



Living With Our Deepest Differences

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Thank you very much. It's an enormous pleasure to be here. Meeting some of you as you came in and seeing where many of you are from, is a great honor for me. Several of your countries I've had the privilege of visiting and some of them are on my bucket list to finish visiting while I'm still on the earth. As many of you can tell from my name, I'm Irish. I was born in China, educated in England and lived in Switzerland, now living in the United States. [...]

Let me start with a story that has triggered a lot of my thinking. The great German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was dying at the end of the 19th century and a friend asked him, "Otto what will be the decisive factor in the 20th century?"

Of course we can look back a hundred odd years later and see if he's right. Bismarck surprised his friends by saying, "What will be decisive, is that the Americans speak English." [...] [He meant] the world would not be led by European power, but it became the American century.

In the same way people are saying today, "What is the decisive factor in the 21st century?"

I'm moved by the fact that three of the great questions are inevitably, inextricably involve religion and the challenge of religion.

One question (and I've debated this in China), which faith will replace Marxism in China? As they say openly the parties in power, the ideology is increasingly hollow and they're looking towards will it be Confucianism, Nationalism, Buddhism, or maybe the majority emerging faith - the Christian faith - hugely important for China and for the world.

The second question very obviously, "Will Islam modernize peacefully in the end?"

And the third question, "Will the West restore, or sever forever its Jewish and Christian roots?"

Now all of those questions involve religious issues and they are all enormously significant for the world in secular and political and other terms. And they surely underscore the simple fact that, while it's not on the table of many issues, one of the great questions of our world, "How do we live with deep differences, especially when those differences are religious and ideological?"

Because they go to the heart of our understanding of who we are, how we tackle ethical questions and how we proceed in many of the practical and the political problems of our world. How do we live with our deepest differences?

Or as President Kennedy put it, "How do we make the world safe, not for democracy, but how do we make the world safe for diversity in a way that gives us free, open, stable and harmonious societies and a free, open, stable, harmonious world?" That is the challenge.

As you know well, one of the greatest questions today is the search for a New World Order. The whole Westphalian approach - balance of power, equilibrium and so on - has largely broken down. Will we move towards new claimants-to-be-empires, or will we degenerate into cataclysmic failed states as we're seeing sadly [...] in some parts of the world?

As that question goes on, you can see that the religious issues become explosively prominent. Not long ago, there was a theory called the Secularization Theory, that held very simply, the world gets more modern, the world grows less religious. In the last 50 years, that has proved incredibly wrong. Philosophically biased, factually out to lunch.

The world is explosively religious still and the question is how we handle it? In the social sciences it's said, because of travel, the media and mass migration, everyone is now everywhere. And you can think of how many of the world's leading cities are an incredible example of diversity. And the challenge of living with deep differences is pronounced.

Global Public Square

At the same time, many of the older settlements of handling these things are breaking down. And in the age of the internet and satellite television, we can see how this is becoming the whole world's issue. The Greeks talked about a Public Square, the place where citizens come together to deliberate and decide issues of common public life. Their idea, the Public Square, went to the Romans - the Forum. Went to England - Westminster. France - the Assembly. America - the U.S. Congress. Here in Ottawa - down the road.

But the Public Square has shifted from being a physical place, to also being a metaphor. Wherever citizens come together - it could be the newspaper, it could be the television - to discuss of common public life, you have a public square. But of course, the significance of satellite television and the internet is that now the public square is beginning to go virtual. And you can see in the response to say, Salman Rushdie's novel, or the Danish cartoons publication, or Pope Benedict's speech at the University of Regensburg. Now in today's world, we can speak to the world and be heard by the world. And the world can organize its response - often violent.

The question today is how do we live with our deep differences, when we have the rudimentary beginnings of a Global Public Square? You can see, for example, that any notion of civility has broken down when you move to blogs with anonymous screen names and when people are not responsible for what they are writing, with their names behind it, often it descends quickly

to barbaric discourse and really degrading ways of treating people with anything but respect and civility.

So you can see the conditions of our modern world have aggravated this question, “How do we live with our deep differences?” Now I would argue there will be no answer to this, until more and more of our countries establish and protect religious freedom for people of all faiths. We all have different settlements in our countries because of our different histories, our different values, but there needs to be in every country a core of protected, guaranteed rights, and at their heart, religious freedom based on freedom of conscience.

Three great political rights

Freedom of conscience has always been understood as the first right. Of the three great political rights - freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly - there's no hierarchy, there's no ranking, but they are interlocked.

Freedom of assembly, getting together with people that you want to, assumes and requires freedom of speech. Freedom of speech assumes and requires freedom of conscience. And freedom of conscience is not freedom of choice. Freedom of choice, consumer style, is easy, autonomous, choose what you like, prefer what you like.

Freedom of conscience is respected, because it is not free. Someone is bound by the dictates of their conscience. They can, in Martin Luther's words, “do no other.” This is what they believe is true about the universe. This is what they believe is right, just and good. And they are bound by the dictates of their conscience and for that reason they are respected. Freedom of conscience has always been properly understood as the first liberty. And there will never be peace and harmony with our diversity, unless that first liberty is protected.

There are other advantages. It's the key to civil society. You know well the whole notion of civil society is that governments don't need to grow bigger and bigger and bigger. And citizens can feel more empowered if there are voluntary associations, non-governmental things in which people can give time, money and pursue the dreams they have of charity, of education and reforms. Societies that are rich with civil societies, are societies that are rich in freedom and not overburdened by government. And the key to that is freedom of conscience that allows people to pursue those dreams and initiatives.

So we need to understand the fundamental importance of the human right of freedom of conscience. But of course the explosive question, the big question, “What is the best model of bringing that in in our world?” You look all around the world, broadly speaking there are two dominant models and I will argue that neither of them does justice to today's diversity.

Sacred Public Square

One model, sometimes in mild form, sometimes in very severe forms, is called the *Sacred Public Square*. A vision of public life where one religion is preferred, or established, or even dominant as a monopoly. And of course everyone who doesn't share that faith, is therefore second class and in the extreme cases, in danger for their lives. You can think of the fate of

minorities, say the treatment of the Bahá'í in many countries and many others like that. The Sacred Public Square, whether it's a mild version as we have in England - probably the mildest in the world, the Church of England - or very severe versions, which you can think of yourself and I won't name today. You can see it does not do justice to diversity of those who don't share the faith.

Naked Public Square

The other extreme is what's called the *Naked Public Square*. Where people of a secularist persuasion, viewing religion as always troublesome, want to remove all religion from public life. Now of course what they do is smuggle in secularism through the back door very often. Once again you have mild versions, which are not that discriminating [...] and you have very Draconian versions, take say, China or North Korea. Once again, since most of the world is incurably religious - whatever the religion is - it just simply does not do justice to where most of the world is.

Civil Public Square

I would argue - with those who are arguing - for a third way. Now you might say it's Utopian. In the literal sense, Utopia means no place. In other words, nowhere so far has espoused this in a big way practically, although you can see many people pressing towards it. It is what is called not a Sacred Public Square, not a Naked Public Square, but a *Civil Public Square*. A vision of public life, where everyone of every faith - on the basis of freedom of conscience - is free to enter and engage public life on the basis of their faith. Free to be faithful and yet within an agreed political framework of what each citizen recognizes just and free for other people too.

You can understand I am a follower of Jesus, a Christian. But a right for a Christian, is a right for a Jew, is a right for a Muslim, is a right for a Hindu, is a right for every different faith. A right for one faith, is a right for another faith and a responsibility for both faiths. And of course that requires civic education, so that people know how to respect people's freedom of conscience, and yet also know how to differ with them if they have disagreements, which of course politically and ethically we will do.

But it means that most of, say the religious differences, are things we discuss more in the private world, whereas public life is much more for discussing the social and practical implications. Of course in those countries that are democratic, the 51% will always prevail, but the discussions will be civil. In other words, persuasive, because people are free to be faithful to argue for what they believe, but they will abide by the majority opinion if they are in a democracy. But they will do so with respect for the dignity of the other person, which they need to be taught. Now of course as you can see, that vision - very different from much of what we have today - requires a vision, it requires leadership - and we are sorely lacking on that at the global level - and it requires civic education.

As all the great thinkers about freedom point out, freedom is never guaranteed by law alone. As Montesquieu, the French theorist, put it, "You need the structures of law, but you need the spirit of freedom."

You can lay down the structures easily and they'll last for a long time, but the spirit of freedom which has to be passed from parents to children, teachers to students, that may easily go and needs to be kept alive from generation to generation. [...] The European Union is heavy with laws, articles and conventions [...] and there's no spirit of freedom, no civic education, no vision, leadership, civic education. I passionately believe that these things are not Utopian, in the long run.

Are we to be content with controversy, conflict, violence, state oppression, sectarian violence? You know well, 100 million people were killed in the last century in war. Another 100 million people - human beings were killed by their fellow human beings - under political oppression, many of them in the country in which I was born. And sadly yet another 100 million people were killed sectarian violence.

How do we live with deep differences? Are we content to go forward with religion and ideology allowed to become controversial and a source of violence and oppression, or will there be leadership and courage and vision in many of our societies to go a better way? I hope that each one of your countries, however small, wherever you are in the part of the world, will be thinking courageously about a vision of a future of humanity.

Thank you and God bless you.