

RELEASE IN PART B6

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Secretary's Remarks: Keynote Address at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/02/136501.htm>>
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Keynote Address at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State

Washington Hilton Hotel

Washington, DC

February 4, 2010

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. I have to begin by saying I'm not Bono. (Laughter.) Those of you who were here when he was, I apologize beforehand. (Laughter.) But it is a great pleasure to be with you and to be here with President and Mrs. Obama, to be with Vice President Biden, with Chairman Mullen, with certainly our host today, my former colleagues and friends, Senators Isakson and Amy Klobuchar. And to be with so many distinguished guests and visitors who have come from all over our country and indeed from all over the world.

I have attended this prayer breakfast every year since 1993, and I have always found it to be a gathering that inspires and motivates me. Now today, our minds are still filled with the images of the tragedy of Haiti, where faith is being tested daily in food lines and makeshift hospitals, in tent cities where there are not only so many suffering people, but so many vanished dreams.

When I think about the horrible catastrophe that has struck Haiti, I am both saddened but also spurred. This is a moment that has already been embraced by people of faith from everywhere. I thank Prime Minister Zapatero for his country's response and commitment. Because in the days since the earthquake, we have seen the world and the world's faithful spring into action on behalf of those suffering. President Obama has put our country on the leading edge of making sure that we do all we can to help alleviate not only the immediate suffering, but to assist in the rebuilding and recovery. So many countries have answered the call, and so many churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples have brought their own people together. And even modern technology through Facebook and telethons and text messages and Twitter, there's been an overwhelming

When I think about being here with all of you today, there are so many subjects to talk about. You've already heard, both in prayer and in scripture reading and in Prime Minister Zapatero's remarks, a number of messages. But let me be both personal and speak from my unique perspective now as Secretary of State. I've been here as a First Lady. I've been here as a senator, and now I am here as a Secretary of State. I have heard heartfelt descriptions of personal faith journeys. I've heard impassioned pleas for feeding the hungry and helping the poor, caring for the sick. I've heard speeches about promoting understanding among people of different faiths. I've met hundreds of visitors from countries across the globe. I've seen the leaders of my own country come here amidst the crises of the time and, for at least a morning, put away political and ideological differences. And I've watched and I've listened to three presidents, each a man of faith, speak from their hearts, both sharing their own feelings about being in a position that has almost intolerably impossible burdens to bear, and appealing often, either explicitly or implicitly, for an end to the increasing smallness, irrelevancy, even meanness, of our own political culture. My own heart has been touched and occasionally pierced by the words I've heard, and often my spirit has been lifted by the musicians and the singers who have shared their gifts in praising the Lord with us. And during difficult and painful times, my faith has been strengthened by the personal connections that I have experienced with people who, by the calculus of politics, were on the opposite side of me on the basis of issues or partisanship.

After my very first prayer breakfast, a bipartisan group of women asked me to join them for lunch and told me that they were forming a prayer group. And these prayer partners prayed for me. They prayed for me during some very challenging times. They came to see me in the White House. They kept in touch with me and some still do today. And they gave me a handmade book with messages, quotes, and scripture, to sustain me. And of all the thousands of gifts that I received in the White House, I have a special affection for this one. Because in addition to the tangible gift of the book, it contained 12 intangible gifts, 12 gifts of discernment, peace, compassion, faith, fellowship, vision, forgiveness, grace, wisdom, love, joy, and courage. And I have had many occasions to pull out that book and to look at it and to try, Chairman Mullen, to figure out how to close the gap of what I am feeling and doing with what I know I should be feeling and doing. As a person of faith, it is a constant struggle, particularly in the political arena, to close that gap that each of us faces.

In February of 1994, the speaker here was Mother Teresa. She gave, as everyone who remembers that occasion will certainly recall, a strong address against abortion. And then she asked to see me. And I thought, "Oh, dear." (Laughter.) And after the breakfast, we went behind that curtain and we sat on folding chairs, and I remember being struck by how small she was and how powerful her hands were, despite her size, and that she was wearing sandals in February in Washington. (Laughter.)

We began to talk, and she told me that she knew that we had a shared conviction about adoption being vastly better as a choice for unplanned or unwanted babies. And she asked me – or more properly, she directed me – to work with her to create a home for such babies here in Washington. I know that we often picture, as we're growing up, God as a man with a white beard. But that day, I felt like I had been ordered, and that the message was coming not just through this diminutive woman but from someplace far beyond.

So I started to work. And it took a while because we had to cut through all the red tape. We had to get all the approvals. I thought it would be easier than it turned out to be. She proved herself to be the most relentless lobbyist I've ever encountered. (Laughter.) She could not get a job in your White House, Mr. President. (Laughter.) She never let up. She called me from India, she called me from Vietnam, she wrote me letters, and it was always: "When's the house gonna open? How much more can be done quickly?"

Finally, the moment came: June, 1995, and the Mother Teresa Home for Infant Children opened. She flew in from Kolkata to attend the opening, and like a happy child, she gripped my arm and led me around, looking at the bassinets and the pretty painted colors on the wall, and just beaming about what this meant for children and their futures.

A few years later, I attended her funeral in Kolkata, where I saw presidents and prime ministers, royalty and street beggars, pay her homage. And after the service, her successor, Sister Nirmala, the leader of the Missionaries of Charity, invited me to come to the Mother House. I was deeply touched. When I arrived, I realized I was one of only a very few outsiders. And I was directed into a whitewashed room where the casket had already arrived. And we stood around with the nuns, with the candles on the walls flickering, and prayed for this extraordinary woman. And then Sister Nirmala asked me to offer a prayer. I felt both inadequate and deeply honored, just as I do today. And in the tradition of prayer breakfast speakers, let me share a few matters that reflect how I came on my own faith journey, and how I think about the responsibilities that President Obama and his Administration and our government face today.

As Amy said, I grew up in the Methodist Church. On both sides of my father's family, the Rodhams and the Joneses, they came from mining towns. And they claimed, going back many years, to have actually been converted by John and Charles Wesley. And, of course, Methodists were methodical. It was a particularly good religion for me. (Laughter.) And part of it is a commitment to living out your faith. We believe that faith without works may not be dead, but it's hard to discern from time to time.

And of course, John Wesley had this simple rule which I carry around with me as I travel: Do all the good you can by all the means you can in all the ways you can in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the people you can, as long as ever you can. That's a tall order. And of course, one of the interpretive problems with it is, who defines good? What are we actually called to do, and how do we stay humble enough, obedient enough, to ask ourselves, am I really doing what I'm called to do?

It was a good rule to be raised by and it was certainly a good rule for my mother and father to discipline us by. And I think it's a good rule to live by, with the appropriate dose of humility. Our world is an imperfect one filled with imperfect people, so we constantly struggle to meet our own spiritual goals. But John Wesley's teachings, and the teachings of my church, particularly during my childhood and teenage years, gave me the impetus to believe that I did have a responsibility. It meant not sitting on the sidelines, but being in the arena. And it meant constantly working to try to fulfill the lessons that I absorbed as a child. It's not easy. We're here today because we're all seekers, and we can all look around our own lives and the lives of those whom we know and see everyone falling so short.

And then of course, as we look around the world, there are so many problems and challenges that people of faith are attempting to address or should be. We can recite those places where human beings are mired in the past – their hatreds, their differences – where governments refuse to speak to other governments, where the progress of entire nations is undermined because isolation and insularity seem less risky than cooperation and collaboration, where all too often it is religion that is the force that drives and sustains division rather than being the healing balm. These patterns persist despite the overwhelming evidence that more good will come from suspending old animosities and preconceptions from engaging others in dialogue, from remembering the cardinal rules found in all of the world's major religions.

Last October, I visited Belfast once again, 11 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a place where being a Protestant or a Catholic determined where you lived, often where you worked, whether you were a friend or an enemy, a threat or a target. Yet over time, as the body count grew, the bonds of common humanity became more powerful than the differences fueled by ancient wrongs. So bullets have been traded for ballots.

As we meet this morning, both communities are attempting to hammer out a final agreement on the yet unresolved issues between them. And they are discovering anew what the Scripture urges us: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don't give up." Even in places where God's presence and promise seems fleeting and unfulfilled or completely absent, the power of one person's faith and the determination to act can help lead a nation out of darkness.

Some of you may have seen the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. It is the story of a Liberian woman who was tired of the conflict and the killing and the fear that had gripped her country for years. So she went to her church and she prayed for an end to the civil war. And she organized other women at her church, and then at other churches, then at the mosques. Soon thousands of women became a mass movement, rising up and praying for a peace, and working to bring it about that finally, finally ended the conflict.

And yet the devil must have left Liberia and taken up residence in Congo. When I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo this summer, the contrasts were so overwhelmingly tragic – a country the size of Western Europe, rich in minerals and natural resources, where 5.4 million people have been killed in the most deadly conflict since World War II, where 1,100 women and girls are raped every month, where the life expectancy is 46 and dropping, where poverty, starvation, and all of the ills that stalk the human race are in abundance.

When I traveled to Goma, I saw in a single day the best and the worst of humanity. I met with women who had been savaged and brutalized physically and emotionally, victims of gender and sexual-based violence in a place where law, custom, and even faith did little to protect them. But I also saw courageous women who, by faith, went back into the bush to find those who, like them, had been violently attacked. I saw the doctors and the nurses who were helping to heal the wounds, and I saw so many who were there because their faith led them to it.

As we look at the world today and we reflect on the overwhelming response of outpouring of generosity to what happened in Haiti, I'm reminded of the story of Elijah. After he goes to Mount Horeb, we read that he faced "a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence – a still small voice." It was then that Elijah heard the voice of the Lord. It is often when we are only quiet enough to listen that we do as well. It's something we can do at any time, without a disaster or a catastrophe provoking it. It shouldn't take that.

But the teachings of every religion call us to care for the poor, tell us to visit the orphans and widows, to be generous and charitable, to alleviate suffering. All religions have their version of the Golden Rule and direct us to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger and visit the prisoner. But how often in the midst of our own lives do we respond to that? All of these holy texts, all of this religious wisdom from these very different faiths call on us to act out of love.

In politics, we sometimes talk about message discipline – making sure everyone uses the same set of talking points. Well, whoever was in charge of message discipline on these issues for every religion certainly knew what they were doing. Regardless of our differences, we all got the same talking points and the same marching orders. So the charge is a personal one. Yet across the world, we see organized religion standing in the way of faith, perverting love, undermining that message.

Sometimes it's easier to see that far away than here at home. But religion, cloaked in naked power lust, is used to justify horrific violence, attacks on homes, markets, schools, volleyball games, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples. From Iraq to Pakistan and Afghanistan to Nigeria and the Middle East, religion is used a club to deny the human

vomeli, from the Gulf to Africa to Asia, and to discriminate, even advocating the execution of gays and lesbians. Religion is used to enshrine in law intolerance of free expression and peaceful protest. Iran is now detaining and executing people under a new crime – waging war against God. It seems to be a rather dramatic identity crisis.

So in the Obama Administration, we are working to bridge religious divides. We're taking on violations of human rights perpetrated in the name of religion. And we invite members of Congress and clergy and active citizens like all of you here to join us. Of course we're supporting the peace processes from Northern Ireland to the Middle East, and of course we are following up on the President's historic speech at Cairo with outreach efforts to Muslims and promoting interfaith dialogue, and of course we're condemning the repression in Iran.

But we are also standing up for girls and women, who too often in the name of religion, are denied their basic human rights. And we are standing up for gays and lesbians who deserve to be treated as full human beings. (Applause.) And we are also making it clear to countries and leaders that these are priorities of the United States. Every time I travel, I raise the plight of girls and women, and make it clear that we expect to see changes. And I recently called President Museveni, whom I have known through the prayer breakfast, and expressed the strongest concerns about a law being considered in the parliament of Uganda.

We are committed, not only to reaching out and speaking up about the perversion of religion, and in particularly the use of it to promote and justify terrorism, but also seeking to find common ground. We are working with Muslim nations to come up with an appropriate way of demonstrating criticism of religious intolerance without stepping over into the area of freedom of religion or non-religion and expression. So there is much to be done, and there is a lot of challenging opportunities for each of us as we leave this prayer breakfast, this 58th prayer breakfast.

In 1975, my husband and I, who had gotten married in October, and we were both teaching at the University of Arkansas Law School in beautiful Fayetteville, Arkansas – we got married on a Saturday and we went back to work on a Monday. So around Christmastime, we decided that we should go somewhere and celebrate, take a honeymoon. And my late father said, "Well, that's a great idea. We'll come, too." (Laughter.)

And indeed, Bill and I and my entire family – (laughter) – went to Acapulco. We had a great time, but it wasn't exactly a honeymoon. So when we got back, Bill was talking to one of his friends who was then working in Haiti, and his friend said, "Well, why don't you come see me? This is the most interesting country. Come and take some time." So indeed, we did. So we were there over the New Year's holidays. And I remember visiting the Cathedral in Port-au-Prince, in the midst, at that time, so much fear from the regime of the Duvaliers, and so much poverty, there was this cathedral that had stood there and served as a beacon of hope and faith.

After the earthquake, I was looking at some of our pictures from the disaster, and I saw the total destruction of the cathedral. It was just a heart-rending moment. And yet I also saw men and women helping one another, digging through the rubble, dancing and singing in the makeshift communities that they were building up. And I thought again that as the scripture reminds us, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed."

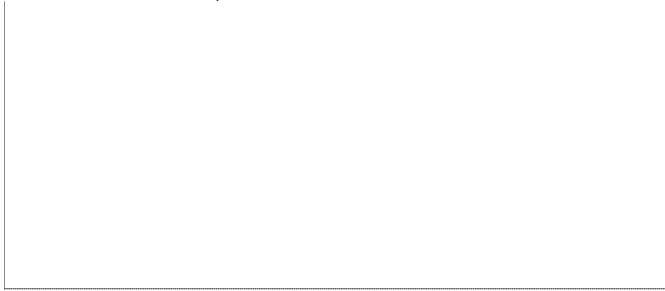
As the memory of this crisis fades, as the news cameras move on to the next very dramatic incident, let us pray that we can sustain the force and the feeling that we find in our hearts and in our faith in the aftermath of such tragedies. Let us pray that we will all continue to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Let us pray that amid our differences, we can continue to see the power of faith not only to make us whole as individuals, to provide personal salvation, but to make us a greater whole and a greater force for good on behalf of all creation.

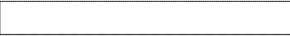
So let us do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, to all the people we can, as long as ever we can.

God bless you. (Applause.)

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Message Headers:



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