

NOTE: The President spoke at midnight in the Grand Ballroom at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to soprano Jessye Norman; David Dinkins, former New York City

mayor; and Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., dinner emcee. These remarks were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 19.

Remarks at the Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Fruitland, Tennessee August 19, 1996

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very, very much. Reverend Donaldson, before the Sun went underneath that cloud for a minute, I was beginning to wonder how a place so close to heaven could be so hot. [Laughter]

But I am very glad to be here. Hillary and I are delighted to be here with Reverend and Mrs. Donaldson, and Reverend and Mrs. Vaughan, and our good friend John Tanner, Governor McWherter, and the other folks from Tennessee public life. I also wanted to say Reverend Donaldson gave you a big plug, Mr. Barnett. He said if it hadn't been for you and the leaders of the church, you all wouldn't be here today. And I thank you, too, for what you've done. [Applause] Thank you.

I want to begin my remarks by presenting to Reverend Donaldson and Reverend Vaughan a plaque with a statement I made about this whole issue not very long ago that says, "We must come together as one America to rebuild our churches, restore hope, and show the forces of hatred they cannot win." And I wanted you both to have these plaques when you reopen your church so that people all over this part of the country could see that what you have done is a symbol of the best in our faith and the best in our country. So if you would come up, Reverend Donaldson and Reverend Vaughan, I'd like to give you these plaques.

[At this point, the President presented the plaques to Rev. Daniel Donaldson, pastor, Salem Missionary Baptist Church, and Rev. Bill Vaughan, pastor, New Shiloh United Methodist Church.]

The President. You know, I think I'll start my brief remarks here just by picking up on something that Reverend Donaldson said about politics and differences and how he was sure that every President had done something that somebody disagreed with. After 4 years, I'm sure

that every President has done something that everybody disagreed with. [Laughter] But part of what we're dealing with today, folks, is not only how we live our faith but how we manage our differences.

And as your President—I want you to think about this—as your President, an enormous percentage of my time in dealing with America's relationship to the rest of the world is required of people who refuse to get along with each other because of their religious, their racial, their ethnic, or their tribal differences. That is what has convulsed the Holy Land for decades now. That is what brought the people in Bosnia, after decades and decades of peace, to slaughtering each other as if they were animals for 4 years. In Northern Ireland, the part of Ireland which ought to be the most prosperous and successful, it's what keeps Protestants and Catholics apart. They're still refighting 600-year-old battles when the kids want them to join hands and march into the future together. In Rwanda and Burundi, tribal differences have kept two small countries convulsed with mass slaughter when they ought to be trying to figure out how to feed their children.

I see this everywhere. And I thank God for the wisdom of our Founding Fathers who said, first, that people are created equal, and second, that the right to the freedom of religion is the first amendment, the first and most important right we have. And so I ask you to think about that.

I said the other day that I hoped that we could get out of the point in our politics where we trade in insults and go back to fighting over ideas, when we realize that not every election is a race between a saint and a scoundrel but instead a contest to find out what the best truth is for our country to move forward together.

I might say in that context, I noticed one of your neighbors here who is running for the

United States Senate, Houston and his wife, Debbie, Gordon. I thank them for coming, and I wish you well, sir. *[Applause]* Thank you.

I want to encourage everybody to participate in our process just as we encourage everyone to practice their faith. The genius of America is we have found a way to manage our differences and to keep coming closer to the ideals of our Constitution.

We've had our troubles, too. We've had our troubles in trying to come to grips with the fact that our Constitution was inconsistent with our practice when it said all people are created equal. We had a Civil War in this country. We had a long civil rights struggle. We had a lot of challenges. But we're still here after 220 years, stronger than ever, because we found a way to work together—not just blacks and whites anymore.

You know, when we had the Olympics and the Vice President and Tipper and Hillary and I went to Atlanta, there were representatives from 197 different nations there. Our largest county, Los Angeles County, has folks from 150 of those places in it. Now, that's an amazing thing and a great tribute to the United States.

We say, if you come here, we'll give you the freedom to speak; we'll give you the freedom to assemble; we'll give you the freedom to move around; we'll give you the freedom of religion, but you can't look down on somebody else because they're of a different religion, a different race, a different ethnic group, a different tribe. You got to treat people as if they're equal in the eyes of God and the law.

And so I tell you that I have spent a lot of time on this church burning issue because I think it is a test of our character as a people and because we must never even begin to go down that road that has ended in the dark alleys of slaughter in Bosnia, the continuing agony in the Middle East, and all the other places in the world where people cannot get along because they insist on living their lives by being able to look down on people because they're different from them instead of trying to lift everybody up because they're all children of God. And we must not start down that road. We have to stamp out these feelings whenever we see them manifest.

Let's face it, every one of us at some time in our lives—not a single soul here can say that you're not guilty at some time in your life of defining yourself because you could look

down on somebody else, say, "Well, I may not be perfect, but at least I'm not that person." *[Laughter]* "At least I'm not this, that, or the other thing." Every one of us is guilty of that. And we know there's something in human nature that makes people do that. But when it's uncontrolled, you have all this slaughter and heartache.

So Hillary and Tipper and Al and I, we've worked hard to try to rally the American people to deal with this problem of church burning because we don't even want to see it start in America. We're still around here after all these years because we believe people should be free to practice their faith. And, you know, now it's a Baptist and a Methodist church—we've had a lot of synagogues defaced; we've had three Islamic centers burned in this country, and that's not right either.

So what I want to say to you is that you're not just rebuilding your church here, you're showing America what's special about America. And by doing that, you're leading us into a brighter and better future instead of back into the kind of dark path that has divided and torn asunder so many other nations and that in times past has made America less than it ought to be.

You have given us a great gift by allowing us to come here and share this day with you, and I want to mention that too. This is a problem that's a people problem. This is an opportunity that's an opportunity of the heart and conviction. There's things that the Government has to do. We're doing everything we can to help local law enforcement officials to find out who's burned all these churches. We got guilty pleas from two former Ku Klux Klan members in South Carolina just last week. We're working to charge some others that we now know have burned some of these churches. We will spare no effort to catch and prosecute people we can find. We will follow up every lead we are given. But fundamentally, we know that this issue has to be addressed by people who live in and around and who attend these churches and other religious institutions. This is an affair of the heart, and we celebrate today a triumph of the American spirit.

Let me say, too, that we are standing on the brink of a new century. The kids in this audience today, some of these kids will be doing jobs 20 years from now that have not been invented yet. Some of these children will be

doing jobs that have not been imagined yet. People that live in little rural places, within a matter of a few years, thanks in no small measure to the work that Al Gore has done to bring the benefits of the Internet and computer technology to every classroom, every hospital, and every library in America by the year 2000, they will have access to things that no child in rural America has ever known before. And that is a wonderful thing. And our children will be able to live their dreams more than any generation of Americans before them if, but only if, we don't forget what "brung" us, as we used to say at home. [*Laughter*]

You know, my people come from a little place in Arkansas that looks a lot like this. And I was looking at the soybeans and the cotton and the corn—needs a little water; we'll pray for that today—[*laughter*—going down these fields thinking about how wonderful it's going to be if the benefits of technology allow people to enjoy the virtues and the strength and the joys of rural life and still access the modern world. That's what I think is going to happen, as long as we don't forget what "brung" us.

And so you've given us a gift today. The Scripture says, "Much is required from those whom much is given." Well, there may not be any millionaires in this crowd today or many millionaires that are members of these two small churches, but you have shown us again the meaning of those words. You have shown us that we have more than we think and that we can give more than we think. And therefore,

you've given us a chance to live the Scripture today.

That's why Tipper and I wanted to spend our birthdays here. That's why Al and Hillary wanted to be with us. And let me say, that's why our children came too.

And I want to thank Reverend Donaldson's daughter for taking such good care of our children. We have Karenna and Sarah and Albert Gore, and our daughter Chelsea, are here, and we're all honored to be here with you today.

Every time you drive past one of these two churches from now on you think about that. When the two congregations got together, when people began to reach across the lines that divide us, when people began to reassert their belief in the freedom of religion, every time you do that you're sticking up for what's made America great for over 200 years and you're standing up against what is tearing the heart out of the rest of the world. This can be—this day, this church, that church down the road—a symbol of everything to you every time you see it that makes America the greatest country in human history.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Donaldson's wife, Athalia; Rev. Vaughan's wife, Marge; Representative John Tanner; Ned Ray McWherter, former Governor of Tennessee; Lincoln Barnett, chairman, deacon board, Salem Missionary Baptist Church; and Houston Gordon, Tennessee senatorial candidate, and his wife, Debbie.

Remarks in Jackson, Tennessee August 19, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you for the "Happy Birthday." I have had a very happy birthday in west Tennessee, and I thank all of you for that. I thank you for coming out here. This is a vast crowd; we never had any idea there would be this kind of crowd here. They said, "Well, Mr. President, we've got to go. We need to be at the airport because we're going to have to shake hands with a few people who will be there before we leave"—a few thousand people, or maybe not even a few thousand peo-

ple, several thousand people. I thank you all for coming, very much.

Hillary and Chelsea and I have had a wonderful time with Al and Tipper and Karenna and Sarah and Albert. We did go out and work on the church rebuilding today to give us something to do to remind ourselves that, as the Scripture says, "To those to whom much is given, much is expected." And all of us have a responsibility now as Americans to say we don't want our country to be like other countries