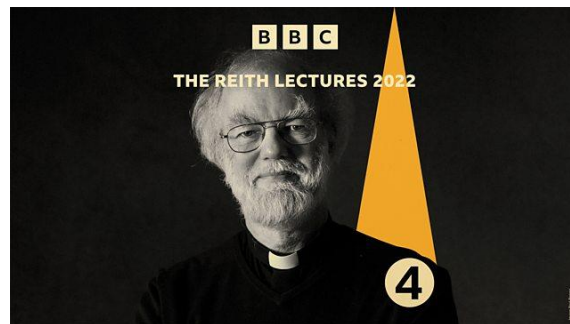




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The Reith Lectures 2022: The Four Freedoms



Lecture 2: Freedom of Worship

*Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea University's Singleton Campus
Swansea, Cardiff, South Wales, UK*

ANITA ANAND: Croeso cynnes i bawb i Ddarlith Reith 2022 – Welcome to the second of the 2022 BBC Reith Lectures, called “The Four Freedoms”. This series draws upon American President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s historic speech of 1941 where he argued: “There were certain freedoms which were fundamental to democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear.” We’re asking, “What do those freedoms mean to us now?”

Now, we are in South Wales at the Taliesin Arts Centre, it’s named after the ancient Welsh Bard, and this centre is set in the very heart of

Swansea University's Singleton Campus. It hosts arts and cultural events for the whole region and the University itself is home to 21,000 students.

Today's lecture will address what FDR called, "The Freedom of every person to worship God in his own way everywhere in the world." Our speaker has spent a lifetime not only thinking about this but also putting his thoughts into practice when he was the most senior figure in the Anglican Communion, so let's meet him. Will you please welcome our second BBC Reith Lecturer for 2022, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

ANITA ANAND: Welcome. And it was really interesting when I was sitting with you in the audience, you were looking down and saying, "This is my entire life flashing before my eyes," because you are very much a local lad aren't you?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Very much so, yes, yes. Lovely to be back.

ANITA ANAND: What does it mean to come back and deliver the Reith here in your home town?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Terrifying really because people will remember me when I was in short trousers, so to speak, and saying stupid things when I was small. So, I hope I may have grown up a bit since then, but you never know.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHING)

ANITA ANAND: Unbelievably, and it is very strange how time whips along. It is actually nearly a decade since you were Archbishop of Canterbury.

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: It is indeed, yes.

ANITA ANAND: I mean, I just wonder whether you look on that time and you miss it desperately, or do you feel sort of giddy with the freedom that you now have to say what you want and think what you like?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I think the “giddy with the freedom” phrase more or less captures it rather than lying awake at night thinking of how much I miss it.

ANITA ANAND: And has the job become more difficult do you think since you left?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: It certainly hasn't got any easier. I think you'd have to ask Justin Welby whether it had got more difficult, but I sense that the tensions are much the same and some of them are not easily resolvable in our lifetimes.

ANITA ANAND: Well, I know that some of those tensions are going to be the subject of your lecture, so if you will, join with me in welcoming our Reith Lecturer to the Lectern.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Wel noswaith dda i chi a diolch yn fawr am y gwahoddiad a diolch am fod yma heno.

Thank you very much indeed for being here, for the invitation to deliver the lecture. Anita, thank you for a very generous introduction. It's a pleasure and a privilege; a pleasure to be back in Swansea; a privilege to be able to deliver one of the Reith lectures.

And so to begin, let me set the scene in Pennsylvania. It's a row over land. A private oil company has seized some farmland to build a natural gas pipeline. The landowners are not happy and have gone to Court. So far, so familiar, but here's what's unusual, the farmland belongs to a Catholic women's religious order, and the nuns have argued that the pipeline violates their rights to liberty, specifically religious liberty. “Every day since October 2018,” said one of the

sisters, as fossil fuel and gas flows through our farmland so also flows Transco's blatant disregard and trampling of our religious beliefs. Really, some might ask. On the face of it it's a startling application of the language of religious freedom. The sisters are describing the legally authorised seizure of the field as an offence against religious liberty, because it forces the community into complicity with new fossil fuel exploitation. And they hold this to be contrary to their religiously grounded beliefs about environmental responsibility. Is this a credible argument? Is there really any problem here for the sisters' religious freedom? Surely no one is trying to deny them the liberty to believe what they want. So let's take a step back and look for a moment at the language involved.

This lecture is supposed to be about freedom of worship, but the vocabulary of human rights' discussions more often refers to freedom of religion and belief as one of the fundamental pillars of social liberty. Surely the real priority for an enlightened society is the freedom to follow our consciences. Why bring in worship? Well, this wording has its roots in a very specific historical setting. Most European nations in the century or so after the reformation restricted the public manifestation of religious conviction. In 16th Century England you might believe in, let's say devotion to the Saints, or the real presence of Jesus in the Mass, but if you gathered with others and held services in which you acted on these beliefs you'd be in trouble. And this was a problem because if the language of faith meant what it said then believing certain things to be true entail the obligation to act accordingly, whether in daily life or in shared worship. It's not much use being allowed to hold Catholic opinions but denied the possibility of going to Mass.

Now, as any Jew, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist would have confirmed, the notion that religious conviction as such is basically a private affair, was a problematic new idea. Religious commitment in non modern and non Western context requires actions, both moral and ritual, in which you say and show what you believe. Part of what you believe is that your purpose as a human being is to make visible something of who God is and what God has done. And whatever

caricatures may be around in the Western mind it makes no sense at all to say that you can be a Buddhist, say, simply in virtue of holding certain ideas. Something has to change in your visible behaviour in the rhythms and habits of your body.

Modern societies have settled for a kind of lukewarm tolerance, a recognition that within reasonable limits of public order people may conduct whatever rituals they please because none of this should impinge on the way they make significant decisions or order their civic and personal lives. But this gives the unmistakable impression that religious practice is essentially a sort of leisure activity, probably harmless, but definitely marginal to the main business of society. It's the kind of repressive tolerance that some radical social theorists of the '60s identified, a tolerance that undermines what it purports to allow. And this is where I want to argue that a lot more is involved; the controversial further dimension that the sisters in Pennsylvania were appealing to. But arguing for this perspective relates directly and perhaps unexpectedly to how far a self styled liberal society remains capable of asking itself serious critical questions.

Now people who follow a traditional religious discipline understand the whole of their human life to be tied up with the business of attuning oneself to, and communicating the nature of, the sacred. A Jew keeping the Sabbath is announcing that the rhythm of their week is shaped by a story which establishes how God relates to the world. Renouncing any kind of active business for one day of the week keeps us aware that we do not always have to maximise the use of time for our own safety, advantage or profit. Quite the contrary. We are obliged to remember for 24 hours or so our unconditional dependence, a dependence on a grace that we have not earned or created for ourselves. The same kind of perspective will be at work in how a Muslim understands keeping Ramadan, the self restraint and generous arms' giving expected Ramadan display the crucial conviction about human life, and the sacred environment in which it takes place.

So the practices involved are more than simply occasional acts of decorous or picturesque religious ceremony. In these cases they alter the Jewish or Muslim individuals' engagement with society, and this might prompt society at large to try and restrict their practices when they become inconvenient.

Broadening the picture a bit, most of us will remember the case of a Coptic Christian from Egypt working for an airline. Uniform rules prohibited her wearing a cross around her neck. She argued that for her tradition the wearing of a cross was not an optional bit of decoration but a statement of faithfulness on the part of a disadvantaged and harassed minority. And the Pennsylvanian nuns are objecting that the integrity of their actual physical witness to their belief, their freedom to communicate what they hold to be true of God's relation to the world is fatally compromised if their property is forcibly used in a way which contradicts what they hold to be true.

Well, try thinking of worship in this sort of context. Not just as an occasional public ceremony but as the appropriate real world response to and expression of commitment to a certain kind of supposed truth, a truth which determines the options we have for relating to one another as persons in society. If this makes sense then freedom of worship is an intrinsic aspect of the freedom to manifest belief which is the phrasing used in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And manifesting belief it seems is not just about being able to say what you think in abstract terms, it's not even about your sacred rituals being more or less tolerated; it's about the freedom to conduct yourself in a certain way, understanding your pattern of life as communicating something more than just your individual wants or feelings because it's answerable to something more than just your own judgment or just the prevailing social consensus. And it may indeed be challenging for that consensus or majority opinion as it is challenging for your own individual comfort or preference. Now this is where things can become really complicated. Let's start at the simpler end.

We can tell stories of how this understanding of freedom fuels and motivates resistance to gross injustice, like that of Maria Skobstova, a Russian Émigrés in Paris, who became a nun and worked with both Russian and Jewish refugees in the 1930s. She would speak of how the liturgy of the church, its solemn public worship, should leak out of the church door and dictate the priorities of life in the wider world. And this was what led her to increasingly risky ventures in saving Parisian Jews during the German occupation and led eventually to her arrest and execution in Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1944.

Or again, in the South Africa of the 1950s the Anglican authorities, rather slowly and reluctantly as you might expect from good Anglicans, decided that they could not operate schools for the African population under Apartheid law. If they reorganised these schools on the basis of racial discrimination they would be actively promoting a belief which they completely repudiated. So they closed their schools rather than betray their conviction.

So far so good, but what about the issues that are more immediate just at the moment? What about the Evangelical Registrar who will solemnise same sex marriages? What about the legal allowances made for Catholic doctors who will not perform abortions? Just how disruptive can the public manifestation of convictions be allowed to become in a diverse society?

Well questions like these have become weaponised in the current culture wars raging across North Atlantic societies in particular, in ways that more or less rule out nuanced exploration of what's going on. So again, it helps to pause for breath and draw some necessary distinctions.

One of the most neglected points of traditional moral theology is the recognition of the rights of consciences even when we think they're misinformed or misdirected. It won't do to demonise those with inconvenient consciences as automatically monstrous and oppressive. You can't simply ascribe deliberately evil intention to someone who disagrees on principle with the principles that you think

are self-evident. Think for example of the debates over abortion or physician-assisted dying. The tendency in quite a lot of contemporary liberal rhetoric is to characterise people with objections to such practices as just being enthral to archaic and arbitrary rules committed to indefensible models of control and coercion exercised over the bodies of others.

But of course, on the other side we're familiar with traditional believers describing the options they disapprove of as simply the fruit of unbridled individualism and undisciplined self will. Both perspectives are equally unreasonable and finding any meeting ground will require recognition that an opponent just might have comparable values and goals or at least values and goals that make some sense and allows some mutual exploring. And this cuts both ways of course. The person who holds on to a traditionally sanctioned religious morality must avoid simply mirroring the mistakes of the dogmatic liberal using tactics like the violent intimidation of others and efforts to reverse legal decisions endorsed by clear majorities, because these poison the wells of honest moral argument.

Antiabortion activists should be wary of unequivocally celebrating the United States Supreme Court's recent reversal of the Row v Wade Decision which have granted a Federal right to the termination of pregnancy. They should be wary of endorsing methods used to achieve this result that involve literal or procedural violence, because this invites equally non consensual, violent, absolutist reprisals if and when the political balance of power alters.

And again, in the case of individuals seeking optouts on the grounds of conscience, like the Catholic doctor refusing to perform an abortion, they would be on shaky ground if they demanded a wider right to prevent others from acting or to restrict public access to legally established liberties. A legal exemption which allows an employee to avoid directly performing an action believed to be intrinsically wrong is one thing, but it's clearly different from allowing the employee to refuse to grant simple legal recognition to choices made by others that are wholly within the law. Arguably like the

registrar refusing to authorise a same sex marriage the degrees of agency or involvement are different.

So it's a complex picture, but essentially when the shouting has died down what's at stake in all this is the freedom to believe that certain human actions and policies derive their goodness or rightness not from consensus or even legality but from something more lasting, something about the way things are, and the freedom to organise your actions, public and private on that basis. It's the freedom to see your human choices and habits as part of an attempt to discover some kind of fit with a reality that is quite outside human control. It's the ethics as tied up with a process of discovering what is lastingly appropriate for the kind of beings that human beings are in the kind of world that this world is.

Of course, post-enlightenment societies are habitually uncomfortable with this language, for they quite understandably see a risk in any kind of appeal to authority that doesn't rest on some kind of publicly accountable process, like democratically decided laws. It risks becoming an appeal to a privileged insight that can't be challenged and so it can become another form of violent and coercive behaviour.

We can't forget that the claim to transcendent authority was a crucial element in the protection of social privilege guaranteeing that other voices could be silenced, and the liberating of such other voices, women, sexual minorities, ethnic and ideological others, has been an unequivocally positive aspect of post-enlightenment culture. And yet we are reminded more or less daily how appallingly incomplete that liberation still is whether our eyes turn to Iran or nearer home. Indeed, the history of the last couple of Centuries suggests that the rational obviousness of our modern morality is a good deal more fragile than we might like to think. It isn't quite enough to appeal to self evident truths or to the steady advance of ethical sensitivity through history. The crucial belief that there are moral truths independent of how things happen to turn out or the current of cultural agreement, or the prevailing majority view at any one point, this is what makes moral argument possible, because this is what

allows us to ask of any prevailing consensus, but is it just, does it actually guarantee human beings what is absolutely due to them? Anything else takes us straight back to a more refined variety of coercion by majorities.

So, when the religious believer says: “I claim the right to dissent because I claim the right to shape my life according to convictions that show me how things really are,” such a person is in effect saying to the majority or consensus view: “Give me some arguments to justify your view that go beyond the sheer weight of numbers and what most of you happen to feel.” The power of numbers and of shared feeling may guarantee that something becomes and remains technically lawful, but if lawfulness itself is no more than what the majority happens to be happy with there will never be a rationale for criticism and resistance, there will never be a process of further learning.

And there’s the rub, we have learned our convictions through history. We can’t appeal with any credibility to natural and indisputable evidence. A huge range of cultural factors and conflicts has brought us to the positions we hold, and many of those factors are based at best pretty loosely on consistent argument. And we have learned what we have learned because certain older consensus views have been challenged and to a greater or lesser degree argued down. The end of slavery. The revolution in the status of women. The recognition of same sex attraction as something other than a pathology. All these things required substantial shifts in what was taken for granted. They required something of the energy of absolute conviction, the sense that some sorts of inequality and discrimination were nakedly at odds with human dignity. Or to put it another way, they required some deeply grounded intuitions about what were and were not fitting ways of treating members of the human race. And what brought these intuitions to light was more often than we regularly suppose something like religious conviction, sometimes literally so, but it is equally true of some of the most overwhelming forces opposing radical change were also fuelled by religious conviction. True and unsurprising, because human cultures work like

that. Religious belief may be transcendently justified but is also in practice a human culture, that's to say, it is itself engaged in learning. What is distinctive about it is the strength of its belief that it's dealing with aspects of humanity in the world that are not up for negotiation and can't be voted into irrelevance. And this may be welcome reinforcement to modern liberal ethics when certain topics are in view and much less welcome with other matters.

Green Nuns in Pennsylvania are one thing, supposedly homophobic registrars are another. But the main thing is that the presence within a society of people with strong commitments about what is due to human dignity puts a certain kind of pressure on the whole social environment, a pressure to argue for and justify what society licences or defends in terms that go beyond popular consensus alone. In other words, it helps to guarantee that argument about issues from environmental responsibility to sexual politics will have an element of real moral debate, debate about the kind of beings human beings are.

The State may well shape its legislation on the basis of what the majority will be able to live with. Fair enough, but if this is the only or the dominant consideration there will be no element of critical energy in public debate, the sort of critical energy that can actually challenge consensus and change the law on the basis of a developing sense of what is due to humanity as such.

This is perhaps why that great 19th Century historian and political moralist Lord Acton claimed that "religious freedom was the cornerstone of all political freedoms." He was arguing I think that religious freedom rested on the conviction that human beings have a nature endowed with intrinsic dignity, intrinsic qualities, a location in the world and a responsibility to something more than what existing forms of power might find convenient. And he implies that this conviction is what allows the very idea of political argument about the common good and open debate about whether certain forms of governance adequately respect human dignity to get off the ground. Very simply, it guards against absolutizing the status quo.

Conscientious descent and ongoing public moral debate are part of the life blood of a viable and critical society. If we drive out any element in society which makes its decisions and shapes its policies on the grounds of convictions about what is simply given in the human situation about what the ultimate context is of human life and experience, society is less likely to flourish. A society may be secular in its procedures and its law may be impartial as far as any specific religious ethic is concerned, but it will still need the argumentative grit of the worshipping mentality to keep it asking moral questions and not reducing those questions to issues about majority opinion. This surely is one of the most important distinctions between a fully lawful democracy and a majoritarian tyranny whether religious or secular.

And if what I have suggested here is right, religious liberty involves the recognition of the freedom to worship in the extended sense of shaping a life in public in response to what are believed to be the pressures of a reality beyond the immediate social context.

But it would be wrong to conclude this discussion without a word about the significance of worship in the most familiar sense. The freedom to spend time in attention to something held to be mysterious, nurturing, elusive and sometimes frustrating, tantalising and inexhaustible: that's the freedom of worship. It means the freedom of a contemplative Carmelite nun to gaze in silence at the altar for an hour. The freedom of the Jew on Shabbat. The freedom of a whole community gathered for an hour or two to sing, listen and articulate what is longed for.

It is you could say an extreme version of the freedom we encounter in music or theatre, the freedom that comes from permission not to be useful or productive, but just to be human and to allow that humanity to come for a moment more fully into focus. For the religious believer such a coming into focus is inseparable from standing in a certain light, trusting in a certain presence, simply looking into a darkness that is paradoxically illuminating and generates new vision.

The secular observer is free to see this as a waste of time, yet limiting or abolishing such timewasting is an essential violent project because it shuts down vital areas of human imagination, the sense of responsibility to something more than naked power, the sense of irony that allows human power to be put into perspective, the sense of hope that reminds us that the way things happen to me today is not set in stone. And this mixture of responsibility, irony and hope creates what's been described by one modern philosopher as "a difficult liberty, the freedom to keep alert to the double dangers of modernity." One danger is the dominance of an external authority that claims universal and final rationality, the authority at worst of fascism and communism. And the other danger is the sanctifying of an inner authority of individual authenticity and ambition.

Religious liberty, the freedom of worship helps to make political liberty difficult in this constructive and good sense. When it fully understands what it's about it will not be looking for a religious consensus which itself can become an agent of coercion and control, it will simply seek to leave the question there for the human imagination. What if there are priorities radically unconcerned with success or profit or popularity? What if the deepest human dignity is visible in the sovereign freedom to adore and delight? What would human society look like if that were true? Difficult, yes, but what if the alternative is the frozen conformity of some imagined end of history where no unsettling moral questions could ever be asked?

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSES)

ANITA ANAND: Thank you so much. First of all, I'm sure a lot of people will be astonished at some of the stories that you've told this evening that they don't know about and one that sticks in my mind is the Green nuns versus the oil companies, I mean who's winning in that?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: The Court is still looking at it. The oil company is clearly rather worried and worried about the precedent that a judgment might set.

ANITA ANAND: Right. I was really interested in your choice, your very careful choice of words, I mean, you talked about this lukewarm tolerance in a somewhat disparaging way, but I wonder whether the religious freedom that you're demanding can only exist in a pool of lukewarm tolerance because otherwise, you know, it's the Goldilocks zone, if you like otherwise it's too hot or it's too cold, that may not be perfect but it's the best that you've got.

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Yes. I think that there are worse options than tolerance certainly in our society, but my worry is when two things happen, one is when tolerance itself becomes the only moral value that really survives in discussion and when people talk about moral education in school or inter-faith dialogue, the word 'tolerance' seems to carry a huge amount of weight and I'm not sure it's load-bearing in quite that way, we need something a little bit more robust which leads me to the second point which is, my worry about the lukewarmness is that it can be simply a patronising, marginalising strategy that says, "Well, if a few eccentrics are so determined to carry on these outmoded and outrageous practices and beliefs we can probably squeeze them in somewhere and hope they die off." It's the granny flat view of religious tolerance.

ANITA ANAND: It's the granny flat of religious tolerance, so that's (34:32), you do have a rather wonderful way with words. A lot of what I was very taken with is the examples that you gave where the power dynamic there's a real disparity where it is a State or it is a force of law or something versus the individual, but what about when the power dynamic is kind of similar? So real world examples, you gave a few in your lecture, but what about the gay couple that wants to check into a BnB that's run by a very religious Christian family and it goes against their beliefs to allow two same sex people to sleep in the same bed...what then?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Mm. That's a case where I find my sympathies are more enlightened than otherwise, if you see what I mean, in the part of the world that we talk about.

ANITA ANAND: Not really. Explain?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I mean more in line with what people would regard as a kind of enlightenment consensus, in other words what I mean is, that the power to deny somebody what is legally available to them is not a power I think religious people ought to be seeking to exercise. I try to draw the distinction in the lecture between someone saying, "I don't want to be made to directly perform an action which is against my conviction." I'm not sure that's the same as being asked to facilitate somebody else's decision or at least accept somebody else's decision, and the BnB case seems to me something which falls short of actually being directly complicit in an action. There's a debate about that but that's my own instinctive response there.

ANITA ANAND: Okay. Thank you. We're going to open it up to the wonderful Swansea audience here.. So, yes, first question over here please.

CHRISTINE ALLEN: Hello. I'm Christine Allen. I'm the Director of CAFOD the Catholic Development Agency, and thank you for the lecture, Rowan. I'm really intrigued because I think in some areas of the public sphere there is a degree of acceptance of religious and faith voices, but less so with others; I'm thinking particularly when church and religious leaders spoke out against the government's Rwanda plans or on the rising use of foodbanks or even of failure as a country to keep our climate change and aid promises, where we've been told in no uncertain terms to, "stick to our knitting," what's your reflection on that?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I've never been a great fan of knitting myself and I think there are perhaps other kinds of knitting we ought to be taking up like knitting the social fabric a bit more securely, but the point's a good one because it seems to me that these are areas precisely where people with strong convictions about what's due to human beings can ask questions that might otherwise be muffled in a calculus of advantage and disadvantage that doesn't really look into

the eyes of the people who are actually experiencing what we're deciding about, and to be honest that is my greatest worry that so many decisions are made by people who generalise and abstract the people they are speaking of.

One of the things which quite often religious leaders of all communities have been able to do in a succession of public controversies around the migration issue, around poverty and so forth, has been to say, "Well, we do have some local first-hand experience; we do have some narratives of how this works and how this feels, and what doesn't work," and we need to know that those particulars –are somewhere in the mix.

What I'm saying is, not that people ought automatically to do what religious communities say or even automatically proactively to seek out what religious communities have to offer, but that there should be a place where those voices can be part of a public discussion.

ANITA ANAND: But what is the situation at the moment?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: In my experience, very varied. It depends a lot on the politician, but the thing is, that even if politicians do not listen, even if the reaction is a dismissive one, "What business is it of yours?" "knitting" and so on, nonetheless the voice is there in the public debate and that matters.

ANITA ANAND: Do you know, I spy with my little eye, and you know I'm coming to you, in our front row we have the first Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford here, do you mind if I just put you on the spot?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

ANITA ANAND: I mean, it's too late to say you do mind now.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

ANITA ANAND: What do you think the relationship should be between those who govern and those who deal in matters more spiritual?

MARK DRAKEFORD: Well you don't want it to be characterised by a frankness, it ought to be characterised by a willingness to listen, and it ought to be characterised by a consciousness of the unequal distribution of power in our society, because if I'd had a question for Rowan rather than a comment, it would have been to ask him how he thinks that the sort of freedoms that he has so persuasively set out, how can you actually make those (but 44:46) in a society whereas R. H. Tawney said, "Freedom for the carp is death to the minnow."

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: That's exactly the kind of question which I think I would want to leave in people's minds from this evening. I wish I knew how to do it, which is possibly one reason why I'm not a member of your Cabinet...

But in all seriousness, I don't think that religious professionals have automatically a charism of infallibility around political questions, but one of the things which I would think any self-respecting religious community ought to be pressing all the time is just this issue of power. We live in Wales in the UK, in the world generally, in a context of colossally inequitable power and to talk about freedom in this context, especially freedoms that are focused on the –consumer liberties of a rather small, sliver of the global population sounds a bit hollow, so I would want to say with any issue start your analysis by saying, "Where does the power lie? Who has the advantage and what are they frightened of?" and then you may begin to get somewhere.

ANITA ANAND: It's radio so you don't see this, but I see a host of heads nodding in agreement. Let's take another question here.

SARAH HARVEY-SHAROUSI: Okay. Thank you. It's Sarah Harvey-Sharousi. I'm the daughter of a reluctant Muslim and a confused mum, born in Brighton but proud to be living in Wales for 33 years. Do you think the church is globally – and that's a bit unfair isn't it –

but do you think the church is really making enough of a case for the freedom of worship?

ANITA ANAND: Can I just come back.. what is in your mind when you're asking the question?

SARAH HARVEY-SHAROUSI: I love worship, I'm on the happy-clappy end of the Christian spectrum. I love worship. I love describing myself as a Christian as I have since I was about 13. I don't hear the church's voice loud enough in the media at the moment, it frustrates me.

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: One of the things that I often want to say to others in the church and in other religious communities is, that the worst message we can convey to the society around us is embarrassment and anxiety and quite often religious communities convey that, "We're worried and we'd like everybody to know just how worried we are," and what I've been talking about in terms of trying to take part actively and even transformingly in public conversation is I would say the opposite of that. We're not there because we're worried, we're there because we believe we have some gift to offer into the conversation.

SARAH HARVEY-SHAROUSI: Amen.

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: And that's what motivates. So, if the question for systems of power is something like, "What are you afraid of?" something not dissimilar might come back to the churches and maybe other religious communities, "What are we afraid of?" Actually we are quite grateful for the horizons in which we live that we believe given to us. We believe that there is something about this in through which humanity grows into a fuller, more human condition. We'd like to talk about this. We'd like to share this. We don't want to beg any questions. We don't want to impose, but that's why we're there."

ANITA ANAND: I really interested, this global idea. Are there some parts of the Anglican community that are fully engaged with having

the conversation and other parts that do not want to have the conversation under any circumstances? And I'm thinking, of course you know I'm thinking about gay marriage and I'm thinking of the pushback that's coming from Anglican churches in Africa where they don't want to discuss it, it's done, it's dusted, that's the way it is.

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Yes we are of course in a very – often a very embittered, very polarised conversation about sexuality within the worldwide Anglican community. What I often thought was my primary job when I was in the job I used to do, was to try to begin to get the common ground of accepting simply the legal freedom and the human dignity of people agreed. We may disagree about – we do disagree – about the ethics of certain actions and lifestyles. I wish it were otherwise but that's there. Can we then move forward at all on saying there is a possibility of saying we ought to be resisting oppressive dehumanising laws which put the lives and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people at risk? Can we push back on that together?

ANITA ANAND: Is gay marriage ever going to be accepted by the Anglican Church in your lifetime?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: It already has been accepted by quite a few Anglican churches around the world, hence some of our problems. I think the trajectory is very much in one direction at the moment. So, we shall see. I don't know is the simple answer. I see where the trajectory seems to be going in numbers, in generational attitudes and so forth...so change would not surprise me.

AZIM AHMED: Azim Ahmed, Muslim Council of Wales. So, I want to pick up on the conversation of how do we defend and advocate for religious freedoms beyond good moral debates because effectively that still in a way appeals to the majority and if not the majority to the State. So how can we as communities, especially those which are on the lower end of the power spectrum, defend those rights, attain those rights and keep those rights?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: That is exactly where we need a more robust, more three-dimensional view of what religious practice really means. As you say, it's not too difficult for the secular world in general to think, "Well religious beliefs help people to be nice." I would want to say, "Religious belief helps people to be serious, imaginative, even courageous," and that seriousness, that imagination, that courage, may sometimes be an uncomfortable presence in society, but a confident response is to say: "Well, here we are with a reality which is indeed not the same as the secular environment, it's liveable with, at least we are still trying to work that out and how it can manage, but it's not simply about franchising the work of moral debate and social care to religious communities, it is taking those communities for what they are and seeing where we go with that."

A kind of intelligent and educated respect

ANITA ANAND: Yes, the woman in the orange please...yeah..

CHRISTINE ABASS: Hi I'm Christina Abass, and I'm the high representative on the Interfaith Council for Wales, and I'm sitting in front of it in the huge font and it says, "Freedom of Worship." But I don't know how many people particularly children and young people actually know they have this freedom because I don't think they're experiencing worship. How do we bring that alive?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: That's a wonderful question, and I think it relates directly to what we've just been talking about. I've said that to see what human faces look like engaged in worship is a crucial educational element in familiarising young people, students, with what humanity does and how humanity works. And again, I worry about the way in which sometimes religious education focuses on ideas rather than practice, on system rather than habit, and if I were impossibly trying to design a religious studies syllabus I would want to take people to witness worship a lot and say:

"This is what it looks like. Don't panic.

This will seem very strange in any number of ways. Okay. Get used to it. It's like your first time at a concert or your first time in the theatre. Concerts are very strange behaviours. Theatre is a very eccentric thing. There's somebody up there talking, why can't I interrupt or ask questions? Ssh. The religious worship is a very strange, a very eccentric thing. Alright, get used to it, it's something human beings do and just as at a good concert you might want to watch the faces around you.

ANITA ANAND: Thank you. The woman in green...

KATHY RIDDICK: Thank you. Kathy Riddick from Wales Humanists. Now we talked about education and daily acts of Christian worship are a legal requirement in all of our schools and children don't have the right to withdraw themselves from it. Is that law not denying freedom of worship by failing to uphold the freedom to not worship?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I think that there's a balance here between what I was talking about are the exposure of young people to the human fact of religiousness, religious practice, religious worship, and the imposition of forms of worship. My sense of how a lot of schools manage this is that they generally negotiate that boundary fairly well. I know that's not everybody's experience but you'd expect me to say that being who I am. I think it's fair that we continue to press the question of how far such daily acts of worship are in any way manipulative or coercive, keep an eye on that, I think it's important that the presence of religious activity of some kind within the education institution that's built in just as part of an education literacy. That needs to be held onto. And I suppose if I'm honest I wouldn't go to the stake ultimately for daily worship of a distinctively Christian kind because we're in a society where not a great many people involved in education have the skill, the enthusiasm or the commitment to make that worship anything other than formal and rather off-putting.

ANITA ANAND: Going back to our Humanist's question there, what do you think the balance is, and what would you have it be?

KATHY RIDDICK: We now have a new curriculum in Wales where we have religion values and ethics and it's inclusive of Christianity and other religious beliefs but also non religious philosophical convictions. It's objective and pluralistic and that allows that engagement with different faiths and beliefs without any form of enforced worship, and there is experiences at the heart of that new curriculum. I don't see why we need to hold onto a law requiring daily active Christian worship when we have such a strong curriculum being rolled out.

ANITA ANAND: Okay. Thank you.

TIMOTHY CHO: Thank you. My name is Timothy Cho, an Open Doors Spokesperson for North Korea. It took me, over 5,200 miles and 34 years escaping from North Korea to come to this lecture and address this question for you today. I am very grateful.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

TIMOTHY CHO: Thank you. As someone who grew up in totalitarian North Korea and who was persecuted and imprisoned four times during my journey, I understand where what it's like not to have religious or political freedom. As you look at the world today isn't it difficult not to be pessimistic that political freedom which Lord Acton said: "is the basis of religious freedom" is under threat and we know there are over 360 million persecuted globally for their faith around the world. If that is right, what role should the church and religious people play?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Thank you. And thank you very much for being willing to contribute from an experience which I think is probably unique in this room. Thank you. You're right that at the moment the statistics around religious persecution globally are deeply depressing. I sense that this is an escalating problem, is one that ought to worry us more than it does at times. It's important in that connection I think particularly for people of all faiths to make

sure that they're there for all others. I remember discussions that we used to have, again back in the old job, between people from different...

ANITA ANAND: Is it the job that dare not speak its name?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: Yes. I need trigger warnings.

ANITA ANAND: Okay.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: But what we used to talk about was, can we have sufficient of an interfaith consensus that when – if the Mosque is attacked, the Christian Jewish communities will be there. If the Synagogue is attacked, the Muslim and Christian communities will be there. If a church is attacked, the Muslim and Jewish communities will be there. And you can extend that to other communities but to make sure that we are all there for each other in that context. Now that means I think globally looking at all the varieties of persecution even the ones we'd rather not remember. It means for I think Christian advocates being crystal clear that the situation, let's say of Christies in Northern Nigeria, is appalling. It means looking what's happening to Muslims in large parts of India and so on and so on. And also not to forget the very significant role of the spiritual, social and political reality of Indigenous peoples. We don't often bring them into the picture do we, and yet of course part of the outrage of the treatment of Indigenous peoples in North America and Australia...it's about their freedom to manifest a set of convictions about the balance of the world, a really integral identity which is neither just religious nor just political or social, and I would want to put them into this religious freedom spectrum as well as part of the problem, and to help people understand that the oppression and marginalisation of Indigenous people is a religious issue not just a political one so we need to be there for them too.

ANITA ANAND: Thank you. Question here..

AMANDA RUSSELL-JONES: Amanda Russell-Jones. I'm a student and teacher of Theology and History. Bearing in mind what you've said about power and the differentials in power, in the present day do you think that the Monarch of the United Kingdom should be styled defender of "the" faith?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: The King said famously in the past that he wanted to be defender of faith or faiths and lots of people want to know is that a departure from tradition? I think what he's doing is pretty much what his mother did which is to say, "Alright, we've inherited this title. What it means in practice is making sure that the church of which I am nominally the head as Monarch keeps the doors open as much as it can for other faith communities" and that's part of what defending the faith means, it's defending the faith of those who need defence, advocacy, friendship, solidarity within the broader community.

I'm not particularly in favour of unscrambling that bit of the Monarch's job description, not just out of historical nostalgia because after all it's meant quite a lot of different things in its time, it meant very different things at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign and at the end of it, for example. But I would say that in the sense that Queen Elizabeth very explicitly gave it, especially late in her reign, I would expect the new King to follow through..perhaps helping to hold that institution, the established church in England, to account for its involvement with, responsibility for and advocacy around the needs of all faith communities, and that makes a lot of sense to me.

ANITA ANAND: Thank you. And over here.

ANDREW BROWN: Thank you. Andrew Brown, a mere Journalist. You've talked a lot about moral disagreement but the problem in the world is moral conflict when these non-negotiable views come up against one another and the problem then is not how do we talk

about our problems but what we do about them? So what would you do about ISIS or about Vladimir Putin?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I don't actually believe that ISIS or Vladimir Putin ought to be indulged, included with, yielded to. I do actually believe that the Government of Ukraine is right to resist invasion, and have said so, and would say it again as loudly as you'd like me to. and I do believe that in a good deal of what I've been saying the defence of those who are vulnerable is something I'd want to see as fairly basic in the moral spectrum. Dialogue as far as possible, search for common values etc, I don't think that mandates an indifference about the needs of those most at risk.

ANITA ANAND: Okay. But just to develop that, it's been an interesting question. I mean it does ask a lot of an individual but just to take that further, if there is a State, say Saudi Arabia which executes people, would you advise a government to say, "Actually, don't do business with that State because what they're doing is against what is right and what is good and what we all should believe in"?

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS: I'd hope very much that what happens in somewhere like Saudi Arabia does affect how we respond. I don't think we should go and invade and impose values, we've tried that and look what a success that was in parts of the Middle East. I do think it's right to use pressure, whatever diplomatic and economic pressure we can to change the moral ethos of other States.

ANITA ANAND: That is all that we have time for, unfortunately. Thank you so much Dr Rowan Williams. Next time we're going to be in Glasgow in Scotland with the writer Darren McGarvey who is going to be addressing: Freedom from want: How do we deal with poverty and make society fairer? But for now, thank you to our wonderful audience here in Swansea and a very special thank you to our second Reith Lecturer for this Four Freedom Series, Doctor Rowan Williams.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)