

# WOODSTOCK BUSINESS CONFERENCE

MADDEN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AT LE MOYNE

## WBC TOPICS November 2015 Meeting

- **Welcome and Self-Introductions**
- **Woodstock Business Conference Mission Statement**
  - **The Mission of the Woodstock Business Conference is to establish and lead a national and international network of business executives to explore their respective religious traditions in order to assist the individual executives:**
    - **To integrate faith, family and professional life,**
    - **To develop a corporate culture that is reflective of their religious faith and values and**
    - **To exercise a beneficial influence upon society at large**
  - **The Conference, grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition, welcomes believers who are open to and respectful of one another's religious tradition. It is committed to the conviction that ethics and values grow out of one's religious heritage.**
- **Scripture Reading: Acts 4:23-31 The Believers Pray**

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one.

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

- **Quiet Reflection 5 minutes followed by sharing insights**

# In God We Trust

Jim Vaughan  
October 26, 2015

The primary author of The Declaration of Independence while identified as a Protestant had diverged into more of a deist. This becomes evident in his choice of words when he states that our independence is entitled by “Nature’s God.” Here Jefferson refers to God with a capital “G,” typically associated with a single higher being, a belief in all Christian faiths as well as many other religions. Deists believed that God created the world, instilled it with natural laws of science, morality, and ethics, and did not interfere with it any further. In the second paragraph of the Declaration it is declared that we are endowed with unalienable rights by our Creator. Again we see that the word Creator begins with a capital “C.” Fifty one of fifty five of our founding fathers identified themselves as Christian with the others being deists. Weaved within the rest of the Declaration of Independence are the Christian values which those founders brought to the new land.

Four years after the Constitution of the United States was signed into law the First Amendment was adopted providing for religion freedom. In 1954, at the provocation of the Knights of Columbus, President Dwight D. Eisenhower amended our pledge with the words “under God.” Two years later Eisenhower signed a law officially declaring “In God We Trust” to be the nation’s official motto. This motto was embossed on to our paper currency the next year.

While there is a lot of discussion as to whether or not the United States was founded as a Christian nation this evidence demonstrates how the country was created and continues to develop with the believe in a higher being, and a God as our creator. In a 2014 census it was determined that about 71% of our population identified themselves as Christian. That is down from 78% in 2007. Also in the 2014 census it is important to note that 60% of Americans consider religion as “very important” to them. This is in great contrast to Western Europe that came in at only 21%. It is clear that our country continues to demonstrate a strong faith base, much as it did at our founding.

Despite the history and statistics it seems that we must continuously work and commit ourselves to religious freedom. The tricky part here is that while the First Amendment offers us religious freedom it also provides for the separation of church and state. This separation also provides rights therefore to atheists and agnostics who comprise roughly 7% of our population. This has led to the debate over the reciting of the pledge of allegiance in our public schools.

Where would we be in this country without religion? In his book *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide with Passion & Purpose*, Matthew Kelly tells us about the good deeds which the Catholic Church brings to the United States. In the United States the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students each year, has more than 230 colleges and universities with and enrollment of 700,000, leads 637 hospitals which treat one in five patients each day and provides over 6000 meals each day to feed the hungry. These numbers do not speak to the services which are provided by the many other religious groups that exist in the United States. Where would we be if our religious freedoms were taken away?

In his recent visit to the United States Pope Francis took the opportunity to speak to us on religious freedom from Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Interestingly enough he spoke from the podium once used by Abraham Lincoln to deliver the Gettysburg Address. This connection to Lincoln is important if we consider Lincoln’s quote during his 1884 campaign for president. In that campaign he is quoted as saying, “That the guarantee of the rights of conscience, as found in our Constitution, is most sacred and inviolable, and one that belongs no less to the Catholic, than to the Protestant; and that all attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights, either of Catholic or Protestant, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation, and shall ever have our most effective opposition.”

In Pope Francis’ speech in Philadelphia he warns that there are “various forms of modern tyranny [which] seek to suppress religious freedom.” In an earlier speech at the White House he indicated that “Freedom is one of America’s most precious possessions.” This especially includes our religious freedom. Later in the White House speech he reminds us that “all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.” In *Evangelii Gaudium* [255] Francis states that “The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences

the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions.” This is where the battle line is drawn.

Saint Peter calls is to be, “sympathetic, loving toward one another, compassionate, [and] humble.” [1 Peter 3:8] Francis states that “As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God.” [Evangelli Guadium 257]

It has been over 200 years that our forefathers had the vision to provide us with religious freedom. That freedom, as with all freedom, is continuously being challenged. As Christians therefore it is important that we must fight this battle with love and understand yet at the same time we must hold firm to convictions and freedoms. Our own conviction in conjunction with the rights provided to us by law and from God Himself will allow us to maintain our freedom. But it is up to us to be alert and vigilant.

# Pope's Message On Religious Freedom At Independence Mall (Full Transcript)

Dear Friends,

One of the highlights of my visit is to stand here, before Independence Mall, the birthplace of the United States of America. It was here that the freedoms which define this country were first proclaimed. The Declaration of Independence stated that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that governments exist to protect and defend those rights. Those ringing words continue to inspire us today, even as they have inspired peoples throughout the world to fight for the freedom to live in accordance with their dignity.

But history also shows that these or any truths must constantly be reaffirmed, re-appropriated and defended. The history of this nation is also the tale of a constant effort, lasting to our own day, to embody those lofty principles in social and political life. We remember the great struggles which led to the abolition of slavery, the extension of voting rights, the growth of the labor movement, and the gradual effort to eliminate every kind of racism and prejudice directed at successive waves of new Americans. This shows that, when a country is determined to remain true to its founding principles, based on respect for human dignity, it is strengthened and renewed.

All of us benefit from remembering our past. A people which remembers does not repeat past errors; instead, it looks with confidence to the challenges of the present and the future. Remembrance saves a people's soul from whatever or whoever would attempt to dominate it or use it for their interests. When individuals and communities are guaranteed the effective exercise of their rights, they are not only free to realize their potential, they also contribute to the welfare and enrichment of society.

In this place which is symbolic of the American way, I would like to reflect with you on the right to religious freedom. It is a fundamental right which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors whose religious views differ from our own.

Religious freedom certainly means the right to worship God, individually and in community, as our consciences dictate. But religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families.

Our various religious traditions serve society primarily by the message they proclaim. They call individuals and communities to worship God, the source of all life, liberty and happiness. They remind us of the transcendent dimension of human existence and our irreducible freedom in the face of every claim to absolute power. We need but look at history, especially the history of the last century, to see the atrocities perpetrated by systems which claimed to build one or another "earthly paradise" by dominating peoples, subjecting them to apparently indisputable principles and denying them any kind of rights.

Our rich religious traditions seek to offer meaning and direction, "they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and heart" (*Evangelli Gaudium*, 256). They call to conversion, reconciliation, concern for the future of society, self-sacrifice in the service of the common good, and compassion for those in need. At the heart of their spiritual mission is the proclamation of the truth and dignity of the human person and human rights.

Our religious traditions remind us that, as human beings, we are called to acknowledge an Other, who reveals our relational identity in the face of every effort to impose "a uniformity to which the egotism of the powerful, the conformism of the weak, or the ideology of the utopian would seek to impose on us" (M. de Certeau).

In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the dignity and rights of others.

We live in a world subject to the "globalization of the technocratic paradigm" (*Laudato Si'*, 106), which consciously aims at a one-dimensional uniformity and seeks to eliminate all differences and traditions in a superficial quest for unity. The religions thus have the right and the duty to make clear that it is possible to build a society where "a healthy pluralism which respects differences and values them as such" (*Evangelli Gaudium*, 255) is a "precious ally in the commitment to defending human dignity... and a path to peace in our troubled world" (*ibid.*, 257).

The Quakers who founded Philadelphia were inspired by a profound evangelical sense of the dignity of each individual and the ideal of a community united by brotherly love. This conviction led them to found a colony which

would be a haven of religious freedom and tolerance. That sense of fraternal concern for the dignity of all, especially the weak and the vulnerable, became an essential part of the American spirit. During his visit to the United States in 1987, Saint John Paul II paid moving homage to this, reminding all Americans that: "The ultimate test of your greatness is the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenseless ones" (Farewell Address, 19 September 1987, 3).

I take this opportunity to thank all those, of whatever religion, who have sought to serve the God of peace by building cities of brotherly love, by caring for our neighbors in need, by defending the dignity of God's gift of life in all its stages, by defending the cause of the poor and the immigrant. All too often, those most in need of our help are unable to be heard. You are their voice, and many of you have faithfully made their cry heard. In this witness, which frequently encounters powerful resistance, you remind American democracy of the ideals for which it was founded, and that society is weakened whenever and wherever injustice prevails.

Among us today are members of America's large Hispanic population, as well as representatives of recent immigrants to the United States. I greet all of you with particular affection! Many of you have emigrated to this country at great personal cost, but in the hope of building a new life. Do not be discouraged by whatever challenges and hardships you face. I ask you not to forget that, like those who came here before you, you bring many gifts to your new nation. You should never be ashamed of your traditions. Do not forget the lessons you learned from your elders, which are something you can bring to enrich the life of this American land. I repeat, do not be ashamed of what is part of you, your life blood. You are also called to be responsible citizens, and to contribute fruitfully to the life of the communities in which you live. I think in particular of the vibrant faith which so many of you possess, the deep sense of family life and all those other values which you have inherited. By contributing your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help to renew society from within.

Dear friends, I thank you for your warm welcome and for joining me here today. May this country and each of you be renewed in gratitude for the many blessings and freedoms that you enjoy. And may you defend these rights, especially your religious freedom, for it has been given to you by God himself. May he bless you all. I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

**APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
EVANGELII GAUDIUM  
OF THE HOLY FATHER  
FRANCIS**

**Social dialogue in a context of religious freedom**

255. The Synod Fathers spoke of the importance of respect for religious freedom, viewed as a fundamental human right. This includes “the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one’s beliefs in public”.[203] A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions. In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace.

256. When considering the effect of religion on public life, one must distinguish the different ways in which it is practiced. Intellectuals and serious journalists frequently descend to crude and superficial generalizations in speaking of the shortcomings of religion, and often prove incapable of realizing that not all believers – or religious leaders – are the same. Some politicians take advantage of this confusion to justify acts of discrimination. At other times, contempt is shown for writings which reflect religious convictions, overlooking the fact that religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and the heart. This contempt is due to the myopia of a certain rationalism. Is it reasonable and enlightened to dismiss certain writings simply because they arose in a context of religious belief? These writings include principles which are profoundly humanistic and, albeit tinged with religious symbols and teachings, they have a certain value for reason.

257. As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation. A special place of encounter is offered by new Areopagi such as the Court of the Gentiles, where “believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence”. This too is a path to peace in our troubled world.

258. Starting from certain social issues of great importance for the future of humanity, I have tried to make explicit once again the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message and to encourage all Christians to demonstrate it by their words, attitudes and deeds.

## Questions for Reflection

**Be Attentive:** In Acts, the chief priests and the elders ordered the apostles to “speak no further” in the name of Jesus. Nearly 2000 years later our freedom of speech is still being challenged. Who are those that represent the priests and elders in today’s society?

**Be Intelligent:** With the liberties and limits under which we live how can we bring our faith to bear in our corporate environments and in public forums?

**Be Reasonable:** As Christians we are taught acceptance of all people. Love your enemies. How do show acceptance when our faith is being challenged?

**Be Responsible:** What do we need to do to help others understand our faith without demeaning those who challenge us?

Jim Vaughan  
Coordinator – Holy Family Woodstock business conference  
847-477-7116

John J. Fonatana  
Woodstock Business Conference  
At Le Moyne College  
847.703.5836