

Saharan Africa and Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.”

The White House,
May 19, 2005.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Remarks at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast May 20, 2005

Thank you for that warm reception, especially for a Methodist. *[Laughter]* It's an honor to be here at the second annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast. This is a new tradition, yet its promises are timeless for Catholic Americans, to thank the Lord for the blessing of freedom, to renew our shared dedication to this great Republic, and to pray that America uses the gift of freedom to build a culture of life.

I am sorry that Laura is not here. You probably think she's preparing a couple of new one-liners. *[Laughter]* But in fact, she's winging her way to Jordan and Egypt and Israel to spread the freedom agenda. But I know if she were here, she would join me in thanking you and millions of others whom we'll never get to say thanks to in person for the countless prayers. It's an amazing experience to be the President of a nation where strangers from all religions pray for me and Laura. And I will tell you, it gives me such peace of mind and enables me to do my job much better when I'm lifted up in prayer. Thank you for your prayers.

I want to thank Leonard Leo for his kind introduction. I want to thank Joe Cella, the president of the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast. I want to thank His Eminence Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. What a fine man; what a beacon of hope. His Eminence shines brightly in the Nation's Capital.

I appreciate Archbishop Chaput of Denver. Thank you for being here, sir. I apologize to him for not being able to listen to his address. He said, “We're paying you a lot of money. Get back to work.” *[Laugh-*

ter] Fortunately, he didn't say, “We're paying you too much money. Get back to work.” *[Laughter]*

I appreciate Archbishop Gomez from the great State of Texas. Sister, thank you very much. Admiral, thank you very much, sir.

Carl Anderson, the Supreme—Knights of Columbus, is with us today. Carl, thank you for your friendship.

The Catholic contribution to American freedom goes back to the founding of our country. In 1790, a newly inaugurated George Washington, the first George W.—*[laughter]*—addressed a letter to all Catholics in America. He assured them that “your fellow citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of their revolution.” I'm honored to stand before you to offer my gratitude for the work American Catholic sons and daughters are doing for our Nation. This work includes the incredible acts of compassion through our faith-based institutions that help Americans in need, especially the Catholic schools that educate millions of our fellow citizens and deliver hope to inner-city children of all faiths.

This morning we first thank God for the shared blessings of American liberty. Catholics have always known that a society built on respect for the religious beliefs of others would be a land where they could achieve and prosper.

When the French writer de Tocqueville visited these shores back in the 1830s, he noted that the most democratic country in the world was also the one where the Catholic religion was making the most progress. He called Catholics the most

faithful believers in our land, yet also the most independent of citizens—[laughter]—as I've learned from dealing with Senator Santorum. [Laughter]

This morning we also reaffirm that freedom rests on the self-evident truths about human dignity. Pope Benedict XVI recently warned that when we forget these truths, we risk sliding into a dictatorship of relativism where we can no longer defend our values. Catholics and non-Catholics alike can take heart in the man who sits on the chair of Saint Peter, because he speaks with affection about the American model of liberty rooted in moral conviction.

This morning we pray for the many Catholics who serve America in the cause of freedom. One of them is an Army Chaplain named Tim Vakoc. He's a beloved priest who was seriously wounded in Iraq last May. We pray for his recovery; we're inspired by his sacrifice. In the finest tradition of American chaplains, he once told his sister, "The safest place for me to be is in the center of God's will, and if that is in the line of fire, that's where I'll be." Father Tim's sister, Anita Brand, and her family are with us today, and a grateful nation expresses our gratitude to a brave reverend.

Catholics have made sacrifices throughout American history because they understand that freedom is a divine gift that carries with it serious responsibilities. Among the greatest of these responsibilities is protecting the most vulnerable members of our society. That was the message that Pope John Paul II proclaimed so tirelessly

throughout his own life, and it explains the remarkable outpouring of love for His Holiness at the funeral mass that Laura and I were privileged to attend in Rome. It explains why when the men were carrying his wooden casket up the stairs and they turned to show the casket to the millions that were there, that just as the casket crests, the sun shown for all to see.

The best way to honor this great champion of human freedom is to continue to build a culture of life where the strong protect the weak. So today I ask the prayers of all Catholics for America's continued trust in God's purpose, for the wisdom to do what's right, and for the strength and the conviction that so long as America remains faithful to its founding truths, America will always be free.

Thank you for allowing me to come. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:42 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Leonard Leo, member of the board of directors, National Catholic Prayer Breakfast; Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop of Denver; Jose H. Gomez, Archbishop of San Antonio; Sr. Margaret Mary Jerousek, Little Sisters of the Poor; Rear Adm. Louis V. Iasiello, USN, Chief of Navy Chaplains; and Carl A. Anderson, supreme knight, Knights of Columbus. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark and an Exchange With Reporters May 20, 2005

President Bush. The Prime Minister and I will be glad to answer two questions per side.

First, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome back. It is so wonderful to see you. He's a good friend of mine. Denmark is a good friend

of America. I appreciate your contributions to transatlantic ties. The Prime Minister has made very constructive and helpful comments to make sure that the transatlantic ties between the United States and Europe are strong. And I want to thank you for your leadership role.

I also appreciate your clear understanding about the historic times in which we live, times in which more and more people are becoming free. I appreciate your strong support for those who desire to live in a democracy in Iraq. I thank you for your contributions to a new democracy called Afghanistan. I thank you for your very constructive work in helping the Palestinians develop a democratic state that can live side by side with Israel in peace.

So welcome back. It's good to see you, sir.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I'm happy to be back in Washington. It's my fourth visit as Prime Minister, which underlines that the United States and Denmark are close friends and allies. We share the same fundamental values. We are allied in our efforts to promote freedom and democracy worldwide.

And I'm happy to say, in addition to this, that I appreciate very much your straightforward style. I consider you a friend, and I know that with you, I'll always have a very frank discussion and exchange of views. So I'm happy to be back.

President Bush. Fortunately, he's not that good a friend that I would go running with him. [Laughter] He's one of the best runners in the world, amongst the world leaders. Yes. He's a good one.

Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Stem Cell Research

Q. Mr. President, on stem cells, specifically, would you veto legislation that loosened the requirement on Federal funding for stem cell research? And secondly—

President Bush. Now—

Q. —what's your reaction to the news about the South Koreans cloning an—

President Bush. I'm—first, I'm very concerned about cloning. I worry about a world in which cloning becomes acceptable. Secondly, I made my position very clear on embryonic stem cells. I'm a strong supporter of adult stem cell research, of course. But I made it very clear to the Congress that the use of Federal money, taxpayers' money to promote science which destroys life in order to save life is—I'm against that. And therefore, if the bill does that, I will veto it.

Investigations of Prisoner Abuse

Q. Mr. President, how do you react to the continuing reports about mistreatment of prisoners held by American military around the world, and also the perception abroad that the ones that are paying for it are low-ranking soldiers but that nobody higher up is taking any responsibility?

President Bush. I think the world ought to be—pay attention to the contrast between a society which was run by a brutal tyrant in which there was no transparency and a society in which the whole world watches a Government find the facts, lay the facts out for the citizens to see, and that punishment, when appropriate, be delivered.

If I'm not mistaken, I think about over 20 percent of the people thus far that have been held to account as a result of the Abu Ghraib issue have been officers. There have been over, I think, nine investigations, eight or nine investigations by independent investigators that have made the reports very public. I'm comfortable that we're getting to the bottom of the situation, and I know we're doing so in a transparent way. Obviously, ours is a country that respects human rights and human dignity, and if those rights and dignity have been denied, we will hold people to account.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].