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TRANSCRIPT OF DISCUSSION - PRESIDENT FORD AND EVANGELICAL LEADERS

Mr. President, Christians believe that a personal commitment to Jesus Christ has to be an integral part in their faith. In the light of that, can you tell us what Jesus Christ means to you, and have you dedicated your life to Him?

I have said on several occasions, when asked, that I have a commitment to the Christian faith and I have a relationship with Jesus Christ through my church and through my daily life. My faith goes back to my upbringing by my parents when I was very young. It has been reinforced in my lifetime by a number of experiences that I have had. Faith means the dedication to His life and to His principles and I seek to follow in my own public, as well as private, life those principles.

Many Presidents have testified that Bible reading and prayer were essential to them in times of crises. Do you find this to be true in your experience as well?

Very definitely, and it has been all of my life, but it has been accentuated by the fact that our oldest son, Mike Ford, is currently going to seminary, Gordon-Conwell, up in Massachusetts. He is very dedicated and since he has taken that as his life work, whenever he is here, we do have an even broader experience in reading the Bible and studying it together.

He gave me one of the priceless things that I have in the Oval Office, a Bible, which meant much to him and now means an even greater amount to me. Both my wife, Betty, and myself read excerpts from the Bible on a daily basis.

How does that Christian commitment that you have made to Jesus Christ affect the political decisions that you have to make day by day?

It is somewhat hard to be definitive in that regard, but the fact that I have that commitment has a tremendous subjective impact on decisions that I have to make, and some of these are very "close calls" as we say.

When some of these very difficult decisions have to be made by me in the Oval Office, I don't hesitate to ask for guidance through prayer.

Prayer is very important to me. From Proverbs, I have a favorite verse which I express daily, and have for a good many years. It is a daily source of strength for me: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct thy paths."

How does a person's private moral conduct affect his ability to serve in public office?

As a Christian, I strive to live up to the moral code as set forth in the Ten Commandments and in the teachings of Jesus.

As a public official, I feel that I am responsible to conduct myself privately so as to earn the respect of those I serve and those with whom I work.

The most effective public servants I have known were those who had a high moral code in their personal life.

We cannot stand very long on the shifting sands of "situation ethics." History proves that power and prestige are slippery peaks from which the mighty have often fallen into disgrace. Jesus said, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

We stand in danger today of losing the soul of America to the seductions of material gain and moral apathy, to a new code of conduct which reviles the basic truths and mocks the fundamental beliefs on which this Nation and much of religion were founded.

Public officials have a special responsibility to set a good example for others to follow, in both their private and public conduct. The American people, particularly our young people, cannot be expected to take pride or even to participate in a system of government that is defiled and dishonored, whether in the White House or in the halls of Congress.

Jesus said, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." Personal integrity is not too much to ask of public servants. We should accept nothing less.

The American people have seen too much abuse of the moral imperatives of honesty and of decency upon which religion and government and civilized society must rest. To remedy these abuses we must look not only to the government but, more importantly to the Bible, the church, the human heart.

In your view, is there any threat to religious liberty by big government and expanding government regulations?

I have said on numerous occasions that a government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take from us everything we have.

I have also stated that what we need is not bigger government but better government. I am sympathetic with most Americans who are fearful that government can become so large and we can be burdened with so many regulations that our individual liberties may be taken from us little by little. As long as I am President, I will resist government bureaucracies intruding into the free religious institutions of America.

We want the freedom in America to choose our own course, our own lives, to chart our own terms without having the government tell us everything we can or cannot do.

Do you propose any presidential initiatives on prayer and Bible reading in public schools?

I believe that prayer in public schools should be voluntary. It is difficult for me to see how religious exercises can be a requirement in public schools, given our constitutional requirement of separation of church and state.

I feel that the highly desirable goal of religious education must be principally the responsibility of church and home. I do not believe that public education should show any hostility toward religion, and neither should it inhibit voluntary participation, if it does not interfere with the educational process.

As long as this is the case, I do not plan any initiative.

You have already stated your opposition to abortion on demand. What actions do you propose to take to reduce the number of such abortions, especially those performed at governmental expense?

I have a deep concern about the rising tide of secularism. There is an apparent increase of irreverence for life.

I do not believe in abortion on demand. I think the Supreme Court went too far in its 1973 decision which invalidated the rights of the states to make their decisions on abortion. I disagree with the recent Supreme Court decision which permits abortion without the parents' permission.

As you know, I have consistently opposed the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court, but as President, I am sworn to uphold the laws of the land and I intend to carry out this responsibility. In my personal view, however, this court decision was unwise.

As Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, I co-sponsored an amendment which would restore this authority to the States, and I have consistently supported that position since that time.

My position has been based on three fundamental convictions:

- I am against abortion on demand
- The people of every State should have the Constitutional right to control abortion
- There is a need to recognize and provide for exceptional cases

I should also point out that the Republican Platform which I support is fully consistent with these views.

Some problems are better dealt with by the church or in the home. Government cannot in and of itself solve every problem.

Americans have benefited greatly by our rich spiritual heritage. The sound, sensible lessons of goodness imparted by religious teachers and devoted parents have done more than anything else to prepare our children for life.

What is your view of homosexual relations?

I hold a personal viewpoint that homosexual relations are wrong. I have always tried to be understanding and fair about people whose views are different from my own. That does not mean that I always agree with what they do or with what they believe. I just think we have to be considerate and respectful of others.

The teachings of the Bible are very explicit on this matter and when you consider it in a Biblical context, in my view homosexuality is morally wrong.

Many Christians are more interested in freedom to operate their religious and non-public schools without influence by and interference from governmental agencies than they are in subsidies. Are you concerned to safeguard this freedom?

This question gets back to the subject of big government and excessive government intrusion through a morass of bureaus and regulations. I have already stated my opposition to this.

This question also suggests the reaffirmation of something that I believe in very strongly, that there should be a wall of separation between church and state. Government should not be allowed to control any of our religious institutions.

I have a long standing commitment to diversity in American education. We need our public schools. I also have a long standing commitment to limited government, freedom of religion, and the separation of church and state.

If any alleged abuses by the FBI and the CIA are proven true, what do you think should be done?

America's intelligence agencies are vitally important to our Nation's security. They are essential in wartime, but they are also essential in peacetime. They are the best insurance we have that we will not be caught napping.

We have to keep strong our intelligence gathering arms, the FBI and the CIA. Without the excellent crime fighting skills of the FBI this country would be at the mercy of international lawlessness.

As to proven and alleged abuses, as President, I will not tolerate any improper activities. I have attempted during my Administration to strengthen the intelligence community and at the same time to assure the prevention of abuses by the intelligence community against American citizens. We now have very specific guidelines defining what the intelligence agencies can and cannot do. If those guidelines are ignored, the persons responsible will be held fully accountable.

I have great confidence that both the FBI and the CIA will do an effective job in helping to keep Americans safe at home and America safe in the world.

Do you think world Communism is a threat to freedom in the world today, and if so, what responsibilities does America have in this regard?

The actions of our adversaries, as we have known them over the last four decades, have indeed been a threat to freedom in the world, but it is not nearly as great a threat to freedom and world peace so long as America is strong and determined.

I see clearly the expansionist desires of some countries and their leaders, and as President I have sternly resisted their efforts. It is essential to world stability that American defenses and those of our allies be maintained. As President, I have consistently proposed the necessary funds to make sure of our military capability in order that we may play our necessary role in helping to maintain peace and stability in the world.

While I have often stated my opposition to the basic philosophy of our adversaries, I would not like to see us return to the cold war or return to an uncontrolled arms race. Confrontation is not only costly; it is very dangerous. Therefore, we continue to maintain lines of communication and to create an improved climate, one with a minimum of distrust, so that hostilities are much less likely to occur.

Does the current state of crime and punishment call for any reform in the American judicial system, and if so, what do you recommend?

I share with millions of Americans their concern about the problem of crime. The preamble to our Constitution seeks "to insure domestic tranquility." It was John Locke who said "Where there is no law, there is no freedom."

As President, I have called for the enactment of a comprehensive criminal code to replace the highly complex and confusing set of laws now on the books. I have also set forth the following proposals:

- Establishment of "career criminal" programs designed to assure quick identification and prosecution of persons who repeatedly commit serious offenses.
- Continuation and expansion of programs designed to divert certain first offenders into rehabilitation prior to trial.
- Creation of additional Federal District Court judgeships and expansion of the criminal jurisdiction of United States Magistrates.
- Upgrading of prison facilities, including the replacement of large, outdated prisons with smaller, more modern ones.
- An increase this year in U.S. Attorneys prosecuting Federal crimes and reinforcement of the number of U.S. Marshals.

To keep a convicted criminal from committing more crimes we must put him in prison so he cannot harm more law-abiding citizens. To be effective, this punishment must be swift and certain.

I disagree with the concept of so-called "victimless crime." In many instances, although it may not be possible to identify a particular individual who is the victim, society itself is often the victim. For example, prostitution is a major source of income for organized crime. And clearly drug abuse is responsible for much of the more violent crimes in America today.

Society has made a judgment that these activities are illegal, and I firmly believe that those convicted of such offenses should be brought to justice. The law must be fairly, but firmly, enforced.

More importantly, these offenses threaten the moral fiber of our nation.

Some political observers feel that for the first time in over a decade religion has become an issue in a Presidential campaign. How do you feel about this emphasis on the religious views of a candidate?

I believe a candidate's personal religion is a proper concern for voters when they are choosing their President. However, I do not believe that it is proper for any political figure to deliberately exploit religion for his or her political advantage.

If I am asked about my beliefs, I will respond for I am proud of the convictions I hold.

If you are elected to a full, four-year term, what is your foremost hope for America?

My hope is that in working together we can build an America that does not merely celebrate history, but writes it -- that offers limited government and unlimited opportunity -- that concerns itself with a quality of life marked by strong and free religious institutions, homes which nurture the young, weaving a strong moral fiber for future generations, an America where the other basic institutions in education and industry are solidly grounded and productive for the good of all who live in this great land.

I might add that Betty and I don't necessarily agree on this, but we understand each other. That is my personal feeling and I have tried to say it as carefully and as constructively as possible.

QUESTION: Mr. President, what is the Administration's viewpoint, what are they going to do about the secondary and also primary boycott of American companies dealing with the Arabs, especially some of the very large construction companies? It is difficult to do business with these firms as American firms because of their contracts with the Arabs.

What is the Administration able to do or could do to help our American firms?

THE PRESIDENT: The Arab boycott problem is a very difficult one. We have, in the Administration, tried to impose responsible regulations that will show our displeasure with the attitude of a number of the Arab nations because we basically disagree with that kind of discrimination that they are seeking to impose.

The Congress, however, has initiated legislation and there is a section or a title in the tax bill which will shortly be down on my desk, a 1500-page tax bill, which not only covers this problem but gets into anti-boycott tax provisions.

Now, the Treasury Department during the conference between the House and the Senate tried to work with the conferees to get legislation that would be understandable and legislation that would carry out the intent of what the Congress was trying to do and yet not be punitive as far as American business is concerned.

I have not seen the final language but I am told that the final language does permit the intent of the legislation to be carried out without a punitive impact in a responsible business way.

Now, there are going to be some tough regulations that will have to be worked out by the Treasury experts but I think this is the answer and a responsible answer as far as I understand the case.

JOSEF CARDINAL SLIPYJ

Born: Zazdriz, Ukraine February 17, 1892

Consecrated Archbishop of the Ukrainian (Byzantine) Catholic Church
in December of 1939

Became Metropolitan of Lviv, Ukraine on November 15, 1944.

Arrested by Soviet Army on April 11, 1945.

Spent 1946 through 1965 in Soviet hard labor camps, mostly in Siberia.

Released by Nikita Khrushchev and flown to Rome on February 10, 1963

Installed Cardinal of the Church on February 25, 1965 in Rome, Italy

Cardinal Slipyj came to the United States to attend the funeral of Metropolitan
Ambrose Senyshyn, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United
States.

He is meeting with President Ford and will be accompanied by Bishop H.
Losten, who was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Ukrainian
Catholic Church in America just before the death of Metropolitan
Senyshyn.