

**Remarks of Professor William Wagner at the UK Parliament
Portcullis House - House of Commons, London UK
3 June 2009**

Distinguished members of parliament and honored guests: It is a great privilege to accept your invitation to speak here today on the importance of protecting free expression – and in particular, religious expression.

State sanctioned speech suppression inhibits a citizen from participating in the political and policy-making process. As we have heard from others this morning, it also involves state persecution of Christian citizens, precluding their serving in government at all. This is wrong.

Censuring an idea simply because the idea is informed by ancient sacred tenets prevents thousands of years of wisdom from informing the public ethic. A citizen who attempts to inform the public ethic should not be punished or prosecuted simply because the citizen's ideas are informed by sincerely held religious truths.

In a democracy, religious liberty and freedom of expression is not needed to protect the ideas of those with whom those in power agree – it is needed to protect those who express ideas with which those power do not agree. Thus, the test of a functioning moral democracy is not whether the government protects speech with which it agrees – it is whether it will protect expression it abhors. Instead of censoring or punishing speech, the answer, (at least in a democracy valuing freedom), must always be more speech.

When religious based ideas inform the public ethic, society benefits greatly. The idea that God created humans in His image, and that all human life has dignity, ended slavery and advanced the rights of women around the world. When government suppresses or punishes such expression, however, we get different results. Stalin murdered over 42 million. Mao Zedong murdered over 37 million. Hitler murdered over 20 million. And the list of atrocities goes on and on where those in power selectively pick and choose which citizen's views it will arbitrarily censure or punish.

Selective enforcement and punishment of a citizen's expression sends a bitter chill throughout the citizenry in a democracy. Government suppression of religious expression is never, therefore, a healthy thing for any democratic institution valuing good governance under the rule of law. Institutional integrity cannot exist without personal virtue. Good governance and civic institutional integrity rest on the virtue of its citizens. Religious ideas support and nurture this virtue and should, therefore, always be permitted within the marketplace of ideas.

Thank you – And may God bless your nation as you continue to consider these important matters.