

2/22/95  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
CHURCHES OF CHRIST

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
VIDEOTAPE REMARKS FOR  
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA  
FEBRUARY 22, 1995**

Joan [Brown Campbell], Dr. Raiser [Rye-zer], leadership from the member churches of the National and World Councils, all my friends and people I have admired for many years, I wish I could be with you today in Atlanta, and I would be there if I were not accompanying the President on a State Visit to Canada.

Even from a distance, it is a special privilege to be able to share in this magnificent celebration with so many men and women who give of themselves every day to renew the spiritual life and moral strength of our great country.

Every once in awhile, Joan reminds me that this group is not just a representation of church leaders, but of everyday Americans. She once told me that if the membership of all of your churches gathered together in a stadium there would be 49 million people in the stands. And that was a rather graphic reminder that you represent Americans from all walks of life, who live and work and worship in every neighborhood in America.

You are truly a vision of the Church united: the heads of historic African American Churches, the leadership of mainline churches, the leaders of Orthodox Churches and significant representation of the Roman Catholic Church, including Cardinal Law, who bears greetings from His Holiness the Pope. And it is fitting that this gathering of the ecumenical family should be in honor of Archbishop Iakovos [yak-ka-VOHS], who has done so much to promote religious unity in the fight for human dignity around the world.

Reflecting on the life and ministry of Archbishop Iakovos is a truly humbling exercise, and I mean that in the best sense. It was 40 years ago that this extraordinary man was elevated to the episcopate. And the President and I join in congratulating you, Your Eminence, for your many contributions on behalf of the Greek Orthodox community as well as our larger national religious community.

We are grateful for your many good deeds, which are far too numerous to list right now, but especially your efforts to bring peace and harmony to South Africa and the Middle East, your courageous statements on behalf of those suffering in Bosnia and Haiti, your work to end discrimination here at home, and your ongoing efforts to create a dialogue among all of our religious groups.

We also thank you for your great spirit. Because it is your spirit that has helped unite us, draw us together, bridge our differences, and teach us about tolerance, compassion, courage and faith, even when those feelings are hard to summon. Whatever our denomination, whatever our religious experience, we all have looked to you for inspiration, for moral guidance, for wisdom, and for comfort, and we will continue to rely on you to lead us in the right direction in the years ahead.

In a few weeks, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of Selma. Some of you were there, as was Archbishop Iakovos. And when we think back on that time, and the civil rights struggle we were engaged in as a nation, and the courage required to fight for human dignity and values -- to take that walk from Selma to the Edmund Pettus Bridge -- we can see very clearly the great accomplishments born from that struggle. We can see the progress made on behalf of minorities, the disenfranchised, women, and others in our society who are less advantaged. And we can see that our nation is stronger for being more inclusive -- and for recognizing the image of God in every member of the human family.

But if we look around us today we can also see a society in need of renewed spiritual commitment and moral leadership. We see a spiritual vacuum in America that every day affects millions of our children. Your Eminence, and those of you who marched in Selma, you didn't risk your lives to watch the American family disintegrate. . . to watch 13-year-olds arm themselves with automatic weapons and kill each other over a pair of tennis shoes or a jacket . . . to watch hopeless and helpless girls become parents themselves . . . to watch 10- and 11-year-olds in the nation's capital plan their funerals because they are so sure they are going to die on the streets. This is not the definition of social progress and freedom you had in mind then or now.

For all the progress we have made, we need only look around us to see the breakdown of "civil society" -- families, communities, civic organizations, and even religious institutions collapsing under the weight of economic insecurity, cynicism, distrust and fear that dominate too many people's lives today.

I often think how ironic it is that we fought and won the Cold War, yet we are now losing the war here at home, on our own streets and in our own neighborhoods. And it is our duty to turn that around.

We need a new ethos of individual responsibility and caring. We need a new definition of civil society that makes us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. We need to restore our sense of community. We need to emphasize "we" as much as "me."

Most of all, we need spiritual leadership for our children.

That means joining together to find ways to create conditions in which children and families can flourish in America.

This is not a challenge we can leave to government alone, or parents alone, or social and religious institutions alone. As my husband is fond of saying, "Government doesn't raise children, parents do." But government can help parents become more responsible about their family obligations. It can help families stay together who are in danger of being torn apart. It can help children get the right start in life by ensuring that they get adequate health care, proper nutrition, good schooling, and protection from violence and abuse.

Still, government is not a panacea and government programs are not enough. Families burdened by poverty, violence, inadequate services, and other disadvantages often have trouble coping alone. And today, there are some in Washington who are making it even harder for families to move forward in their lives. But we can't let that happen.

Our country needs your help. We need your leadership. We need you to awaken our consciences so that our nation can do a better job of offering hope to the millions of American children who see nothing but a dead end in their futures.

I was lucky enough to grow up in a family where love and nurturing were in abundance. I also was raised a Methodist. My mother taught Sunday school. I belonged to a Methodist youth group that expanded my horizons far beyond the confines of my comfortable, middle-class neighborhood. When I was a student, I used to read Motive, a magazine for college-age Methodists. My religious education taught me about compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and justice. And my experiences made me appreciate the gift of faith in my life, which is something I take very seriously.

I also take very seriously the social gospel and how we balance personal faith with our obligations to our larger community. And I think it is something we must all strive for, no matter our religious background or experience.

It is my firm conviction that there is a growing awareness of the need for spiritual renewal in our country and a willingness to act and work together to fill that sense of emptiness with the Word and with an outreach grounded in real Christian values.

The challenges we face demand action from each and every one of us. I'm confident the religious community will lead the way in helping us look beyond ourselves and fill that spiritual and moral vacuum. Just as Archbishop Iakovos has demonstrated through

his life and through his ministry, we must not flee in the face of a challenge. And we must not let apathy or cynicism take over when our children need us most.

As Scripture says, "You are the salt of the Earth and the light of the world. That if your light shines before men they will give glory to the Father in Heaven."

We must join together for the sake of human dignity. We must not turn our backs on our children. By the grace of God, we can make the world a better place if we are willing to work together.

Thank you very much.

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