

Religious Freedom, John Paul the Great, and American National Interests

Thomas F. Farr

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My subject tonight is international religious freedom and American national interests. The mission of US foreign policy is to engage the world in defense of American interests. Twelve years ago, in 1998, Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act, which requires US diplomacy to advance religious freedom as a central element of American foreign policy.

For some time now I have argued that success in this endeavor would benefit those whose religious freedom were enhanced by our efforts, including minority and majority religious communities. It would benefit their societies and politics, their neighbors, world peace, and the vital national interests of the United States.

Unfortunately, US international religious freedom policy, while it is slowly improving, has to date largely been ineffective. There are many reasons for this problem, and a number of prospective remedies have been proposed by me and by others. But as I have reflected on the deficiencies and the remedies, I have long

wanted to engage a question that has intrigued me since I began this work over a decade ago, a question which Dr. Hittinger has provided me an opportunity to explore with you tonight.

What can we learn from the life and work of Pope John Paul II – the man many Catholics call John Paul the Great -- that might inform a wiser and more effective US policy in the promotion of international religious freedom? I believe that we can learn many things, foremost among them that we must not only oppose religious persecution. We must also advance religious freedom in politics and culture.

I'll return to this theme in a moment, but let me set the stage with a story. In the Spring of 2000 I had traveled to Egypt and Cairo's Al Azhar University, the center of Sunni learning in the Islamic world. Just weeks before, Pope John Paul II had been at Al Azhar as part of his Jubilee journey to the Middle East. During that trip he had visited key sites of Christian history, performed Masses for the dwindling numbers of Middle Eastern Catholics, and met with political and religious leaders.

At the time, I was an American diplomat, director of the US State Department's office of international religious freedom. I had gone to Cairo for a meeting with the

head of Al Azhar University, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi and some of his advisors. When these men learned I was a Catholic, they were eager to tell me how things had gone when the Pope had been there. They had been apprehensive and, quite frankly, skeptical of the Pope. Serious tensions existed between Catholics and Muslims, and John Paul had been outspoken in his defense of religious liberty for Christian minorities under siege in the Middle East. So they had decided to greet him politely but formally, remaining somewhat aloof until the meeting was over.

When the Pope arrived that day, he was frail and stooped. He had difficulty walking because of the effects of a hip replacement which had not been completely successful, and because of Parkinson's disease.

When he entered the room where the Muslim leaders awaited, John Paul was using a cane and was helped by an assistant. But when he saw his hosts, he began moving toward them alone, shuffling painfully but, as odd as it may seem, joyfully as well. One of the observers told me that the combination of suffering and good will quite overcame them. Their plans for aloofness melted away and they embraced the Pope. As they chatted, he spoke to them with respect and candor. "The Pope treated us with great dignity and honesty," said this observer. "We did not agree on everything, but we had profound respect for him."

Commitment to the dignity of every person, even amid suffering. Mutual respect, grounded in candor. These virtues were at the heart of the pontificate of John Paul the Great. They also represent, as it were, the beginnings of an answer to the question: why religious freedom? Why for everyone, of whatever place in life, in whatever nation or region, of whatever religion, or of none?

Before exploring the Pope's answers to those questions, let me sketch out briefly why I believe that advancing international religious freedom would be good for the world and good for American interests. Both history and contemporary scholarship demonstrate that religious freedom is necessary to individual human dignity and to the stability and flourishing of societies and political order. No human being can be said to be living a fully human life if he does not have religious freedom. And no society - especially highly religious societies - can be stable and free without full religious freedom for all its members, and all its religious communities.

There is, however, a monumental international deficit in religious freedom, one which can be said to have reached crisis proportions. A recent study by the Pew Forum demonstrates that a full 70 percent of the world's population lives in societies where religious freedom is highly restricted. That is not good for those

societies or their citizens, for their neighbors, or for international security. Why?

Because those nations are far more likely to be unstable, aggressive, or incubators of religious extremism or terrorism. While religious freedom is not the only determinant of stability in these societies, the evidence suggests that it is necessary if they are to be stable and prosperous.

The United States has an interest in the stability and security of other nations for a whole host of very practical reasons. One is economic; nations that are unstable are not good producers or consumers of goods. They are not good trading partners.

Another is democracy. Much American blood and treasure has been spent to help root stable democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. The evidence suggests that neither will achieve stable democracy unless they can achieve religious freedom.

A third reason is national security: many nations that lack religious freedom -- nations like Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Iran -- are also net producers and exporters of religious terrorism, including the terrorism that struck the American homeland on September 11, 2001. Again, the evidence shows that the absence of religious freedom encourages religious extremism and violence. The advancement of religious freedom can help undermine the social, political and religious pathologies

that yield extremism. Religious liberty can be, in short, a diplomatic means to counter religion-based terrorism.

The Life and Work of John Paul the Great

Let's turn now to the Pope. What **lessons** can we glean for **the American international religious freedom** project from the life and work of Karol Wojtyla, the man that became Pope John Paul II?

There are many reasons that Karol Wojtyla is revered by Catholics and non-Catholics around the world. He was an extraordinary man who lived an extraordinary life. Prior to his election as pope his life straddled the reign of the two great secular totalitarianisms of the 20th century. From the Holy See he traveled the world, and became for many a kind of peripatetic moral compass, for others a threat to power and privilege. As George Weigel put it in the first volume of his splendid biography, *Witness to Hope*, "the sheer drama of Karol Wojtyla's life would defy the imagination of the most fanciful screenwriter." Most of that drama has implications for the issue of religious freedom.

Born in Poland just after World War One, young Karol was raised by his father, a former soldier who firmly embraced the pluralist culture of Poland and taught his son to do the same. Twenty percent of Karol's home town was comprised of Jews,

and the young man developed a deep respect for Judaism, which led him to be particularly sensitive to the suffering of European Jewry that he was **soon** to witness. It would lead him as Pope to reach out to Jews in Israel and around the world. One of the final acts of his Jubilee visit to the Middle East was to pray at the Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, a gesture of solidarity with Jews, whom he had often called Christianity's "elder brothers and sisters."

Indeed, Wojtyla developed a deep respect for the religious convictions of all people. At an early age he came to understand that religion was not some add-on to the human personality, merely one in the spectrum of human choices on offer. He discovered that religion is a powerful force that lies at the very heart of human nature. Karol was developing into a profoundly religious man himself, someone whose own religious convictions required him to respect those of others.

During the Second World War, Wojtyla's Poland was occupied by Nazi troops, and the experience deepened the young man's understanding of human degradation, human suffering, and human nobility. He later wrote of this period in his life as the experience of "humiliation at the hands of evil." Wojtyla supported himself and his aging father by working as a manual laborer in a mine and a chemical factory. He began the study of philosophy at a Polish university, where he became committed

to the life of the mind and began to develop his own personalist philosophy. **As he attended classes, he** began to witness the gradual elimination of his Jewish professors and classmates. Soon he joined an underground group that provided false papers for Jews and hid 2500 Jewish children from the Nazis in Warsaw.

During these years Wojtyla helped form an underground theater group that staged clandestine performances of classical Polish poetry and drama. The passionate and budding young actor risked his life on several occasions to make his contributions to Polish patriotism on the stage. It is interesting, is it not, that both Wojtyla and his later comrade in the fight against Communism, Ronald Reagan, were both actors.

But the theater ultimately lost Karol Wojtyla to another vocation. In 1942, the 22-year old decided to enter the underground Catholic seminary in Krakov. Most local priests had already been arrested and shipped off to Dachau. By the end of the war, over 3600 Polish priests had been sent to concentration camps. Over 2000 were exterminated. By committing his life to service as a Catholic priest, Wojtyla took a step that was as threatening to the Nazis as military resistance, and in some ways moreso. In 1944 the Gestapo discovered and shot one of Karol's fellow seminarians and began a sweep of the city for others. Wojtyla survived.

By 1945 the Nazis had been defeated, and Karol was ordained a priest one year later. But by then he and his native Poland had a new occupying force - the armies and the totalitarian ideology of the Soviet Union. Under Nazi rule the young seminarian had witnessed the terrible consequences of racial and religious persecution, and he would fight this enemy all his life. But now he was faced with an equally terrible enemy -- one that not only sought to enslave men, but to justify slavery by a powerful and insidious anthropology derived from dialectical materialism. For the communists man was but a pawn in the movement of history, the product of material forces whose destiny is not freedom but servitude.

Father Wojtyla was destined to become the scourge of that anthropology, and – along with Reagan -- of the evil empire which sustained it. In 1958 he became a bishop and in 1963 was appointed by Pope Paul VI the archbishop of Krakov. It was in that capacity that he contributed to the Second Vatican Council, which met in Rome during the mid 1960s, and in particular to its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*. It is worth taking a couple of minutes to examine this Declaration, because it has much to teach us.

The traditional view of the Church on religious freedom was twofold. First, no human being can legitimately be coerced to believe in the teachings of Christianity or to join the Church against his will. God wishes men and women to come to him freely, not through coercion. Second, however, the Church has a responsibility to its members and to society. Its teachings represent the truth about God and man, are critical to the right ordering of societies and the common good, and are necessary for the salvation of souls. Accordingly, the state must restrain the public articulation of religious error. As some theologians put it, “error has no rights.” This teaching was in part a logical reflection of the Church’s understanding of itself as the one true Church, and in part a reaction to the powerful anti-Catholicism of the 18th and 19th centuries, represented by the French Enlightenment and Jacobinism, as well as the anti-Catholic strains of the Italian Risorgimento and the German Kulturkampf.

Archbishop Wojtyla and other Church fathers embraced and affirmed the first teaching – that there can be no coercion of conscience, as had most Catholics throughout history. With respect to the second – that error has no rights – they proposed a profoundly important doctrinal development. They did not abandon the Church’s claim to be the Church established by Jesus Christ, but they focused on the questions of human dignity and ordered liberty. Their approach can be summed

up as follows, “while it is true that error per se has no rights, it is also true that human beings do have rights -- rights that derive precisely from the God that made them in his image. It is the primary role of government to protect those rights.”

Some of the Church Fathers with whom Archbishop Wojtyla allied in the drafting of the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* were American bishops who were convinced that the American constitutional system of protecting the free exercise of religion had nourished the growth of the Church in America. These bishops were highly influenced by the American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray, whose writings had a profound effect on Council thinking about religious freedom. Others were, like Wojtyla, central European bishops who were convinced religious freedom was necessary to protect the Church in its fight against the mortal enemy of communism.

Reaching into the treasure of Catholic doctrine about the human person, and drawing from the personalism which was at the center of his philosophical writings, Wojtyla argued – as did Murray -- that the dignity of all persons, imprinted as they are with the image and likeness of God, requires that each be given religious freedom, defined as an immunity from coercion by government or any human agent. Religious freedom, he told the Council Fathers, was necessary for every man and woman to achieve what God intended. It was, in other words,

not simply a matter of freedom from outside interference, but freedom for a purpose. That purpose was the discovery of truth.

Further, Wojtyla argued, the state had no role in religious matters other than to facilitate the religious quest; it had no competence in theology, or in authorizing or forbidding religious institutions. Here the archbishop was coming remarkably close to arguments presented by America's Founders. Finally, he rejected the communist claim that religion was "alienating" and therefore should be severely restricted by the state. This claim has ominous echoes in some of contemporary American political philosophy, such as that of John Rawls, as well as in recent American jurisprudence. It is also reflected in the French system of controlling religion. In fact, Wojtyla insisted, religion is necessary for man to be complete.

Most of Archbishop Wojtyla's positions, and those of other Council Fathers of like mind, found their way into the Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which was presented to the world in 1965. Let me read you a few brief sentences from that Declaration and ask you to listen for the voice of Karol Wojtyla:

"This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that

no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs ... The council further declares that the right to religious freedom 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. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

...all men (the Declaration continued) should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth. However, men cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed. “

In sum, human nature imposes a duty on human beings to seek religious truth, and to live in accord with the truth as it is found. But because religious

freedom is grounded in human nature, men and women may not be coerced by the state or anyone else, even if they refuse to seek religious truth or live in accord with it. The role of the state is to ensure that the religious enterprise can take place freely, subject only to the limits of just public order. This understanding of religious freedom, I would submit, is grounded not only in a sound anthropology, but also in a sound and fruitful view of politics and the state.

In 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was elected Bishop of Rome, the first non-Italian pope since the 16th century. **As such he was to become the world's foremost apostle of religious liberty, and – precisely because of this -- a powerful enemy of authoritarianism and advocate for democracy.** Most people had never heard of the Polish man who took the name John Paul II. They were soon to find out who he was, and witness what he meant when he said to the faithful in his first speech as pope, “Be not afraid!”

There was one particular group who knew Wojtyla quite well, and had followed his teachings closely. They were the SB and KGB, the intelligence services of the communist governments in Poland and the Soviet Union, respectively. The SB had developed a file on the new bishop in 1958, and quickly saw him as an enemy of

communism. Observing his work during the Second Vatican Council, an ominous entry appeared in his file: “Wojtyla is a very dangerous ideological opponent.”

Say what you will about the Communists; they were good at identifying who their enemies were. They were certainly correct in assessing Wojtyla’s ideology as a threat to their own, especially his view of human nature and of human freedom.

In June 1979, eight months after his election as pope, John Paul II made the first of three papal visits to Poland. This visit was to confirm the judgment of Polish and Soviet intelligence services, and, many believe, led three years later to an assassination attempt against the Pope. John Paul’s nine days in Poland gave heart to the Polish labor movement, Solidarity, and to the Catholic Church, both of which would contribute to the downfall of Polish communism and, in due course, the entire Soviet Empire.

In 1979 the young and vigorous new pope addressed the United Nations for the first time. Sixteen years later, the same man would return to the UN, still vigorous, but now stooped and in the early stages of Parkinson’s. In both cases his message was the same. Politics, he told a hushed throng of UN delegates, was about human beings. Their welfare was the very reason for politics. And the highest obligation of the political world was to nourish and protect human dignity and human rights,

the most important of which was religious liberty. It was, he said, “the cornerstone of the structure of human rights and the foundation of every true society.”

John Paul the Great and American Interests

Now, there is much more to be said about the effects of the Pope's work on religious freedom and democracy in places like Latin America, Africa, Asia and in the Middle East. But in the interests of time, I want to turn now to the question of how his project can inform America's international religious freedom policy. The goals of that policy, as they are articulated in the International Religious Freedom Act, are twofold: to reduce religious persecution and to advance religious freedom.

Note that these two goals are complementary. They are, as it were, two sides of the same coin, each a part of the whole. But they are not the same thing. Religious freedom entails more than the absence of persecution. It certainly includes that -- no one can be said to have religious freedom if they are tortured or otherwise abused because of their beliefs, or those of their tormentors. But religious freedom also means the right of religious individuals and communities to seek religious truth and to act publicly in accord with that truth. That includes the right to engage in the political life of a nation on the basis of religious belief, within due limits but in full equality with other religious and non-religious communities. This is not only

a matter of human dignity and a proper understanding of religious freedom. As Karol Wojtyla learned, and John Paul II taught, it is also a matter of social justice and political stability.

Unfortunately, this is not an understanding that US diplomacy has internalized.

Let me illustrate this point with a contemporary example. When the United States overthrew the vicious and theocratic Taliban government of Afghanistan, levels of religious persecution plummeted. There were no more executions of women who failed to wear the burqa, no more brutal and systematic torture of minority Shiite Muslims by the Sunni Taliban. But the decline of persecution did not mean the emergence of religious freedom then, and it does not mean that today. Afghanistan has a fairly liberal constitution, but it also declares that no law may be contrary to the (undefined) principles of Islam. This puts enormous power into the hands of religious leaders and judges. What in practice this has meant is that Muslim liberals are at great risk if they dare to speak publicly **about their own religion** in ways that would **increase the chances for Afghanistan to survive** as a democracy over the long term.

To take but one example, an Afghan journalism student was recently prosecuted for blasphemy when he disseminated Koranic interpretations supportive of

women's equality with men. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. Such prosecutions are not atypical in democratic Afghanistan and they constitute a fundamental attack on religious freedom. Whether or not US and Afghan forces defeat the Taliban militarily (or conclude an agreement with them), such Taliban-like ideas, if they are not eliminated, will ensure that Afghan democracy never roots and is never stable. **The United States worked behind the scenes to get the journalism student off, and we succeeded. But that is not enough.**

The problem is that American religious freedom diplomacy has embraced an anti-persecution **approach to religious freedom** that is largely rhetorical or, at its best, reactive. **Sometime it devolves simply into case management, trying to get this or that victim out of harm's way. US diplomacy** has declined for a host of reasons to do the hard work of actually encouraging the development of legal and cultural institutions and habits that can yield true religious freedom. **It has not, for example, made a concerted effort to convince the Afghan government that anti-blasphemy prosecutions are utterly incompatible with democratic stability. They stifle free religious expression and ensure that the voices of Muslim reformers are not heard. In short,** the United States cannot afford simply to react to cases of persecution; it must find ways to advance religious liberty.

Karol Wojtyla understood both the **intrinsic connection and the important** distinction between opposing persecution and advancing freedom. On the one hand, his experience of the Second World War and of communism led to a deep revulsion against religious persecution as a moral evil that affects both individuals and society, including the political order. At the same time, his life of deep spirituality, his personalist philosophy, and his vigorous intellectual engagement with other religions, all impelled him to articulate and to advocate what religious freedom is *for*. **It is for the benefit of individual human beings, their societies and their political arrangements.** American diplomacy has shown a distinct intellectual obstinacy on this score. **It has refused to consider the proposition that to advance religious freedom is to liberate a host of fruitful social, economic and political possibilities, most of which would further the interests of the United States.**

The Nazi and Communist regimes under which Wojtyla lived certainly understood the mortal threat his ideas posed to their respective totalitarian projects. They knew that **Wojtyla was championing a counter anthropology and an understanding of politics that was inherently democratic. And they were right. As Samuel Huntington and others have recognized, the Church's Declaration on Religious Liberty, whose message the Pope personally delivered to Catholic**

nations worldwide, fed what Huntington has called the “3rd wave” of democratization. 75 percent of the new democracies emerged in Catholic nations that had until then been authoritarian, such as Spain, Portugal, Chile, and the Philippines.

Those authoritarian governments learned, as had the Communists, that religious liberty was more than the absence of persecution. As articulated by this pope it was nothing less than the juridical recognition of God’s will -- namely, that man’s journey to truth must not be hindered by the state or any other human agent. As an apostle of Vatican II, John Paul declared that the state must not only ban religious persecution, but it must actually *favor* the religious life equally among all religious actors and communities, Catholic and non-Catholic, Christian and non-Christian.

I would suggest that if America is to be true to its founding Creed, which is built on religious liberty, and, at the same time, advance its interests in the world, including its interest in national security, American diplomacy must approach the issue of religious freedom as did Wojtyla. (I might add that such an approach would, in my view, be entirely in accord with a proper interpretation of the First Amendment.) American foreign policy need not pose the issue, as the Pope did, in terms of God’s will, although such an entry to the problem has some interesting

possibilities in the lands of Islam. What it must do is oppose religious persecution and advance the institutions and habits that protect religious freedom, convincing states that it is in their interests to do so.

Let's conclude with a brief look at America's international religious freedom policy. Why has it focused on **reacting to cases of** persecution, rather than advancing **religious** freedom, and has succeeded in doing neither?

First, it is important to acknowledge that the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act – the legislation that mandates our policy -- actually requires actions by the State Department that amount to opposing religious persecution, although mainly in a rhetorical sense. By the same token, it encourages actions by the State Department to advance religious freedom, but does not require them. Given the reluctance of American diplomacy to be involved in this policy in the first place, it is not surprising that the State Department has opted to do the bare minimum.

Let me be specific. The law created a very senior diplomatic official to head US IRF diplomacy – an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. The ambassador is empowered to represent the United States abroad, and, should he or she choose to do so, institute programs to advance religious liberty. Although past administrations have made it extremely difficult for the ambassador to carry

out such programs, the Obama administration has trumped them all: it has not yet even gotten its ambassador for religious freedom in place.

Let me repeat that: Halfway through Barak Obama's presidency the IRF ambassador is not yet on the job. This is particularly revealing, given that other senior envoys have long been at work -- on such issues as women's rights, climate change, fighting HIV/AIDS, engaging Muslim communities, or closing Guantanamo. Since very early in the administration there has been a State Department task force on advancing gay rights in US foreign policy. It is fair to say that international religious freedom is not high on the list of foreign policy priorities for the Obama administration.

I am happy to say that now there is at least a nominee, and I am hopeful she will get a Senate hearing soon. Once she is on the job she will have several tools at her disposal should she choose to try and use them, although there is little reason to expect that she will do so. **Again, however, the point is that** all those actions required of her are essentially negative. They are designed to condemn and to punish religious persecution. Let me run through them briefly.

First, the ambassador must issue an annual report that gives the status of religious freedom in every country abroad. These reports are excellent as far as they go: they

are compendia of incidents of persecution in a given year, designed to shine a light on the problems that exist in most countries. Second, the ambassador must then designate the very worst persecuting governments. A list of those severe persecutors – the so-called “countries of particular concern” – is issued annually along with a description of what the United States is doing about it. Third, the Secretary of State is empowered to levy some pretty serious economic sanctions on these countries, but in the twelve years since the passage of the Act has done so in only one case – that of Eritrea.

My own view is that unilateral sanctions do not work – they certainly have not worked in Eritrea, where things have gotten worse. But the larger point I want to make is that while the annual reports and designations, with or without economic sanctions, are potentially useful tools of diplomacy, they are insufficient. When they are the only tool in the diplomatic toolkit, they are relatively ineffective and can even be destructive.

I began my remarks by saying that the mission of American diplomacy is to engage the world in defense of America’s interests. In my view, the comprehensive understanding of religious freedom we have seen in the life of Karol Wojtyla and Pope John Paul II, provides the intellectual model for what we should do, indeed, what we must do to defend our country. We must advance religious freedom in

culture and in law, which means encouraging the institutions and habits that root and protect this fundamental right.

This, to put it mildly, will be hard work. So let me address briefly two natural questions: why would we want to do this, and how might we accomplish it?

The answer to “why” is, in my view, straightforward and compelling. Advancing religious freedom successfully will reduce persecution of human beings – a moral and humanitarian imperative – and further American interests. It will further American interests in ways the Polish Communist regime fully understood, and which their Chinese brethren today understand as well. Religious freedom is the enemy of authoritarianism in all its forms, secular, theocratic, nationalist or otherwise. Moreover, religious liberty can help to root democracy where it is fragile, and – perhaps most important of all -- help to counter religion-based terrorism. Both history and contemporary research strongly suggest that if democracy is to succeed in highly religious societies like Iraq or Afghanistan, it must be rooted in religious freedom. And if Muslim reformers are to defeat the extremist norms that feed terrorism, they must have religious freedom.

Answering the question of “how” we are to do this reveals, I fully admit, serious obstacles. Put simply, there are two problems: them and us. My argument has more

power, it seems to me, in nations that have already committed to democracy, and want it to work. It is far more difficult, but in many ways even more important, to move toward religious freedom in tyrannical places like Saudi Arabia and Iran, however gradually and carefully we must go.

Moreover, to be blunt, most of these societies, whether democratic or not, view our religious freedom policy as a front for American missionaries, an effort to protect Christian minorities but no others, and designed to undermine the majority religious community. This perception is absurdly false and supremely ironic. If anything, American diplomacy has ignored Christian minorities in the Middle East. And if anyone here thinks our government is plotting to replace Islam with American missionaries, they haven't been paying attention.

The point, however, is that these perceptions are pervasive. They abide in India among majority Hindus, in Russia among majority Russian Orthodox, and – most destructively for American interests – in the lands of Islam. They are doubtless in part a consequence of our negative, anti-persecution approach, which is believed, again falsely, to be aimed only at Christian minorities.

We can begin to overcome those perceptions by emphasizing, in Wojtyla-like fashion, that religious liberty is universal in scope, necessary for justice, social

harmony and political success. In other words, we need to provide reasons for other societies to adopt the laws and institutions that will protect religious liberty, reasons that go to their self interest and are not seen as finger wagging, punitive projects of the United States.

As for the problems within our own diplomatic establishment, there is widespread resistance to elevating our religious freedom policy. Some of the skepticism at Foggy Bottom is the result of liberal internationalist sympathies, some of it due to classical realism. Both schools of thought are resistant to promoting religious liberty. Some of the skepticism is old fashioned, garden variety irreligion. There are lots of lapsed Catholics and agnostics at State, and a few Christopher Hitchen-like “new atheists.” A perceptive explanation was provided by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in her 2006 book, *The Mighty and the Almighty*. “Diplomats in my era,” she wrote, “were taught not to invite trouble, and no subject seemed more treacherous than religion.”

How do we change the religion avoidance culture at the State Department?

Albright calls for better training, and I certainly endorse that. We also need high level political decisions to energize our IRF policy, as well as some organizational improvements, such as elevating the authority and status of the ambassador at large. We need to integrate this issue into the daily work of America’s diplomats.

Religious freedom needs to be seen as a career enhancing, and relevant aspect of the work of diplomacy and foreign affairs. Until that happens, progress will be sporadic and ad hoc at best.

Here, at the end of the day, is where the life and thought of Karol Wojtla is most relevant to American interests. American diplomacy must recapture what its Founders and John Paul the Great both understood: religion is supremely relevant to human affairs. It can have an intensely personal, individual dimension, but it is inevitably a public matter as well. Why? Because human beings act on their religious beliefs, for better and for worse.

What better way for American diplomacy to engage a highly religious world than to advance international religious freedom, applying both its rights and its limits? As John Paul might put it, such an endeavor would not only acknowledge the human dignity of every person, it would also move us further toward a goal we will never perfectly achieve, but for which we must never cease to strive. That is the goal of stable, peaceful societies, living together in peace, candid about their differences, but acknowledging their common humanity.

Thank you.