

“Pope Francis: Renewed Vision of Religious Freedom”  
**Most Reverend William E. Lori**  
International Religious Liberty Award Dinner  
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**I. Introduction**

Senator Hatch, Elder Von Keetch, Elder Wilford Anderson, Dean Rasband, Mr. Marcus Faust, and honored guests, it is a pleasure to be with you this evening. I am grateful to the J. Reuben Clark Law Society & the International Center for Law & Religious Studies at Brigham Young University for honoring me with this award, and for spotlighting the cause of religious freedom.

At a time when God and the things of God are being marginalized or compromised, how fortunate we are to have the J. Reuben Clark Society whose mission is to “affirm the strength brought to the law by a lawyer’s personal religious conviction.”

Similarly, BYU’s International Center for Law and Religion Studies effectively counters secular trends and government actions that seek to erode our “first, most cherished freedom” by fulfilling its goal of securing “the blessing of freedom of religion and belief for all people”.

I am truly honored to be among friends here tonight, friends who join me, my brother bishops, priests, and lay co-workers, as we stand together for the religious freedom rights of all Americans.

**II. Fresh Eyes**

A. Years ago, when I was serving as Cardinal James Hickey’s priest-secretary here in Washington, an old friend of mine came to visit me; I hadn’t seen him in years. He was curious about my service to the Cardinal and wanted to see where I worked. I tried to give him some idea about what a priest-secretary does – arranging and managing the Archbishop’s schedule, assisting with ceremonies, preparing for events, and helping with the flow of correspondence.

In the course of our visit, I introduced my friend to Cardinal Hickey, who greeted him warmly and inquired about his family. As my friend and I walked around the chancery office, he stopped and looked at me: “You don’t know how good you have it!” he said.

Truth to tell, I was surprised. It’s not that I thought I was in a bad situation, but it took someone with fresh eyes to make me aware of the many blessings God had given me. In essence, he said to me, “Don’t take your blessings for granted.”

B. I thought of my friend when Pope Francis visited the United States last month.

Until then, Pope Francis had never been in this country. It was obvious to everyone that he prepared carefully for the visit by studying our language and culture, as well as our challenges as a Church. But he didn't merely read speeches prepared by advisors. He looked at us with fresh eyes.

He engaged us and reminded us of the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. He told us not to take our blessings for granted but rather to cherish them and to use them in service to others, especially the poor and the vulnerable.

### **III. Reprising the Pope's Message of Religious Freedom**

#### **THE WHITE HOUSE**

A. One blessing that Pope Francis spoke about frequently is religious freedom. In his address on the South Lawn of the White House, Pope Francis spoke of the commitment of faithful people to build a society that is "truly tolerant and inclusive", a society that rejects "every form of unjust discrimination."

Here we saw the Pope was taking a second look at people of faith in the United States. He was pointing out to the President and to the Nation that Catholics, and indeed most religious people, are not motivated by narrow self-interest but rather a deep-seated desire to build our society upon respect for others, including those with whom we sincerely differ.

And in seeking justice and tolerance, the Pope said, people of faith are concerned that society "respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty." He added, "Religious liberty remains one of America's most precious possessions" and, I don't mind telling you, I was delighted that he expressed his support for the U.S. Catholic Bishops' efforts to preserve and defend religious freedom. From the White House balcony, no less, the Pope encouraged us to be good citizens who are vigilant, ready "to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it."

B. In his remarks at the White House, Pope Francis did not mention any specific issue, such as the Health and Human Services mandate, that would involve many church-sponsored ministries and institutions in facilitating the provision of abortifacients, sterilizations, and contraceptives for their employees and family members. Later that day, however, the Pope visited the Little Sisters of the Poor in Washington who are prominent in their courageous resistance to that mandate. His gesture of support for the Sisters prompts all of us tonight to applaud their service to the elderly poor and their courageous defense of our most fundamental liberty. Thank you, Mother Lorraine, thank you dear Sisters and my dear friends!

#### **ADDRESS TO CONGRESS**

C. Pope Francis returned to the importance of religious freedom in his address to the Congress.

Again, he helped us see ourselves anew, first by pointing to the image of Moses in the chamber of the House of Representatives. It was through Moses that we received the Ten Commandments, a privileged expression of the law of God written on the human heart.

Just legislation that reflects God's law unifies peoples and nations because it respects transcendent human dignity. Unjust legislation that contradicts that law of God inscribed in human nature ultimately leads to disunity and to the trampling of fundamental rights & liberties.

Today we see this with stark clarity in parts of the Middle East where full-blown religious persecution, even genocide, is underway, an unfolding tragedy which Pope Francis has spoken about time and again.

D. The Holy Father then focused our attention on iconic figures in our culture, among them President Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He called Lincoln "the guardian of liberty, who labored tirelessly", that "this nation, under God, [might] have a new birth of freedom."

Pope Francis reminded us that this "new birth of freedom" requires us to serve the common good with bedrock convictions about our shared human dignity, a dignity that is the basis for human solidarity. He called for respect of those decisions that rightly belong to individuals, families, churches, and institutions at the local level that serve the common good.

These convictions about human dignity lead us to engage in the struggle to preserve our fundamental, universal, and God-given freedoms while resisting efforts to use religion for unjust and violent purposes. Indeed, the Pope urged us to use our freedoms to build bridges of understanding and cooperation wherever possible.

In that spirit, the Pope referred to Martin Luther King. His leadership in attaining "full civil and political rights for African Americans", he said, should inspire all citizens of the United States to live up to the founding principles and ideals of our country. It should also encourage us to welcome immigrants who are seeking the blessings of liberty for themselves and for their families.

### **INDEPENDENCE HALL**

E. A few days later, the Holy Father spoke at Independence Hall in Philadelphia which he called "the birthplace" of the United States.

Again, the Pope held up for us anew the ideals on which we were founded, namely, that "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; and that governments exist to protect and defend those rights."

Lofty ideals, of course, are one thing and the struggle to live up to those ideals is another. Here too the Holy Father's words helped us see with renewed clarity the political and social struggles that mark our own history as a nation.

Overcoming threats and obstacles to the fulfillment of the founding vision of our country hinges on the preservation of religious freedom, understood not only as the right of individuals to worship as they please, but also as the right and duty of believers to be active in the public square, including political life, reminding everyone that we are made for God and that our dignity transcends this world.

F. Further, religious traditions have the right to "serve society primarily by the message they proclaim"....

As if to warn us not to take our freedoms for granted, the Pope pointed out the danger of an overarching secularism that tries "to eliminate all differences and traditions in a superficial quest for unity."

Here the Holy Father puts his finger on the nature of religious liberty struggles we are presently undergoing in the United States. There are efforts, at times carried forward by government at all levels, to force individuals to cease running their businesses according to their deeply held religious convictions;

There are efforts to force religious institutions that serve the common good to compromise their deeply held religious convictions and moral teachings. And when people seek to put their religious convictions into practice, especially those that pertain to the nature of marriage and the family, then they are often labeled as bigots, as devotees of discrimination.

Indeed, religious liberty is not real if we are unfree to proclaim and live by views that are culturally unpopular; or if it is said that we are free to advocate for such views but we are fined, taxed, jailed, or otherwise marginalized when we try to act upon our convictions.

### **THE AIRBORNE NEWSCONFERENCE**

G. When the Pope concludes his visits, his messaging is not over. We've all learned to tune in to his homeward bound airborne news conference.

So, at 30,000 feet he spoke about conscientious objection in our culture, that is to say, the rights of conscience. He affirmed that conscientious objection is a human right that one does not lose just because one is government worker.

Whatever else one may say, it is clear that the Pope knows his own mind on the subject of the right to conscientious objection. It is a right that protects not popular points of view (which often don't need to be protected) but to protect those convictions that are unpopular, countercultural.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

A. All of which brings me back to the observation of my friend of long ago who helped me see how God was blessing my life.

The Pope, who bears in his heart the plight of refugees and persecuted Christians, helped us to see how blessed we are in the freedoms we enjoy. But he also spoke of our need to dialogue courageously with our culture so as to preserve our freedoms so that we may use them in building a culture that is just and loving, a true “civilization of love”.

B. Let me once again thank most sincerely the J. Reuben Clark Society, the International Center for Law and Religious Studies, and especially The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for your historic and dauntless defense of religious freedom, for your thoughtful and courageous dialogue with law and culture, and for the partnership and warm friendship which I am privileged to enjoy, particularly in my role as the bishops’ point person on religious liberty issues.

We do well to remember the words of Joseph Smith: “I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-Day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.”

This evening you do me great honor and I am both humbled and joyful. With all my heart I thank you and join with you in asking God to bless us and to bless our beloved country, the United States of America.