

Address by Tony Perkins
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It's an honor to be speaking once again at the Republican Leadership Conference here in my home state of Louisiana. Things have changed since I was first elected to office here nearly 20 years ago. Back then being a Republican in this part of the world was a pretty lonely experience. Like being clean-shaven at a "Duck Dynasty" convention. Thanks to the dedication of so many of you, beard or no beard, that has changed for the better and we now have plenty of company.

Now, I have a difficult task addressing you today. It's not that I have a difficult proposition to defend. No, it's just difficult to believe that this proposition would ever need defending in the United States of America. But it boils down to this: *religious freedom is essential to who we are as Americans, and we can no longer assume that all our fellow Americans share that conviction, therefore we must now wage the fight of our lives to keep that essential freedom.*

This fight is in fact well under way. In the past the struggle has been subtle and indirect, but today it is blatant and brutal. The subtlety has been there in the proclamations issuing from academic institutions and now from the Obama Administration that try to recast freedom of religion as merely "freedom of worship."

This idea isn't completely new. After all, "freedom of worship" was one of the Four Freedoms Franklin D. Roosevelt listed in his famous 1941 State of the Union address to Congress. It later became the subject of Norman Rockwell's celebrated paintings illustrating that speech.

Rockwell depicted “freedom to worship” by showing an array of faces - of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and faiths - all bowed in attitudes of prayer.

Not long after, when the United States formally entered World War II, that famed illustration graced posters urging Americans to finance the war effort: “Save Freedom of Worship,” the poster read, “Each According to the Dictates of His Own Conscience: Buy War Bonds.” But what our grandparents’ generation meant as a theme to push outward against the forces of totalitarianism and imperialism has become, in the hands of an aggressive secular state, a drive to push people of faith out of the public square. It is no longer a call to genuine freedom, but an attempt to confine our religious liberty within the walls of churches and meeting halls.

This “freedom of worship” is a sentence to solitary confinement – not freedom *of* religion, but freedom *from* religion.

How do we know this? The examples are now too numerous to count. And they point in a parallel direction.

Let me begin with the most obvious one. In just a few weeks, the Supreme Court of the United States will hand down the most significant religious freedom decisions of modern times in the *Hobby Lobby* and *Conestoga Wood Specialties* cases. These cases are not about contraception or even about drugs or devices that can cause abortions. These cases represent a clash over conscience that implicates the liberty of every American - all of us here today and generations yet unborn.

In a sex-saturated culture where contraceptives are ubiquitous, the federal government has sought to impose its will on businesses that have made a corporate commitment to a different worldview on human life. The imposition is completely unnecessary. Our government could

simply give a free-contraceptive Medicaid card to every person in America if it wished to. It has other options as well. But instead it has chosen a method that, as Justice Anthony Kennedy pointedly asked in oral argument, could force every business and nonprofit in this country (with the exception of those aforementioned houses of worship) to pay for elective abortions for their workers.

Talk about absolute power corrupting absolutely. Given the availability of alternatives, it isn't too much to say that the point of the preventive services mandate is not to promote health but to demonstrate government's brute power over conscience.

This brings us to what writer Maggie Gallagher is rightly calling the New McCarthyism. This McCarthyism would force every corporate leader, university official, public contractor, or media figure to answer a question: "Are you now or have you ever been involved in an effort to preserve marriage as the union of a man and a woman?" No, I'll go further than that: this New McCarthyism demands, "Do you now think or have you ever thought that marriage should remain the union of a man and a woman?"

Answer incorrectly, and watch your career be taken from you and your reputation smeared on a thousand web sites.

Examples of this continue to pile up like scandals in the Obama Administration:

- Last month a federal district judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by Angela McCaskill, who suffered job retaliation at Gallaudet University for merely signing a petition allowing a citizen vote on Maryland's law creating same-sex marriage. McCaskill has never said how she would have voted on the ballot measure - but that should not matter in a free society. She was confronted by a university administrator who derided her Christian beliefs and she was put on paid leave for exercising her most basic constitutional rights.

- Earlier this year Brendan Eich, the computer genius who created JavaScript, was hounded from his new position as CEO of Mozilla, the popular web browser company. Eich was plucked out, put in the stocks, and sent packing because he had the nerve to support, along with the majority of his fellow Californians, Prop 8, which rescued California's definition of marriage from judicial tyranny. A Huffington Post writer recently labeled Eich a "dangerous villain" more despicable than Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling.
- Finally, at the Department of Defense, our military men and women are finding that there is no more dangerous exercise than being willing to express religious convictions in public. In March U.S. Air Force Academy officials forced the erasure of a whiteboard belonging to a cadet who had recorded on it a verse, Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; therefore I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Mikey Weinstein, the relentless founder of the grossly misnamed Military Religious Freedom Foundation, said that the erasure was the just result of dozens of complaints his group had received from other cadets and faculty at the Academy. Then he labeled the Air Force Academy a "virulently hyper-fundamentalist Christian institution." The cadet's offense, Weinstein said, was to put the verse out in the hallway and not keep it in his room away from others' sight.

That is the way this new "freedom to worship" will be allowed to operate. Out of sight, out of mind, out of influence on public policy and public affairs, a source of penalties in both public and private careers, an enemy of the all-encompassing secular state.

There is just one problem with this vision of public life. It is not the one we inherited as Americans. And it is most definitely not freedom. At the close of his Four Freedoms speech, calling on the nation to rally to the defense of democracy against foreign dictators (dictators whose only religion **was** the state), Roosevelt said, "The nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God."

That statement was in keeping with an unbroken line of understanding tracing back to our nation's founding era, when the American experiment in ordered liberty was born. To Lincoln, Madison, Jefferson, Jay and Washington, religious liberty was never merely a procedural right, an island of private belief meant to be circumscribed and isolated from our public duties, our natural civilization. The conviction that our unalienable rights, which give form and definition to constitutional government, come directly from the God who made us was made explicit where it mattered most, in the Declaration of Independence.

The founders did not believe our form of government could long endure absent the moral compass set by religious conviction. As John Adams wrote in October 1798 to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Massachusetts Militia, "Our constitution is made for a moral and religious people; it is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

By invoking the need for protecting and restoring religious freedom, I am not signaling today a retreat to some higher ground after defeat in the "culture wars." I am not describing a scheme of redoubts where the flame of religious liberty is sheltered from the harsh winds of opinion and legislation. I am calling on all of us to recognize and affirm that there will be no liberty without religious liberty, there will be no constitutional government unless we remain – proudly – a moral and religious people.

In advancing this view, we must not be arrogant – but we must refuse to be intimidated. We must be willing to stand tall in the public square. We must be willing to champion our convictions wherever we work and no matter who attacks us. We must "be not afraid."

By all means, let us worship. And let us offer prayers with our families in our homes, in our private associations affirming God as the author of our rights. But just as we would never limit the freedom to bear arms to an armory or parade ground, we must never accept the idea that

religious freedom must be restrained inside a building and kept from the eyes of others lest they be troubled by its messages.

The free exercise of religion resides in the First Amendment alongside freedom of speech, the freedom to peaceably assemble, and the freedom to petition the government for redress of grievances for the simple reason that it ranks among our nation's first principles.

In its place some would erect a disordered liberty that puts the whole of our enterprise in freedom at risk. The great analyst of American democracy Alexis de Tocqueville quoted John Winthrop on this point. Winthrop said:

"There is a liberty of a corrupt nature which is effected both by men and beasts to do what they list, and this liberty is inconsistent with authority, impatient of all restraint; by this liberty 'sumus omnes deteriores' [we are all inferior]: 'tis the grand enemy of truth and peace, and all the ordinances of God are bent against it. But there is a civil, a moral, a federal liberty which is the proper end and object of authority; it is a liberty for that only which is just and good: for this liberty you are to stand with the hazard of your very lives and whatsoever crosses it is not authority, but a distemper thereof."

Let me close by putting our challenge in some perspective. Good men and women are suffering for the exercise of their God-given rights, incurring job losses, restrictions on their freedom, and vicious personal attacks. But we still have the liberty to fight for our liberty, and we must use it. Others are not so fortunate.

Today as we sit in this beautiful ballroom, the wife of an American citizen, Meriam Ibrahim, languishes in a Khartoum, Sudan, jail cell with her 20 month old son and her almost one week old daughter where she has been shackled awaiting execution for four months. Her "crime"? She has allegedly committed both apostasy and adultery by virtue of being a Muslim by birth and marrying a Christian man. The judge who sentenced her to death under his interpretation

of sharia law had generously ruled that she would not be executed until her baby was born – the clock is now ticking – and the Obama administration remains silent.

This is a price that none of us yet faces for the exercise of our religious freedom. But our just recognize that there is a correlation between the increase in religious persecution abroad and the growing intolerance toward religion here at home by our own government. We must pray and work for the freedom of all of the world's Meriams, but to do so, we must rededicate ourselves to a vision of religious liberty that affirms our natural rights here at home. We must do this while there is still time for the America we love to reclaim its fundamental character.

That is why we are here today. We have no higher calling.

Thank you and God bless you.