



Max M. Kampelman Papers

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**MAX M. KAMPELMAN REMARKS
AT THE
2002 COMBINED CONVENTION OF THE
CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT IN JUDAISM**

Washington, DC
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Thank you very much for that gracious introduction and, of course, special thanks for your In Pursuit of Peace Award, which means a great deal to me and which I will cherish. This is an occasion for commemoration and not for formal speechmaking by me, particularly in the company of two outstanding friends, extraordinary public servants and distinguished leaders, Stuart Eizenstadt and Dennis Ross, who are exemplars of the values we share and whom I congratulate this evening.

These introductory comments are not designed to convey an unreal modesty on my part. They do convey, however, my recollection of the Jewish sage who said that as the heavens judge the applicants for admission, they do not weigh the awards that humans give to one another, but rather look for the wounds inflicted in the course of pursuing and living one's religious values. I stand before you this evening empty of wounds, appreciative of your award, and yet, therefore, conscious of its limitations.

Religion is, and should be, on our minds this evening. My childhood was permeated by it, not because my parents were particularly observant (they were not), but because they enrolled me as a Yeshiva student in the Bronx beginning with first grade and then at the Talmudical Academy High School, a part of the

FINAL

Yeshiva University. My departure after high school to New York University, which I frankly looked upon as an escape, exposed me to a much broader milieu, but I believe the essence of what remained with me from my time at the Yeshiva was indelibly imprinted on my life and career. I welcome the opportunity you have given me to search within myself and ruminate about that impact. Since we are not in a psychoanalytic forum, let me limit myself tonight to one appropriate and dominant illustration.

I vividly recall learning in the Yeshiva that within the being of each of us, there is a *Yaitzer Hatov* and a *Yaitzer Hara*, and that within us -- and, therefore, in the societies we create as well -- there is that which is good and constructive, and also that which is evil and destructive. This explains the concept of the Devil in many cultures. Freud understood this dichotomy. The Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called it "Children of Light and Children of Darkness." How else can we explain totalitarianism or the Holocaust?

As my own personal and political philosophy evolved, this early truth led me to conclude that we ignore the dark side at our peril. We must recognize and identify it as it really is -- "evil empire" of yesterday or the "axis of evil" of today - - if we are to replace it with our *Yaitzer Hatov*. Yes, our feet are indeed implanted deep in the dirt of the earth, but we also have the moral duty and the capacity to reach for the stars. That dichotomy is the story of civilization and its development. Judaism and religion to me translated itself into a commitment to strengthen the light within us which obligates us to overcome the dark side within us and our societies. I think of it as the evolution of the species *homo sapiens* to the species *human being*.

FINAL

This ever present evolution is challenging and frequently disruptive. The evolution in our day is not only philosophical, it is also pragmatic, technical, scientific, economic, political -- and all of these changes have a practical impact on human beings and our development. I suggest that religion is not exempt from its impact.

It would be presumptuous of me to remind this learned gathering of the continuing changes and modifications in the growth of the Halakha over the ages as we Jews have marched through the pages of history and into this astonishing modern age, complicated by its variations in different parts of the world. Recent new interpretations by the Vatican reflect similar developments in Christianity. There is, we know, deep resistance to change in all manifestations of religion -- most tragically evident today in Islam -- but I pray and believe the drive for survival may well overcome that resistance and evolve into a harmony with the challenges of modernity and globalization. The Conservative movement in Judaism appreciates and attempts to face that challenge.

I don't intend to end these remarks on a frivolous note, but a story told on himself by Bishop Fulton J. Sheehan has a relevant point with which I wish to conclude. He was scheduled to speak in Philadelphia at City Hall, and decided to walk there from his hotel. He lost his way, and was forced to ask some boys to direct him. One of them asked, "What are you going to do there?" "I am going to give a lecture," Bishop Sheehan replied. "About what?" the boy asked. "About how to get to heaven. Would you like to come along?" answered the Bishop. "Are you kidding?" replied the boy. "You don't even know how to get to City

FINAL

Hall!" My point, I guess, is that, in the face of a constant and understandable continuing search in religion for "meaning," I suggest that it is the experience of realistic living that may be at the heart of "meaning." I assume that it is in that spirit that you provide your awards tonight.

Those you honor tonight try to identify themselves with the Judaic and religious ethic that you represent and foster. Their lives of service reflect the essence of religious "living" and "meaning." For your leadership and your commitment, as well as for your distinguished award, I say "thank you."