

Faith, Freedom and Fundamentalism: Challenges to Transatlantic Relations and Beyond

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by
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Thank you for the honor of being invited to meet with you at this very special place. I look forward to the opportunities we will have for introspection as well as sharing in the week to come.

I expect we will explore the foundations of our beliefs, how those beliefs influence our interactions with others in our families, neighborhoods and communities, and how they fit into the larger scheme of global affairs.

This will not be the talk I would have given last year, nor will it be the talk I might give on the same topic next year.

Having been offered the opportunity to be the lead-off hitter for this week’s all-star lineup, I was challenged to broaden and, hopefully, deepen my approach.

This topic, for me, is a work in progress, part of my life’s journey.

Let me begin by reflecting on the most traumatic experience on that journey – the sudden death of our sixteen-year-old son in 1992.

Between those who tried to be comforting by saying “he’s in a better place,” and those who asked “how can a caring god let this happen?,” I needed to find my own answers.

To do so required that I explore how this devastating event would affect my faith as well as my future.

The journey that began then has taken me in some unexpected, but perhaps not surprising, directions.

As I have studied both my own faith and the role of religion in foreign relations, I seem to have found more questions than answers.

Today, I hope to raise a few questions that you probably have already asked yourselves, and perhaps a few that you wish you had!

I'm hoping also that you will raise questions that will help carry us all a little further down the road on our individual and collective journeys.

Now, a good audience, as well as a good analyst, always "considers the source" of information and perspectives. This is particularly important when discussing a subject that is partly about "facts," but also about "beliefs."

So, I invite you to consider some facts about my background that do not appear in a standard CV or introduction that might nonetheless affect the beliefs that I bring to this topic.

I was raised as a member of the Bethany Congregational Church in Montpelier, Vermont. I don't have to explain to this group, as I do to my European audiences, that this was a "liberal" religious upbringing, and that Vermont, and New England more broadly, are parts of the United States most like Europe in terms of both political and spiritual attitudes.

Some might say that being a Congregationalist is like being an agnostic who goes to church, just in case.

From a more positive angle, you might say a Congregationalist is someone who came to his or her faith through self-examination and individual choice.

Nobody that I know was ever shamed, frightened, fooled or forced into becoming a Congregationalist.

On the other hand, while I served for several years in the 1990s as a deacon for the Emmaus United Church of Christ in Vienna, Virginia, my "questioning" and study have led to greater skepticism about the "stories" that shaped my faith and that provide the underlying rationale for Christianity.

As a result of this questioning, I no longer can honestly describe myself as a "Christian," although I do not consider myself an atheist.

Let me explain. My study of religion and foreign relations has brought me to a point where I believe that there is a "higher power."

But it is a higher power that mankind has variously molded, manipulated and sometimes distorted to fit the needs and experiences of different cultures, societies, ethnic groups, belief communities and nations.

The most important value, in my “new” belief system, is that of what can be called “principled tolerance.”

Principled tolerance goes beyond the practical requirement that we all “put up with” things that we don’t like in our communities.

It requires attitudes that welcome the fact that different individuals and groups of individuals, coming from diverse historical backgrounds and cultures, will reflect a great variety of political, religious and social attitudes.

Those persons have the same basic right to pursue their dreams as we do.

Our aim should be to reconcile these varying attitudes without having to sacrifice or subordinate any of them.

I respect the fact that different people find comfort and affirmation in different religious stories that, for them, help explain and guide their lives.

But when individuals and groups use the life given to them by the higher power to diminish the lives of others, they are committing the greatest transgression against their “god-given” existence.

Many of the stories that have been built on various belief systems have, on balance, benefitted mankind, particularly to the extent that they promote respect for tolerance of the rights and choices of other individuals and groups.

However, to the extent that stories underlying religious beliefs have preached exclusivity, separateness, even antagonism toward non-believers and those with different stories, they promote intolerance, disrespect, division, fear, hate, violence and international conflict.

Those of us coming from Christian backgrounds have been preceded by people who have used their faith for much good for the overall well-being of mankind, and those who have used their faith to justify much that is bad. This is also true of most other religions.

I do not diminish the potential importance of religious rituals and teachings.

I have personally experienced many moments in church services that informed, inspired, comforted, reassured, empowered or moved me.

The moments that moved me most usually involved music that helped me connect, not to the Christian story, but to a higher power.

And, I believe my current faith is built on many positive experiences and lessons from my Christian education and experience.

I have also found reassurance in the fact that our “founding fathers” – the men who wrote our constitution – generally believed that “creating a better life in this world [for all people was]... more important than preparing for the next one,” as Gary Kowalski has written in his new book on Revolutionary Spirits.

Kowalski concludes that the founding fathers aimed “...to establish a republic of virtue, and we must never forget their conviction that civic virtue implies not only tolerance but respect for the multiplicity of opinions and outlooks that infuse this land.”

Perhaps it would never be sufficient for some people to accept that our higher power has not sent down detailed guidance for how to live our lives.

But if all could accept the simple act of creation of life as the higher power’s main message to us, then acceptance and respect for all souls under this higher power should be the foundation for principles guiding relations among individuals, societies and states.

As Benjamin Franklin wrote, “I believe in one God, creator of the universe.... The most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children.”

Beyond that, societies and states need to construct rules to govern lives in their entities. Tolerance is the key value behind “human rights.”

Tolerance provided the foundation for political systems that respect the rule of law and rights of the individual.

Tolerance is a necessary ingredient for democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

We are all on this earth together.

We live in a world made imperfect by man.

We live in a world of many different religious traditions and practices.

We should ensure that our religious beliefs help make the world a better, not a worse, place to live.

My hope is that sharing this will help you understand my bias and my value structure.

Nonetheless, I’ll do my very best to present the topic as objectively as possible. And, I’ll return to the “tolerance” theme at the end of my talk.

Here’s what I hope to do in the coming minutes:

First, I will take a brief look at the importance of the transatlantic relationship to the United States, Canada, Europe, and the broader international system for the past 60 years.

Second, I will look at some religion-related sources of differences between the United States and Europe, examine their impact on transatlantic relations, and raise some questions about the future of that relationship.

Finally, I'll close by examining the extent to which the concept of principled tolerance is not only the key to a healthy transatlantic relationship, but also as the central idea for those who hope and work for a more peaceful, less conflicted world.

Why should we care about transatlantic relations? Let's start with a little history.

Since 1949, the alliance between the United States, Canada and European democracies has been the most important foreign relationship for all the participants:

- 📖 It ensured their military and political defense.
- 📖 It provided the foundation for economic recovery and growth, including construction of the European community system.
- 📖 It helped stabilize relations among European powers that had just fought a brutal war against each other.
- 📖 It confirmed the role of the United States as a European power, and "leader" of the "free world."

The relationship initially had one overriding purpose: to keep the Soviet Union and communist ideology from dominating Europe.

It had the important secondary purpose of providing a framework in which Germany could reconcile with the enemies it had created during World War Two.

In some respects, this alliance looked like many others throughout history: several countries aligning with each other to balance the military power and political influence of one or more potentially threatening powers.

But this alliance was different, in part because the alliance leader – the United States – took a self-interested but principled approach to leadership.

The goals and execution of Marshall Plan assistance illustrated this combination of motivations.

Moreover, the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington in April 1949, reflected the special nature of the new American-European alliance.

The artful language of the treaty never once mentioned the Soviet Union or Russia.

The treaty's preamble says the alliance is intended "to safeguard freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples."

The alliance is founded on the principles of "democracy, individual liberty and rule of law."

So, the alliance was based on a solid value foundation, and its language appears just as relevant and challenging for the members today as it did in 1949.

In spite of this value foundation, skeptics in the early 1990s argued it was the Soviet threat that had held the alliance together.

In this view, American and European societies were already drifting apart and different value structures were developing on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Instead, however, the NATO allies decided in the early 1990s that, even with the Soviet threat gone, their interests would still benefit from continued political/military cooperation.

In the 1990s, the alliance helped stabilize the Balkans after traditional peacekeeping under the United Nations failed to end the ethnic strife there.

The alliance was also used to promote and facilitate the transition of former Warsaw Pact states and former Soviet Republics from authoritarian communist regimes to free market democratic systems, at peace with their neighbors.

Having won their freedom from Soviet control, the fledgling democracies wanted to be embraced by NATO and the European Union.

In response to these aspirations, the members of NATO insisted that those wishing to join the alliance undertake meaningful political and economic reforms and settle all issues with states on their borders.

The decisions of these countries explicitly affirmed their belief that the values enshrined by the North Atlantic Treaty remained not only valid, but also vitally important for their interests.

Yet, to some, the emergence of the United States as the world's only global power, with capabilities and resources far exceeding those of any other, created tensions in transatlantic relations.

For the most part, the United States behaved like a benign hegemon during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, other countries began to question whether it was in their interest to follow the United States down every path that Washington perceived to be in American interests.

The questioning of America's power and role in international relations began long before George W. Bush came to office.

But the conduct of his administration's first term reaffirmed most of the fears Europeans and others had developed concerning the potential abuse of America's power position.

The US decision to go to war against Iraq – and the way in which this decision was taken – demolished US prestige and popularity in Europe and around the world.

To some, US policy in the Middle East started to look like a new crusade, based on American power and fueled by unrealistic expectations.

In the past several years, stimulated by the intersection of the US-declared war on terror and the Iraq conflict, some began to question whether religious differences between the United States and Europe constituted a serious division that would contribute to a transatlantic divorce.

So far, however, the two partners may be in counseling, but they have seen the dangers of any formal separation.

The fact that religion plays a much more prominent role in American society and politics, compared with Europe, is nothing new.

In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in *Democracy in America*, observed that “on [his] arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck [his] attention.”

He wrote: In Europe, “the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom [were almost always] marching in opposite directions.” In America, “they were united.”

Today, I'll talk about three religion-related sources of differences between the United States and Europe.

The first source is the challenge posed by radical Islamic fundamentalism and its role in international terrorism.

The second source comes from the recent impact of Evangelical fundamentalism on US foreign policy.

The third source is the debate over whether or not European secularism is a challenge to European democracy and US-European relations.

I'll look at this aspect in combination with the perception that Islamic immigration and population growth pose a fundamental challenge to Europe's cultural and religious identity.

To begin, however, let me put some relevant statistics on the table. They come from a variety of sources, and while the numbers may occasionally suggest trends, they do not necessarily predict the future.

📖 Public opinion polls demonstrate that the United States is the most religious “rich” country in the world.

- In some polls, 59% of Americans have said that religion is a very important part of their lives;
- only 11% of French, 21% of Germans say so;
- 27% of Italians; 33% of Brits;
- 14% of Russians; and even just 35% of Poles;
- 30% of Canadians; 12% of Japanese.

📖 58% of Americans say America’s strength is “based on religion.”

📖 In answer to the question: “Is it necessary to believe in God in order to be a moral, good person?”

- 50% of Americans say “yes;”
- but only 13% of French, 25% of Brits, and 27% of Italians agree.

📖 However, US public faith in pluralism and tolerance remains relatively strong:

- over 80% believe it is possible to be a “good American” without Judeo-Christian values or even without any religious faith.

📖 48% of West Europeans almost never go to church; 44% in Eastern Europe seldom go.

- 49% of Danes, 52% of Norwegians and 55% of Swedes regard God as irrelevant to their lives.

📖 When you look at demographics, it is clear that Europe’s traditional populations are declining;

- Europeans simply do not produce enough babies.

📖 This has a profound impact on projected economic growth, military capabilities, and Europe’s potential to play a more significant role in the world.

- It has been projected that Germany, for example, between now and 2050, could lose in native population the equivalent of the entire population of the old East Germany;
 - Spain is projected to lose over 35% of its native population.
 - One expert has predicted that, by 2050, 60% of Italians may not know from personal experience what it is like to have a brother, a sister, an aunt, an uncle, or a cousin.
- 👉 At the same time, Europe's Muslim population is growing.
- The current Muslim population in the 27 EU nations is estimated between 18-20 million and growing through both birth rate and immigration;
 - If Turkey, with its predominantly Muslim population, eventually joins the European Union, let's say in 2015, it would come in tied with Germany with 14.5% of all European Union citizens.
 - Some experts have projected that, with current trends and attitudes, Europe could be Islamicized by the end of this century, or even sooner.

Against the backdrop of these statistics and potential trends, let me summarize some of the arguments that are being made these days about how religion could further divide the United States from Europe.

First, it has been argued that dealing with radical Islamic fundamentalism as a source of international terrorism could divide the United States from Europe.

In the United States, it is widely accepted that radical Islamic fundamentalism is a major threat to the United States and to like-minded nations.

The Bush administration has taken the United States to war against terror and against Iraq, telling Americans that they will be "at war" until complete victory is achieved.

The historian and conservative commentator Niall Ferguson has written that: "To Americans, Islamism has effectively replaced Soviet communism as a mortal danger. To Europeans, the threat of Islamic terrorists today is simply not comparable to that posed by the Red Army twenty years ago...many Europeans have behaved as if the optimal response to the growing threat of Islamist terrorism is to distance Europe from the United States."

In spite of differing perspectives on how best to respond to terrorist threats, the United States and European governments understand the importance of cooperating to deal with the near-term consequences.

However, Europeans do tend to put more focus on finding and mitigating the social and international circumstances that give rise to terrorist organizations and their support.

They tend to see the problem as one that requires a long-term struggle that may be managed, not a war to be “won.”

Some Europeans even see the United States as a main causal factor because of its support for Israel, desire to protect access to oil, and quick resort to military force.

However, there are no “easy” generalizations. When the “cartoon crisis” was stirred up again earlier this year, it was European, not American, publications that once again defied the Islamic protest and republished the offending caricatures of Mohammed.

When the cartoons were originally published, the Bush administration defended the right to free speech, but, fully aware of our exposed position, cautioned against provoking even more Islamic protest.

In discussions with US Embassy officers posted to European capitals, I have found them extremely concerned about the extent to which defense of a free press in some European countries runs counter to overall policy objectives of promoting cooperative relations with non-violent but faithful Islamic moderates.

What does this say about US attitudes toward Islam versus those in European countries?

Are Europeans actually less tolerant in this regard or simply more offended by the threats to free speech?

Moving on, it has also been argued that the influence of Evangelical fundamentalism on US foreign policy affects relations with Europe.

As opposed to the United States, where religion has historically been on the side of “freedom,” European historical experience suggested that the church is not always a friend of democracy, and that religion can be the source of conflict as easily as an instrument for peace.

The “success” of the 18th Century Enlightenment for Europeans was to ensure that the political order rested on a social contract based on reason, rather than on an absolute truth that made discussion and debate impossible.

For the most part, religious faith has reinforced many of the values on which European and American civil societies are based.

The freedom to worship in a faith of one's choice is an important source of cohesion and peace in our societies.

The separation of church and state is managed differently in every Western constitutional democracy.

Political systems on both sides of the Atlantic seek to ensure that no "church" ends up running the state.

However, neither American nor European law guarantees the separation of religion and politics.

One European concern about the United States has been the perception of US politics and policies as increasingly influenced by Christian fundamentalism.

Europeans have always been uncomfortable with the way American presidents have invoked God in support of US policies.

George W. Bush did not start this, even though he may have carried it to new levels.

In the spring of 2006, George W. Bush, facing plummeting approval ratings and a mounting list of domestic and foreign challenges, affirmed that he bases "a lot of foreign policy decisions on some things that I think are true. One, I believe there's an almighty.... Secondly, I believe one of the great gifts of the Almighty is the desire in everybody's soul... to be free."

Now, it is hard to disagree with the president's affirmation of freedom as an important value.

However, the direct link between the president's foreign policy decisions and the "truths" that originate in his religious faith, added to the distress of many friends of the United States who think that our nation has recently been led astray by this linkage.

The concern has been about a President who so strongly believes he is doing "God's work" that he has not been able to see mistakes when he makes them or alternative policies when circumstances demand them.

A few Europeans have measured the danger of American evangelical fundamentalism against that posed by radical Islamic fundamentalism.

One European friend puts it this way: "in Europe, it is newcomers who are challenging the fundamental values on which our political system is built, whereas in the United States this

challenge comes from a core indigenous group's perversion of the founding values of their own system."

She concludes, "I find this even more scary [than Islamic fundamentalism]."

Perhaps today she would find the picture less scary, with George Bush scheduled to leave the presidency and with some Evangelicals arguing that religion and politics should be kept more separate.

In May of this year, a prominent group of Evangelical leaders issued "An Evangelical Manifesto" that argued "...Evangelicals should be defined theologically, and not politically, socially or culturally."

The document stopped short of using the magic word "tolerance," but it warned that Evangelicals should avoid politicizing faith, because when faith is politicized "...Christians become "useful idiots" for one political party or another."

While the document was not signed by some of the most prominent Evangelical leaders, and probably is seen as offensive by the most fundamentalist of them, it at least casts some reassuring light on diversity in the Evangelical movement.

By way of contrast, many Islamists – and not just the radicals – seem to want a close match between their religious beliefs and the rules of state. The Koran is often interpreted as sanctifying this marriage of religion and state.

However, such interpretations are not limited to the Islamic faith.

It seems to be a generic tendency of fundamentalists to see the texts and teachings of their faith as "gospel," as the "truth" on which government policies as well as lives should be based.

A middle-of-the-road Christian "believes" in God. But someone with a more fundamental approach sees the existence of their god as a fact, not as a belief.

The kind of certitude to which fundamentalist approaches give rise becomes particularly problematic at the intersection between religion and politics.

An individual whose views on a contentious political issue are based on strong religious beliefs is less likely to tolerate varying political views.

This certitude can also lead one to believe that they are always doing "God's work."

But uncompromising faith, which can be a source of strength in one's personal life, can be a recipe for disaster in foreign policy.

If the fact that one is doing “God’s work” is carried over to political involvement, and further on to positions of governmental responsibility, the “church” may still be separate from the state, but religion is certainly acting as a strong influence on politics and government.

In the United States, influential voices increasingly speak out against any one religious group having too much influence on decisions of government.

The next American president will undoubtedly invoke God’s blessing on America, as American presidents have traditionally done.

However, the next president – whether he be John McCain or Barack Obama – seems unlikely to bring prominent Christian fundamentalist tendencies to the job.

That change undoubtedly will be welcomed by people like Bishop Wolfgang Huber, Chairman of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany, who has warned that some Americans fall into the trap of believing that the American dream means “American superiority in the name of Christ.”

The bottom line is that many Europeans will continue to be reluctant to follow the US lead to the extent that American foreign policy appears to be driven by religious fervor, implying that God not only is on our side but that we are always right or justified in our actions.

On the other hand, some observers have suggested that European secularism, combined with Muslim immigration and population growth, could undermine US-European ties.

For those who take this view, the absence of an active religious ingredient in European foreign and public policy in general is a weakness in European democracy, and a long-term threat to the transatlantic alliance.

One leading proponent of this point of view is George Weigel, a prominent Catholic theologian, author and commentator.

Weigel, in his book *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America and Politics Without God*, questions whether Europe, by adopting a posture of “radical secularism,” and suffering from “Christophobia,” is in danger of losing not only its soul but also its culture and democratic system.

Weigel argues that “history is driven by culture over the long haul, by what men and women cherish, honor and worship, by what men and women are willing to stake their lives on, by the artifacts that they create in literature and art to give expression to those deep cultural commitments.”

Weigel maintains that Europe's depopulation is a sign that it has lost faith in itself and in the future.

In sum, this argument goes, Europeans are choosing a path that will fundamentally alter European society, culture and government, and not for the better for Europe or for the transatlantic relationship.

Perhaps the most important consideration here is how effectively European Muslims are integrated into European society, culture and politics.

The equivalent process has, historically, been more or less successful in the United States. For Europe, it is a somewhat more recent challenge, but one with which European societies and governments will have to deal.

Without "choosing sides" in this particular debate, my sense is that there are some good general rules that should govern how the United States, Canada and the European democracies deal with religion-related issues that affect their relationship.

First, the transatlantic relationship is too important to allow religious or other differences to stand in the way of continued cooperation.

The value foundation of the relationship remains stronger than values shared by either side of the Atlantic with any other country or group of countries.

Second, irrespective of how we practice (or don't practice) our religions, certain irreducible principles that remain vitally important to the maintenance of civil societies must be preserved.

- 👉 A critical building block for our democratic systems is the freedom of individuals and groups to worship in the religion of their choice (or to practice atheism, if they so choose).
- 👉 This right should not be taken away by governments or jeopardized by other religious groups seeking a dominant position for their religious beliefs.
- 👉 Understanding and tolerance of the rights and beliefs of others is a key value for both domestic peace and international cooperation.

Third, if religious beliefs lead some to try to restrict the rights of others by engaging in violent acts, the perpetrators must be confronted, both legally and culturally, to protect a society built on acceptance and toleration.

In a sense, what I am saying is that we need a “soft power” approach to these issues backed up by a willingness to defend our core values – those values that define our societies and governments.

Moreover, Westerners and Christians should be careful not to define Muslims as an undifferentiated threat.

We should work hard to ensure that our political and religious paths reinforce those of so many Islamic moderates who share our desire for peace and religious freedom.

On a more personal note, I have discovered that anyone who ventures into discussions of religion and politics knows to be prepared for emotional disagreements.

I first spoke on this topic a couple of years ago to a local international affairs discussion group in a small town in my home state of Vermont.

That audience was made up of Protestants (including a few Evangelicals), Catholics, Jews and at least one self-identified atheist.

During the discussion period, a local farmer looked at me thoughtfully and asked, “Are you basically saying that we should be intolerant of intolerance?” I think he had it right.

The willingness to tolerate the beliefs of others provides vital sustenance for our civil societies, and for the transatlantic alliance as well.

Intolerance – the failure to honor and respect the religious beliefs of others when not sharing those beliefs, and to try to impose one’s beliefs on others – is the enemy of freedom and justice.

The 20th Century French-American microbiologist and humanist René Dubos once observed “Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.”

Most of us believe we are “tolerant” people, although we may not be as truly tolerant as we would like to think.

When fear takes hold, tolerant attitudes fall victim to more base human emotions. Just look at some American post-9/11 political and social reactions.

Tolerance does not necessarily require “turning the other cheek,” and does not promise to eliminate conflict.

Conflicts inevitably arise among individuals, societies, communities and nations.

They occur because we are different: we have dissimilar goals and sometimes lack the resources necessary to achieve all of our ends.

We cannot reasonably be expected to avoid conflict and disagreement. The question is how we handle conflict and disagreement.

Tolerance is a shining virtue because it inclines people to resolve conflict – not just to avoid it.

Peace is achieved by engaging conflict, by learning and growing from it, not merely by avoiding it.

Today, the goal of a more peaceful international system can be seen as symbolized by a “tolerance pyramid,” a somewhat idealized structure of social and political relationships from interpersonal relations, up to the pinnacle of international relations, based on a foundation of acceptance, fashioned around a core of principled tolerance, and held together by the rule of law.

The foundational building blocks for my imagined pyramid are shaped by the principled acceptance of all persons as individuals with goals and desires – irrespective of race, ethnicity, nationality or sex.

A keystone of the pyramid is recognition by individuals that every person is pursuing their own well being and ought to have an equal opportunity to do so.

The subsequent stages in the construction of the pyramid are shaped by attitudes of principled tolerance at higher social levels.

And yet, if my idealized pyramid had only a foundation of acceptance and building blocks conditioned by tolerance, it would be unstable and even chaotic.

The mortar necessary to hold the structure together is a framework of democratically developed and sustained rule of law.

At each level of the pyramid – individual, local, national and international – acceptance and tolerance need to be held together by a legal structure that protects those rights, but also places limits on them.

There are many challenges. Not everyone, or every group, society, or religion accepts principled tolerance as a value that should guide beliefs, behaviors, and relations with others.

The world is some distance from universal acceptance of western-style democracy.

Some accept tolerance as a necessary evil, a practical requirement for relations with other individuals or communities.

Some who believe themselves to be tolerant in fact behave in intolerant ways.

Tolerance as a mere *modus vivendi*, simply as a way of getting through each day, is not sufficient to ensure that communities, including international ones, thrive under conditions of inevitable diversity.

From a long term perspective, in spite of many setbacks and shortcomings, the progress made by humanity has depended on individuals making difficult decisions to end unreasoned intolerance.

In most modern societies, disbelievers are no longer burned at the stake.

Part of the problem, however, is that practicing principled tolerance does not mean “anything goes.”

Drawing lines can be difficult.

The rule of law must be respected, and at times certain beliefs must be subordinated in a world governed by certain facts, whether by the laws of physics or the scarcity of resources.

Nothing in the tolerance pyramid suggests we should tolerate the violent or the oppressive, such as radical Islamists or Christian extremists who condemn even more moderate followers of their own faiths.

We learn to draw those lines at the foundation of the pyramid by starting with the value that individuals all have a right to pursue their own ends.

The solution, however, cannot be imposed from above; it must be built from below, through a combination of leadership, practice and education, starting early, before minds have been poisoned by prejudices and biases carried down from previous generations that have no constructive place in today’s world.

People may never all “try to love one another” as the Dave Clark Five beseeched in a 1960s hit song.

And, the tolerance pyramid is not a panacea. It guarantees neither the prevention of conflict nor the resolution of difficult and emotional questions.

But even in such cases, until we see that others have values and pursue ends that are as robustly important and valuable as our own, there can be no common ground on which such emotional disputes might be resolved.

I began today by talking a bit about my own personal journey of faith.

I then moved to a topic that grows out of my professional preoccupation with US-European relations.

My work on religion and the transatlantic relationship naturally carried me into consideration of the role of tolerance in international relations more generally.

I hope I have provided a sufficiently stimulating basket of ideas and perspectives to inspire your own reflections, judgments and conclusions, as we all move down the road on our journeys of faith.

I want to thank you for listening so patiently, and I look forward to learning from your comments and questions as we continue this dialogue.