kind of tacit agreement nobody paid attention.

I have several questions I would like to pose to Muslim thinkers in dialogue. I look forward to benefiting by whatever light they can shed upon these propositions.

Can it be said that, buried in the rich traditions of Islam, is a philosophy of liberty, even a philosophy of democracy and religious pluralism, whose full flowering is yet to become evident to those outside Islam? It seems plain that any religion based upon reward and punishment must have buried within it a profound theory of liberty. Reward and punishment for human action makes no sense if you don't believe in liberty. This is a point Thomas Aquinas made in his encounters with Islam in the 13th century. There has got to be a theory of liberty buried within there.

Liberty, of course, has at least three dimensions: personal, social, and political. And it may be examined from more than one point of view—from personal experience and observation, and also philosophically, juridically, politically, culturally. It is not my purpose to request of Muslims an entire systematic treatment. Only, I would like to request of Muslim colleagues some guidance on questions that seem to me of potential fruitfulness for mutual harmony and clear understanding. In order to have mutual respect, we do not have to agree. But it is certainly better if we do not misunderstand one another unnecessarily.

In any case, am I correct that in the moral analysis of individual actions, Islamic thought is clear enough about the conditions of free human action? In other words, there is a theory of liberty in moral action? I've satisfied myself to that effect. I've seen Muslim treatments of ethics which have a remarkable notion of freedom, analogous to the way we think about it. Not developed in the same way, not out of the same conceptual framework, but not so far different.

There seems to be, in fact, a very broad pluralism of different systems of political decision-making—now moving from the ethical to the political—among various Muslim jurisdictions across time and space. If you study Muslim history and even Muslim geography today—I'm no expert at all—there is a very large variety of regimes, both in time and in space. And because the conviction “Allah is great” is so powerful, none of these can be given us. They all must be relativized in Muslim thought, because no one alone can pretend to be of God. This, I think, is a powerful argument for a kind of pluralism. The practice of that pluralism is present; we can see the variety. The theory about it is not so developed, it seems to me.

There is also, by the way, a significant number of democracies, defined as places where citizens have removed a government in power peacefully, by the vote, at least twice. Have some practical proposals or negative warnings been derived from these examples? In other words, what can we learn in the history of Islamic democracy? There have been some where there has been an emphasis on one vote, one time: you have the vote, and then the majority votes for Shari'a law and that's it. That is a negative warning. But there are others where that has not happened, and it would be interesting to have a better picture of the variety.

It is one of the advantages of democracy that it is compatible with many different cultural and religious models. Are there lessons to be learned about different types of Islamic democracy?

Have the different experiences of Christian Democratic parties in different parts of the world shed any light on Muslim experiences? It is not the case that Christian Democratic parties all have the same experience in Latin America and Spain and France and Germany and Italy and Belgium and the Netherlands, in Scandinavia.

In what ways will Islamic democracies provide new principles to international democratic theory? And show significant originality? I do think this contest for the democratic idea and democratic practices and habits in the Muslim world is one of the great stories of our time. On its resolution depends the safety of all of us, eventually.

I wish we all knew much more about it. I wish Muslim thinkers were more explicit about it. I have seen it written that there have been more articles and books and discussions on radio and television about liberty and democracy in the Muslim world in the last three years than in the last 150 years altogether. So I think something really is percolating. I wish we had a better grasp of it, and could learn how we could apply some of those lessons that have been learned the hard way there, also shed light on our own perplexities. It is not as though we have achieved a state of democracy in which we are completely comfortable.

I apologize for going on so long but I thank you very much.

DR. HOLMES: Michael, thank you very much. I know of no one who has the breadth of knowledge to be able to go in detail to the Virginia founding and ending on a detailed discussion of Islamic democracy than you. It's just really a pleasure to have you here for the many insights that you have given us here this morning. We have a few minutes for some questions.

BILL STEVENSON: I'm Bill Stevenson, I teach at Calvin College in Michigan. In thinking about the potential for Muslim societies to “catch the vision,” so to speak, of the possibility of religious freedom, let that seed germinate and so on, I wonder about your thoughts as to how that might best be effected. Is there a sense in which the American model which has become—and maybe this is a good thing—increasingly individualistic on this subject? In other words, the focus is on individual freedom of conscience and not on the coherence of religious institutions; religious freedom is something that individuals exercise but not institutions. In terms of our Supreme Court decisions and so on, this is the kind of message that you get. Is that kind of emphasis going to be helpful in drawing out from Islam more of an emphasis on healthy religious freedom, or is it actually going to be counterproductive? Would it make sense for this to develop more naturally within the institutional framework? Could the West be doing more harm than good?

MR. NOVAK: Well, the truth about history is yes, that happens often. Even the Christian Church was itself corrupted and is constantly open to corruption. So in the political order it is the same.

One reason I think the study of the Founding is so important is that the founders were not thinking only in terms of *individual* liberty. So from Washington through Lincoln, declarations of days of thanksgiving—which government was recommending to all the people and declaring a holiday for—began with the principle that nations as well as individuals have a duty to thank God and to offer Him such worship as seems fit to each: nations have obligations. Now I am not sure I really agree with that, but that is what our founders thought. It wasn't just the federal government that made recommendations; the individual states did so many things too. The founders kept alive communities at many levels. Today, we've abandoned the richness of that tradition in the name of personal liberation—much to our detriment and much to the detriment of liberty.

I think it might be better sometimes for us to talk about human dignity rather than liberty or freedom because in the French context, which is what influences the Islamic world more than anything else, freedom and liberty mean license, libertinism. They don't think of it as self-control. That is an Anglo-American presumption that is absent from Europe.

GERRY LIVINGSTON: I am Gerry Livingston from the German Historical Institute. Mr. Novak, you began your talk by referring to atheist France and to the secularization in Europe. Now Europe is becoming more secularized and that is a concern of the Pope's. Yet that secularization has been accompanied by the longest period of peace in European history. Don't you see a connection?

MR. NOVAK: Yes, I do, but it is not necessarily a positive one. I think that the welfare state has generated such a sense of security and prosperity and satisfaction that it has in effect put people to sleep with regard to the dangers they live under. I think the welfare states of Europe will have a very difficult time in the next 20 years meeting the obligations they are now under. They will not be able to pay for many of the old-age benefits, with people living much longer and medical expenses so much greater. That is one danger.

Secondly, I do think that the threat to liberty in Europe from Shari'a law is very real. And I don't see Europeans as alarmed about it as it seems to me they ought to be.

Third, wherever there is secularization there is also a diminution in demography. Secular people do not have as many children as religious people do. Even in nominally Catholic countries like France and Italy, the parts of the population which are still having families of three, four and five are the religious parts, the church-going parts, in terms of Christians.

So I think the blessing of Europe is they've experienced this 50-year period of peace and prosperity, which in my opinion was largely brought about by America's financial commitment and defense, as sort of an umbrella over them. And by the bitterness and hostility of the world wars, so that people really wanted to turn away from that and think of war no more. I think that is admirable as far as it goes, but it does make you vulnerable to attacks on liberty. Anyway, I think there is reason to worry about the capacity of secularism to motivate people morally and spiritually.

ALAN NICHOLS: Alan Nichols, *Washington Diplomat* magazine. I am just thinking about the founding of the country and Alexander Hamilton, all the other founders. They brought over to this country a culture, but they had a blank slate. Alexander Hamilton created an economic system which exists today, the basis of capitalism and economic freedom along with religious liberty.

And then I am thinking of the ancient civilizations of the Middle East which formed a culture, a tribal culture of nomadic peoples with trade already established. They did not have a blank slate. So to try to inoculate these people with democratic principles—there is no seed-bed there because the culture is not amenable to it, because it is so ingrained in them. How men treat women is primarily cultural; the economics of that region are so historical, so embedded, that to have religious liberty would be to change virtually all the aspects of that culture including having economic freedom and social freedoms. It's not just religious. It's not just creating an ability to see oneself as being religiously free but in every other aspect of their society, which makes it so

hard to get Iraq to become democratic. Would you comment on that?

MR. NOVAK: I want to repeat the main line of reflection that I put before you: Don't underestimate the role of the *via negativa* in changing the consciousness of Middle Eastern peoples. Until Afghanistan and Iraq, eighteen out of eighteen of the Arab nations were tyrannies, and of a very bloody sort. The normal way which they changed power was by assassination (the most frequent way) or sometimes by birth, but only protected by the most amazing overlay of secular secret police and religious secret police and so forth. People lived under observation and in fear. And in remarkable poverty: despite the oil wealth they are among the poorest countries, not in the world as a whole but in worlds of comparable GDP. So there is a search for a way for that.

Finally, on the question of Iraq, I am not nearly so pessimistic as most writers and thinkers. Maybe I ought to be; maybe I am missing something. But what really counts to me and has counted for me from the beginning are the number of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations that are not run by the government. That is the basis of civil society, and those have multiplied in a spectacular way in Iraq. What also matters is the number of free associations, and I believe there are 4,000

plus—I have been told this—non-governmental associations operating in Iraq. I have watched them in these most incredible elections. Elections are the tip of the iceberg—all that goes on below is, I think, very important. I think it is too early to make a judgment about Iraq and which way it is going to go. It's in the balance and it might end horribly—I can see that. But it might end much more happily than most people are now expecting.

My mind goes back to 1864, when it was clear Lincoln was going to lose the election, when he was described in terms of opprobrium and ridicule that equal or exceed the terms in which President Bush is described today, on every front: his attacks on liberty in the name of war, his bumbling manner, his lack of experience, his lack of sophistication, and so on and so forth. And it all changed around in the following year—by the end of 1864 it was all changed around. So I think these historical reverses happen not infrequently in life, and while the issue is in play, I think one must do the best one can. But I do agree with you that one needs to fight for liberty on a very broad front. I was just asked to speak about religious liberty. I have written a lot about democracy and capitalism and economic and political liberty as well. This is the third leg of the stool, the cultural and moral. Those are the three great liberties: political, economic, and moral/cultural.