



Transatlantic Christian Council

“Sustainable Freedom” Inaugural Conference



HEWLETT-PACKARD

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On December 4, 2013, the Transatlantic Christian Council (TCC) hosted its inaugural conference. The theme of the conference was “Sustainable Freedom: The Conversation between Christians and Secularists in the Post-Secular Age.” This theme aligns with the Council’s overall mission “to develop a transatlantic public policy network of European and North American Christians and conservatives in order to promote the civic good, as understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition on which our societies are largely based.”



CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS FILL THE ROOM AT THE CERCLE ROYAL GAULOIS IN BRUSSELS

Co-sponsored by the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Colson Center in Washington, D.C., and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Germany, the Transatlantic Christian Council conference was a cooperative and enterprising venture to collaborate with the foremost organizations devoted to exploring fundamental human questions.

Conference conversations were grounded in a basic understanding of human dignity. This concept is rooted in an openness to the idea of man as an image of God — endowed with the capacities for willfulness and reason, a creature and a sub-creator. And it is this understanding of the human person that served as the point of departure for working through all sorts of interesting questions of politics, economics, liberty, government, religion, and family.

The impressive line-up of speakers from America and Europe included: Anna Zaborska, Member of European Parliament; John O’Sullivan, Editor-at-Large, National Review; Os Guinness, Author and Social Critic; and Frits Bolkestein, a Former European Commissioner.



ANNA ZABORSKA



JOHN O’SULLIVAN



OS GUINNESS



FRITS BOLKESTEIN

Endeavoring to return the public debate to first principles, the speakers and participants discussed the foundations of Western civilization, the inheritance of tradition, the influence of Judeo-Christian principles on our society, the importance of fundamental freedoms for culture, and the proper roles for families and civil associations.

In addition to the keynote speakers, there were many panelists including: academics, think tank leaders, elected representatives, journalists and authors, and entrepreneurs.

These panelists attested to the strong interplay between theory and practice. Then, participants were able to think reflectively about philosophical questions as they apply to everyday life in the public sphere. There were three panel discussions including: “Human Rights and Human Nature,” “Religious Freedom: The Most Foundational Freedom under Threat,” and “The Moral Case for Free Markets.”



HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN NATURE PANEL

"How should Christians and secularists interact in the public square?"

"What is the basis of human dignity and human rights?"

"Why is religious freedom under threat in Europe and North America?"

"What are the ethics of the free market?"

The first panel, “Human Rights and Human Nature” brought to mind Edmund Burke’s insightful remark that human rights may be “incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned.” Panelists and participants grappled with the tension between individual and group rights, the challenges of defending the primacy of the right to life as the indispensable condition for all other rights, and the problems of the absence of an account of where human rights come from in such documents as the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The “Religious Freedom” panel was moderated by Eric Teetsel, Executive Director of the Manhattan Declaration. This declaration is an effort to “take a stand” on the sanctity of life, the dignity of marriage, and religious liberty. Other topics discussed by the panel included: homeschooling, anti-discrimination laws, school prayer, human rights commissions, multiculturalism, pluralism, healthcare, among others. The conference participants included Peter and Hazelmary Bull, a Christian couple from the UK, who recently lost a Supreme Court case over their refusal to host a gay couple at their Bed & Breakfast. Their presence and testimony at the conference motivated us to consider the

tension between matters of conscience and conventions of society by evaluating this particular case of religious accommodations clashing with literal accommodations.



The final panel on “The Moral Case for Free Markets” was moderated by Acton Institute President Father Robert Sirico. Father Sirico began by asking: Who is the human person who has the right to be treated in a particular way? What is man’s distinct place in creation? How do human persons accomplish their nature and fulfill their very being by their actions in the world, according to the facts

and conditions of existence in which they live? Continuing to think philosophically about the nature of the human person with respect to freedom, we can also ask: Who is the human person who is worthy of freedom and what sort of freedom is due to human persons according to their dignity and their nature?



KEYNOTE ADDRESSES AND PANEL PRESENTATIONS INCLUDED PERIODS OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

*Q: Where does freedom come from?
Who endows us with freedom? Is it us?*
- Participant

A: It's a gift. It's relational. It requires truth.
- Os Guinness

The Transatlantic Christian Council Inaugural Conference concluded with a wonderful reception during which the presenters and participants had an opportunity for further conversation and networking. After a full day of debate and discussion, the bridge-building between Europe and America continued. Participants left with new insights pertaining to all of the topics discussed and a better knowledge of dozens of think tanks and associations presently strengthening associational life. Everyone made new friends in the efforts to defend western civilization and preserve fundamental freedoms.

Please support the efforts of the Transatlantic Christian Council. Visit <http://www.tccouncil.org/> to learn more and to receive updates about upcoming conferences and initiatives.