

Remarks at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Nashville, Tennessee

February 10, 2003

Thank you so much for that warm welcome. I'm honored to be here. I want to thank Glenn Plummer for his kind introduction. I want to thank those who put on the convention for letting some of my fellow Texans in the hall. [Laughter] I see Evans. I see Gramm. It's good to see friendly faces. It's good to see people with whom I've spent a lot of quality time. Thanks for letting me come. And I'm honored to be with so many of you all who have dedicated your lives to sharing the good news.

Before I came in this hall, I had the opportunity to have what they call a round-table discussion with members of the faith community here in Nashville, Tennessee, people who are changing Nashville through their love and compassion and decency. I met folks from the Campus for Human Development. It's an extraordinary testament to social entrepreneurship based upon faith. And I want to thank all the roundtable participants for sharing with me your stories. I particularly want to thank the four folks who have recovered from homelessness, addiction to alcohol and drugs, for your courage to share your story with the President. It's so inspirational to see your courage as well as to see the great works of our Lord in your heart.

I also landed today and met an extraordinary woman from Nashville named Sherry Jean Williams. She is sitting right over here. Sherry Jean, you mind standing up just for a second? [Applause] Thank you for coming. You'll hear me talk about the armies of compassion in America; she is a soldier in the armies of compassion. Sherry Jean mentors children whose mom or dad may be in prison. She volunteers to help grandparents who are raising their children. She is one of millions of people who are helping people in need.

My call to our fellow Americans is, while one person can't do everything, one person can do something to make our society a more compassionate and decent place. And I want to thank you, Sherry Jean, for representing all the decent people, whether they be foster moms or dads—and by the way, being a foster parent is an incredibly important part of our society—or whether being a mentor or whether being somebody volunteering their time for after-school programs to help save lives, particularly the lives of our children.

It's also great to be here in Opryland. It's an unbelievable complex. [Laughter] You need a roadmap to get around here. [Laughter] Either that, or a good Secret Service driver. [Laughter] But I'm honored to be back, and I appreciate the warm hospitality.

Opryland has a way of bringing out hidden talents of politicians. You may recall, in 1974, Richard Nixon came to Opryland and played the piano and serenaded his wife. In 1998, Ashcroft, the great Attorney General of the United States, came and sang a duet with Ray Stevens. [Laughter] So I was just thinking—[laughter]—but that's as far as it got. [Laughter]

I think I'll leave the talent to my great friend Michael W. Smith and Sara Paulson Brummett. It's good to see Michael W. I like a man whose middle name is W. [Laughter] He and Debbie joined Laura and me at the White House a couple of nights ago. It was good to be in his presence. And one of the remarkable things about the evening is Michael agreed to play the piano for us. He had to sing for his dinner. Thankfully, he did—[laughter]—but what a joy.

For more than 80 years, America's religious broadcasters have been sharing the gospel on the airways. You bring words of

truth and comfort and encouragement into millions of homes. Broadcasting is more than a job for you. It is a great commission. You serve with all your heart and soul, and America is grateful. Each one of you knows that the power of faith can transform a life. People of faith and goodness and idealism also have the power to transform our neighborhoods and our Nation. I've set a great goal for America: We must apply the great compassion of our people to the deepest problems of this country.

This country is blessed with virtually millions of good-hearted volunteers who work daily miracles in the lives of their fellow citizens. And today I ask our religious broadcasters, those who reach into every corner of America, to rally the armies of compassion so that we can change America one heart, one soul at a time.

The American people have deep and diverse religious beliefs, truly one of the great strengths of our country. And the faith of our citizens is seeing us through some demanding times. We're being challenged. We're meeting those challenges because of our faith.

After we were attacked on September the 11th, we carried our grief to the Lord Almighty in prayer. Last week, our Nation lost seven brave Americans—brave souls, six Americans and one Israeli citizen, aboard the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. Laura and I went to Houston. We were so honored to meet the families. There's no question in my mind they are finding strength and comfort because of your prayers and because of the Almighty God. In times of tragedy, faith assures us that death and suffering are not the final word, that love and hope are eternal.

Religious faith not only comforts; it challenges. Faith teaches that every person is equal in God's sight and must be treated with equal dignity here on Earth. This idea of human dignity forces us to constantly examine our own country and our own hearts. And this ideal has inspired some of the great reforms in American history.

People of faith led the struggle against slavery. People of faith fought against child labor. People of faith worked for women's equality, and people of faith worked for civil rights.

And in America today, people of faith are doing the work of compassion. So many good people are serving their neighbors because they love their God. The spirit of service is vital because the need in America is great. There are pockets of despair and loneliness and hopelessness in America. We do not accept as a fact of life that some Americans must endure permanent poverty or bigotry or a childhood without love and guidance. Our work as Americans is not complete until we build a single nation of justice and a nation of opportunity.

Government, of course, must be involved and will be involved. We just reformed our welfare in America, and we've helped a lot of people. Yet, even as we work to improve the welfare laws, we know that welfare policy will not solve the deepest problems of the spirit.

I first heard an interesting reminder of that fact from Tony Evans. He doesn't remember, but I do. We were in Greenville, Texas. He tells a story about the guy who owns the house and there's a crack running up the wall in the house. So he hires the best painter he can find, and the guy covers the crack and everything is fine, until the crack reappears. And so he hires another painter and he covers the crack. And Tony Evans reminded me and the audience, he said, "You don't fix the crack on the wall until you first fix the foundation."

This economy of ours is growing okay. It can be better. As a matter of fact, we've got plans in place to encourage job growth, ways to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit of the country, encourage small-business expansion so that people can find work. Yet, there are some needs that prosperity can never meet.

We've arrested and we convict criminals. Yet, building more prisons will not substitute for responsibility and order in our souls.

The role of Government is limited, because Government cannot put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. That happens when someone puts an arm around a neighbor and says, "God loves you. I love you, and you can count on us both."

And it is that spirit which defines some of the most effective social programs in America. It is that spirit of love and compassion which makes healing lives work. Yet, for too long, some in Government thought there was no room for faith-based groups to provide social services. I have a different point of view. I believe Government should welcome faith-based groups as allies in the great work of renewing America.

I welcome faith. I welcome faith to help solve the Nation's deepest problems. I understand there's a—that Government must not and will not endorse a religious creed or directly fund religious worship. That's obviously not a role of Government, and that's not what we're talking about here.

But governments can and should support effective social services provided by religious people, so long as they work and as long as those services go to anyone in need, regardless of their faith. And when Government gives that support, it is equally important that faith-based institutions should not be forced to change the character or compromise their prophetic role.

If a charity's helping the needy, it should not matter if there is a rabbi on the board, or a cross on the wall, or crescent on the wall, or religious commitment in the charter. I need to ask, does it work? If an earthquake or hurricane damages a Christian or Jewish or Muslim school, that school should not be denied Federal disaster assistance because of its religious character.

What I'm saying is, the days of discriminating against religious groups just because

they're religious are coming to an end. [Applause] Thank you. I have issued an Executive order banning discrimination against faith-based charities in social service grants by Federal agencies. I continue to work with members of Congress of both political parties to enact faith-based legislation to encourage more charitable giving, so we're more likely able to rally the armies of compassion. We created faith-based offices in key Cabinet departments to ensure that faith-based groups get equal treatment and fair access to Government funds.

I recognize some people around our country asking, "What does this Faith-Based Initiative mean? And is it a threat to my very program?" And so we're holding meetings across the country to help faith-based groups to understand how they can qualify for Government grants without compromising their mission. We're on an education campaign. We're reaching out to find the social entrepreneurs who exist all across this Nation.

I went to Congress at my State of the Union and spoke about two needs I want to share with you today. I have concerns—I know you do as well—about children whose mom or dad may be in prison. Imagine what life must be like for those children. Imagine how they wonder about their future, whether or not this great country holds out hope for them. I know by calling upon the compassionate hearts of our fellow citizens, we can help save those lives by mentoring programs, by putting the child in touch with somebody like Sherry Jean Williams, who realizes somebody does care about them during these tough and difficult times.

Now, I asked Congress to support a mentoring proposal which will bring caring adults into the lives of more than a million disadvantaged children, including the children whose mom or dad may be in prison. There's no question in my mind that if this Nation puts our mind to it, we can surround those little ones with love and provide a better hope for them.

As well, I am concerned about those who are addicted to drugs, who fight for their very lives and survival against addiction. I believe that we can take an approach that focuses on the addict, give that person a voucher to be redeemed at any program that he or she chooses, especially those programs that have got the capacity to change heart and, therefore, change habit. Congress needs to hear this call and work with us to facilitate the mentoring and the healing of those who hurt.

America's religious broadcasters can really play an important role in this work, and I want to discuss what I think that role can be and make a few suggestions today. [Laughter] Christian media outlets like yours reach 141 million people every year. That's a huge audience, and it's a responsibility that I know you take seriously. This Nation has got a lot of wealthy and caring congregations, and we've got a lot of churches in low-income areas that need help too. Your voices reach them all. You can communicate with them, rich and poor alike, suburban church and urban church alike. And you can help bring them together to serve those who hurt, so we can achieve a more just and generous society.

It's been said that 11 a.m. on Sunday is the most segregated hour in America. We all have a responsibility to break down the barriers that divide us. In Scripture, God commands us to reach out to those who are different, to reconcile with each other, to lay down our lives in service to others. And He promises that the fruits of faith and fellowship, service and reconciliation will far surpass the struggles we go through to achieve them.

Suburban churches are often just a short drive away from brothers and sisters who are facing great need and doing God's work. There's an opportunity here to end artificial divisions and join together in fellowship and service. There's also an obligation. The poor and suffering are the responsibility of the whole church, even when they're not members of any church.

When a suburban church and an urban church become full partners, great things can happen. Both churches benefit. The Chicago Christ Church of Oak Brook and Lawndale Community Church are working together to serve the sick in Lawndale's health care clinic for the poor. In Boston, Wellesley Congregational Church and the historic Charles Street AME Church are creating a new center to boost the reading and computer skills of Roxbury residents.

Right here on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee, in Franklin, Tennessee, a conversion between an associate pastor of Christ Community Church and the pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church began a fellowship that now includes nearly 60 pastors and church members of all different races and denominations. I know that to be a fact because I heard them both talk today. Their churches work together to support a medical clinic for poor children, a legal office that gives free advice, a New Hope Academy, a faith-based school where children from different backgrounds study together, learn the classics together. The inspiration for the church told me that her hope was to provide a vision for the children, a vision that was positive and optimistic and clear. She said it's one thing to teach a child to read, but she wants the literate child to see a better day.

At first, Pastor Denny Denson of the First Missionary Baptist—Denny is with us, by the way—was a little wary about how these very different churches would work together. And here's what he says. He says, "There's some walls still there, but they're down low enough that we can just step over them." And then he said this, he said, "We are committed to each other to the end." And the Nashville area is better off for it.

In all these partnerships, lives are lifted up. We see unity and racial reconciliation. We see faith renewed by its works.

So today I ask you to challenge your listeners to love somebody just like they'd like to be loved themselves, to remind

them that one person can make a difference in somebody's life, to encourage them to mentor, to encourage them to start a ministry which will find the children of those who are incarcerated and love them. I ask you to challenge your listeners to encourage your congregations to work together for the good of this Nation, to work hard to break down the barriers that have divided the children of God for too long.

There is no question that we can rid this Nation of hopelessness and despair, because the greatest strength of America is the character of the American people. We are a compassionate country, and we are generous toward our fellow citizens. And we are a courageous country, ready when necessary to defend the peace.

And today, peace is threatened. We face a continuing threat of terrorist networks that hate the very thought of people being able to live in freedom. They hate the thought of the fact that in this great country, we can worship the Almighty God the way we see fit. And probably what makes them even angrier is, we're not going to change. [Laughter]

We face an outlaw regime in Iraq that hates our country, a regime that aids and harbors terrorists and is armed with weapons of mass murder. Before September the 11th, 2001, there's a lot of good folks who believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. Before September the 11th, 2001, we thought oceans would protect us forever, that if we saw a gathering threat somewhere else in the world, we could respond to it if we chose—so chose to do so. But that all changed on that fateful day.

Chemical agents, lethal viruses, and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Secretly, without fingerprints, Saddam Hussein could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists or help them develop their own. Saddam Hussein is a threat. He's a threat to the United States of America. He's a threat to some of our

closest friends and allies. We don't accept this threat.

As a matter of fact, the world saw this as a threat 12 years ago. Twelve years ago, Saddam Hussein was told to disarm for a reason: He's a dangerous man. And he hasn't disarmed. We've tried economic sanctions. He hasn't changed. Over the years, we've tried limited strikes against military facilities. It didn't work. We've offered Iraq the path of voluntary disarmament and inspections. The Iraqi regime is rejecting it.

Saddam Hussein has broken every promise to disarm. He has shown complete contempt for the international community. Last fall the international community spoke with united voice. It said, "This is your last chance, Mr. Saddam Hussein, to do what you said you would do, which is, in the name of peace, disarm. Destroy your weapons of mass destruction." The role of the inspectors is not to play hide-and-seek, in a country the size of California, with 104 people. The role of inspectors is to verify whether or not Mr. Saddam Hussein is keeping his word, whether or not he's showing up with his weapons and destroying them—the weapons, by the way, he says he doesn't have.

My attitude is that we owe it to future generations of Americans and citizens in freedom-loving countries to see to it that Mr. Saddam Hussein is disarmed. It's his choice to make as to how he will be disarmed. He can either do so—which it doesn't look like he's going to. For the sake of peace, we will lead a coalition of willing countries and disarm Saddam Hussein.

If war is forced upon us—and I say "forced upon us" because use of the military is not my first choice. I hug the mothers and the widows of those who may have lost their life in the name of peace and freedom. I take my responsibilities incredibly seriously about the commitment of troops. But should we need to use troops,

for the sake of future generations of Americans, American troops will act in the honorable traditions of our military and in the highest moral traditions of our country.

We will try in every way we can to spare innocent life. The people of Iraq are not our enemies. The true enemy of the Iraqi people, Saddam Hussein, has a different strategy. In violation of the Geneva Conventions, Saddam Hussein is positioning his military forces within civilian populations in order to shield his military and blame coalition forces for civilian casualties that he has caused. Saddam Hussein regards the Iraqi people as human shields, entirely expendable when their suffering serves his purposes.

America views the Iraqi people as human beings who have suffered long enough under this tyrant. And the Iraqi people can be certain of this: The United States is committed to helping them build a better future. If conflict occurs, we'll bring Iraq food and medicine and supplies and, most importantly, freedom. As I said in my State of the Union, liberty is not America's gift to the world. Liberty is God's gift to every human being in the world.

America has great challenges, challenges at home and challenges abroad. We're called to extend the promise of this country into the lives of every citizen who lives here. We're called to defend our Nation

and to lead the world to peace, and we will meet both challenges with courage and with confidence.

There's an old saying, "Let us not pray for tasks equal to our strength. Let us pray for strength equal to our tasks." And that is our prayer today, for the strength in every task we face.

I want to thank each of you for your prayers. I want to thank you for your faithfulness. I want to thank you for your good work. And I want to thank you for loving your country.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:07 a.m. in the Presidential Ballroom at the Opryland Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Glenn R. Plummer, executive committee chairman, National Religious Broadcasters; Anthony T. Evans, founder and president, The Urban Alternative; former Senator Phil Gramm of Texas; entertainers Ray Stevens, Michael W. Smith, and Sara Paulson Brummett; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The Executive order of December 12, 2002, on equal protection of the laws for faith-based and community organizations was published at 67 FR 77141.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and an Exchange With Reporters

February 10, 2003

President Bush. I'm going to make some welcoming comments. The Prime Minister is going to say some things. We'll then take some questions—two from the American side and two from the Australian side.

Prime Minister Howard is a close, personal friend of mine, a person whose judgment I count on, a person with whom I

speak quite frequently. I believe he's a man of clear vision. He sees the threats that the free world faces as we go into the 21st century. I'm proud to work with him on behalf of a peaceful world and a freer society. He's a man grounded in good values, and I respect him a lot, and I'm glad he's back here in the Oval Office.