



# Religious Pluralism, Religious Freedom, and the Limits of Tolerance in Three Tolerant Societies

Prof. Dr. Paul Rasor

Centre for  
Religion,  
Conflict and  
the Public  
Domain  
Seminar Series

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Zittingzaal, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies,  
Oude Boteringestraat 38



The Netherlands, Canada, and the United States have long been regarded as among the world's most tolerant societies, sharing a deep commitment to pluralism and religious freedom. Yet as religious and cultural diversity continue to increase as a result of immigration patterns and other factors, all three societies have had to face hard questions about national self-understanding and the limits of tolerance. In this talk, Dr. Rasor will compare how the courts in these three countries have responded to the constitutional issues of religious freedom that emerge from the inevitable conflicts generated by our increasing religious pluralism.

This comparative discussion will be framed by reference to two models of religion-state relations and two models of religious tolerance. Against this background, Dr. Rasor will examine four legal issues: accommodation of religious difference, religious group autonomy, public funding of religious schools, and religious hate speech. These issues reveal potential conflicts among our most basic values and therefore create tensions in constitutional law. The three countries adopt similar approaches to some issues and widely divergent approaches to others. Yet these issues raise a deeper question: Whether our existing models

of religious tolerance are adequate for responding to current pluralistic realities.

*Paul Rasor is Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk, Virginia. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in theology and religious studies, and his Juris Doctor degree (J.D.) from the University of Michigan Law School. He has taught law at Washburn University School of Law and the University of Texas School of Law, and has taught theology and religious studies at Harvard University, Andover Newton Theological School, and Pendle Hill Quaker Study Center. He has received teaching awards from two universities. Dr. Rasor has published widely in both law and theology. He is the author of *Reclaiming Prophetic Witness: Liberal Religion in the Public Square* (Boston: Skinner House, 2012) and *Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century* (Boston: Skinner House, 2005), and co-editor of *From Jamestown to Jefferson: The Evolution of Religious Freedom in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011). He is a member of the International Advisory Board for the Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen.*

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