Rome conference to explore Christianity’s contributions to freedom 1700 years after liberty first decreed for all faiths

*International Meeting on Christianity and Freedom Set for December 13-14, 2013*

NOVEMBER 7—From Cairo and Damascus to Tehran and Beijing, religious freedom is under siege, and Christianity—a faith that contributed decisively to the rise of religious liberty—now finds itself increasingly persecuted around the world.

Tragically, in the twenty-first century, most of the world’s people do not enjoy anything like religious freedom. Recent events in Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan are part of a global surge in religious persecution and terrorism, with victims from all religious traditions. Even in the West religious freedom is under growing pressure.

On December 13 and 14, an international conference on “Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives” will be held in Rome. Organized and sponsored by Georgetown University’s Religious Freedom Project, it will explore Christianity’s political, religious, and economic contributions to freedom—despite opposition and persecution for more than 2,000 years. The conference, co-sponsored by Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion, will present new findings from a two-year study by dozens of scholars from around the world.

The Sorbonne’s Rémi Brague, winner of the 2012 Ratzinger Prize, and His Beatitude Mar Louis Raphaël I Sako of Baghdad, patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldean Catholic Church, will deliver keynote addresses. Other speakers will include Baylor University President Ken Starr, former solicitor general of the United States, and Marcello Pera, former president of the Italian Senate.

Some of the topics addressed by new research include:

**How Many Christians Are Persecuted Today?**

- More than one of every five Christians in the world lives in states where they are likely to face persecution, and that number likely will rise to 600 million, nearly a quarter of the world’s Christians, by 2020, according to a comprehensive new analysis. Some of the fastest-growing traditions in global Christianity — such as Pentecostals and Independents — are under increasing risk of persecution.
How is Christianity Empowering Poor Women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America?

• Christian faith can play an empowering role in the lives of poor women in developing countries, according to a study based on more than 1,000 interviews on three continents. Women who participate in small faith-based networks are more likely to report domestic abuse, involve community leaders in solving family problems, and save money for family needs, including their children's education.

Christianity: A Straggler on the Road to Liberty?

• A new historical analysis challenges conventional wisdom that Christianity was on the wrong side of history—or a latecomer at best—in the struggle for freedom in the modern West. Instead, many Christians were innovators, not laggards, in the historical development of freedom.

What Impact are Coptic Christians having on Freedom in Egypt Today?

• The Coptic community contributes significantly to Egypt's civil and religious freedom, enriches its culture, and strengthens its economy, according to a new study based on dozens of interviews with Christian and Muslim Egyptians directly involved in the country's dramatic political upheavals over the past three years.

Summaries of these and other studies are available on the Religious Freedom Project website.

The conference coincides with the seventeen hundredth anniversary of Emperor Constantine’s historic Edict of Milan, which granted religious freedom to people of all faiths throughout the Roman Empire. Participating will be leaders from the Vatican and Rome’s other religious communities, government officials, diplomats, academics, and business leaders.

For more information, including a conference agenda, visit: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/rome.

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