



## Eastern Hosts ISI Conference

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On Feb. 17, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) hosted guests from University of Pennsylvania, Haverford College, John Jay Institute, Alliance Defending Freedom and various other organizations. It was a time to discuss and ponder ideas of liberty and religion and their intersection. The weekend started with a debate on Christian libertarianism between Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute and Dr. James Wilson of Villanova University. Some key arguments of the debate were that libertarianism fails to take into account the humanity of persons and that virtue requires freedom.

Saturday morning started with a lecture from Bandow about religious liberty internationally and the persecuted church. He explained that “by numbers, Christians are the most persecuted religion globally, but it is not the only religion that is persecuted around the world.” One lasting thought that Bandow brought up was this: “statistics are easy to talk about, but there is a real human suffering.”

Dr. Jeffery Ventrella of Alliance Defending Freedom followed with a lecture entitled “What’s God Got to Do With It?” He traced the religious DNA of our nation from the Declaration of Independence to our current politics. Ventrella thinks that this topic is of the utmost importance because “if you can control what people perceive about the past, you can control what people think about the present and future.”

Next, lawyers Jonathan Christman and Nathan Fox spoke about the current Supreme Court landscape and threats to religious liberty. They outlined the current laws protecting religious liberty. Christman explained that “religious liberty is more than being able to say, ‘merry Christmas’ and ‘happy Easter.’” They also gave an introduction to ISI alumnus Judge Neil Gorsuch, who has been nominated to replace Justice Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court. Both speakers emphasized the importance of diversity of ideas in the political realm.

After lunch, our very own Dr. Chris Butynskyi led a discussion about classical virtue and freedom in the Modern Age. There was a lively discussion about whether strict rules of conduct can make someone virtuous or if freedom is required. Students, faculty and other guests voiced their opinions on this question in real-world examples.

Ventrella closed the conference with a lecture entitled “From Telos to Technos.” He explained that a teleological culture is one that is pushed by the purpose of man, focused on human flourishing, while a technological culture is one that seeks to cultivate and multiply new opportunities for society to progress, centered on pragmatism. Ventrella stressed that a technological culture must be directed by teleology.

It was a refreshing change of pace to engage in this important conversation with our neighboring institutions.