



Department of Justice

REMARKS OF

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AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA
1992 HUMANITARIAN AWARD DINNER

MAY 31, 1992
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA

THANK YOU, RABBI SHERER, FOR YOUR KIND REMARKS. IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO BE HERE TONIGHT WITH AGUDATH ISRAEL ON ITS 70TH ANNIVERSARY AND SO MANY OUTSTANDING LEADERS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF TORAH SAGES; DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AND HONOREES.

IT IS A HIGH HONOR FOR ME TO RECEIVE THIS YEAR'S HUMANITARIAN AWARD. THE VALUE OF AN AWARD IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE CHARACTER OF THE ORGANIZATION PRESENTING IT. AND THAT IS WHY, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, I TRULY APPRECIATE AND CHERISH THIS AWARD.

I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH YOU BRIEFLY TONIGHT ABOUT TWO PROBLEMS WHICH I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT. THE FIRST IS THE ALARMING RISE IN ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS AND OTHER HATE CRIMES. SECOND, IS THE CRUMBLING OF TRADITIONAL VALUES IN OUR SOCIETY. I BELIEVE THAT THESE PROBLEMS ARE RELATED, AND THAT THE SOLUTION TO BOTH REQUIRES REINVIGORATING THE STRONG RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TRADITION OF THIS COUNTRY.

OUR FOUNDING FATHERS RECOGNIZED THAT MORALITY WAS THE FOUNDATION OF A SUCCESSFUL REPUBLIC. AS SAMUEL ADAMS SAID: "IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT ANY STATE SHOULD LONG REMAIN FREE, WHERE VIRTUE IS NOT SUPREMELY HONORED."

AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS ALSO RECOGNIZED THAT RELIGION IS ESSENTIAL TO SUSTAINING MORALITY. AS PRESIDENT WASHINGTON SAID IN HIS FAREWELL ADDRESS, "OF ALL THE DISPOSITIONS AND HABITS WHICH LEAD TO POLITICAL PROSPERITY, RELIGION AND MORALITY ARE INDISPENSABLE SUPPORTS."

CONSEQUENTLY, I BELIEVE THAT THE FREEST POSSIBLE EXERCISE OF RELIGION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE CONTINUED SUCCESS OF OUR GREAT NATION.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION REQUIRES NOT ONLY FREEING RELIGION FROM UNDUE GOVERNMENT REGULATION AND INTERFERENCE. IT ALSO REQUIRES FREEING RELIGION FROM DISCRIMINATION AND FROM VILE ACTS OF HATRED AND PERSECUTION.

THAT IS WHY I AM SO CONCERNED BY INSTANCES OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES AND HATE CRIME, AND PARTICULARLY, BY THE INCREASING LEVEL OF ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS IN THIS COUNTRY. THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE REPORTS THAT 1991 WAS THE FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR OF INCREASED ANTI-SEMITIC ACTS NATIONWIDE.

AS ATTORNEY GENERAL, I HAVE A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND AGGRESSIVELY TO THESE HATEFUL ACTS. I HAVE MADE VIGOROUS CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT ONE OF MY TOP PRIORITIES AND I PLEDGE TO

YOU THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE'S UNYIELDING COMMITMENT TO ELIMINATING ANTI-SEMITISM AND OTHER FORMS OF RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY.

THE AIRMONT CASE -- WHICH YOU WERE SO KIND TO RECOGNIZE TONIGHT -- IS ONE SUCH EXAMPLE. THE MANIPULATION OF ZONING LAWS TO KEEP ORTHODOX JEWS OUT OF A COMMUNITY STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF WHAT THIS COUNTRY STANDS FOR.

OUR CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN DUNNE, HAS ALSO BEEN VIGILANT IN RESPONDING TO OTHER FORMS OF ANTI-SEMITISM. BY WAY OF EXAMPLE, WE RECENTLY CONVICTED EIGHT MEMBERS OF HATE GROUPS FOR DESECRATING A SYNAGOGUE IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE; FIVE INDIVIDUALS FOR CONSPIRACY TO INTERFERE WITH THE RIGHTS OF A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR IN SAN DIEGO THROUGH A VICIOUS CAMPAIGN OF ANTI-SEMITIC HARASSMENT; NUMEROUS SKINHEADS AROUND THE COUNTRY FOR A VARIETY OF ANTI-SEMITIC CRIMES; AND MEMBERS OF THE ARYAN NATION WHO MURDERED ALAN BERG.

I AM VERY PROUD OF THIS RECORD. WHILE YOU HONOR ME TONIGHT, THE REAL CREDIT BELONGS TO THE DEDICATED MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION AND THE REST OF THE DEPARTMENT. STILL, WE KNOW WE CANNOT LET OUR GUARD DOWN AND MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE.

WHILE I RECOGNIZE THAT RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION HAS DEEP ROOTS, I WONDER WHETHER CURRENT ANTI-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY MAY NOT BE

FUELED BY INCREASING SECULARIZATION OF OUR SOCIETY. I WONDER WHETHER THE DENIGRATION OF RELIGION IN POPULAR CULTURE -- THE PORTRAYAL OF THOSE WITH DEVOUTLY HELD RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS SOMEHOW "STRANGE" -- MAY NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF INTOLERANCE AND HATE.

AND THAT BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND PROBLEM I WANT TO MENTION -
- THE CRUMBLING OF TRADITIONAL VALUES IN OUR SOCIETY.

AS ATTORNEY GENERAL, I HAVE SEEN MANY OF THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS AT CLOSE RANGE -- DRUGS, CRIME, GANGS, BROKEN FAMILIES, DISCONNECTED YOUTH, BATTERED SPOUSES, ABUSED CHILDREN.

IT IS COMMON THESE DAYS TO LOOK TO THE GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE ALL OUR PROBLEMS.

BUT I THINK THESE PROBLEMS MAY BE LARGELY BEYOND THE REACH OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LAWS. I AM PERSUADED THAT MANY OF OUR PRESSING PROBLEMS RESULT FROM THE DISINTEGRATION OF MORALITY. IN SHORT, THE CRISIS WE FACE TODAY IS, AT BOTTOM, A MORAL ONE.

AS I SAID, OUR FOUNDING FATHERS UNDERSTOOD THAT, IN A FREE SOCIETY, THE FATE OF POPULAR GOVERNMENT WOULD ULTIMATELY DEPEND ON THE CHARACTER AND MORALITY OF THE PEOPLE.

OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT HAS GONE ON FOR OVER 200 YEARS. AND WHAT HAS SUSTAINED US DURING THESE TWO CENTURIES HAS BEEN OUR DEDICATION TO CORE MORAL VALUES.

THOSE VALUES -- SO FAMILIAR TO MEMBERS OF AGUDATH ISRAEL -- INCLUDE RESPECT FOR LAW; LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY; SELF-SACRIFICE, BOTH FOR THE SAKE OF OUR FAMILIES AND FOR THE COMMUNITY; HARD WORK AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY; AND CHARITY AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS.

BUT AS WE LOOK AROUND TODAY, IT IS FAIR TO ASK WHETHER THE MORAL VALUES THAT HAVE SUSTAINED THIS COUNTRY ARE BREAKING DOWN.

IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT, SINCE THE MID-1960'S, THERE HAS BEEN A STEADY ASSAULT ON TRADITIONAL VALUES. WE HAVE LIVED THROUGH 25 YEARS OF PERMISSIVENESS, SEXUAL REVOLUTION, AND THE DRUG CULTURE.

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO CAST OFF CONVENTIONAL MORALITY AND OLD-FASHIONED RESTRAINTS. THE EMPHASIS HAS BEEN ON INDIVIDUAL FULFILLMENT AND THE UNBRIDLED PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.

MORAL TRADITION HAS GIVEN WAY TO MORAL RELATIVISM -- A DOCTRINE WHICH MAKES EACH INDIVIDUAL THE SOLE JUDGE OF HIS OWN ACTION AND WHICH IS DESIGNED TO GIVE FULL LEEWAY TO THE PURSUIT OF INDIVIDUAL APPETITES.

AFTER 25 YEARS OF THIS MORAL UPHEAVAL, WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT ITS RESULTS? ARE WE COLLECTIVELY BETTER OFF? IT DOES NOT APPEAR SO.

ALL AROUND US, WE SEE A GRIM HARVEST: UNPRECEDENTED VIOLENCE; SOARING JUVENILE CRIME; WIDESPREAD DRUG ADDICTION; CRACK BABIES; INCREASING RATES OF TEENAGE SUICIDE; THE WORLD'S HIGHEST DIVORCE RATE; ABORTION, AND NOW EUTHANASIA; RECORD PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS; LONELINESS AND DESPAIR.

THIS MORAL CRISIS PRESENTS AN OVERWHELMING CHALLENGE FOR AMERICA. SOLVING IT IS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT BECAUSE IT REQUIRES CHANGING BEHAVIOR ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL -- REESTABLISHING A MORAL SENSE THAT WILL GUIDE INDIVIDUALS IN THE ACTIONS THEY TAKE AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE.

AS I SAID AT THE OUTSET, I BELIEVE THESE TWO PROBLEMS -- THE RISE IN HATE CRIME AND THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL VALUES -- ARE CLOSELY RELATED.

AND, I BELIEVE THAT THE SOLUTION TO BOTH IS THE SAME. THAT THE BEST WAY TO FIGHT RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE -- AND THE DECLINE IN MORALITY AND PUBLIC VIRTUE WHICH I BELIEVE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY OF OUR NATION'S PROBLEMS -- IS TO REINVIGORATE THE STRONG RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TRADITION IN THIS COUNTRY.

AND THAT IS WHY I BELIEVE THAT AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA,
AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, THAT REPRESENT STRONG RELIGIOUS
COMMITMENT AND COMMITMENT TO TRADITIONAL VALUES ARE SO IMPORTANT.

ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE HONORED ME WITH AN AWARD TONIGHT, IT IS I
WHO WANT TO HONOR YOU. FOR, BY YOUR EXAMPLE OF STRONG COMMITMENT
TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND CORE FAMILY VALUES, IT IS YOU WHO HOLD
OUT HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR GREAT NATION.