

Comments at emergency meeting of U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, May 13, 1985

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Each of us has to act from conscience, Mr. Chairman, and to state my own position of conscience is not to question the integrity of another's conscience. I stress the point since my own position will put me at odds with people in this room whose convictions I admire and whose friendship I cherish.

I support the resolution calling for collective resignation by the Council. I have been shocked by the ~~attitude and~~ insensitivity of the president in recent weeks to everything for which the Council stands. *Recall that series of events:*

We assert the absolute necessity of remembering the past; the president, when the German trip ^{is} ~~was~~ first under discussion, insisted^s that there should be no trip to Dachau, ^{telling us} ~~asserting~~ that we must forget the past and look to the future.

We affirm the uniqueness of the suffering of the holocaust victims; the president asserted^s that German soldiers ^{are} ~~were~~ just as much victims as those who were tortured, gassed and murdered in the death camps.

We pleaded^d with him not to visit Bitburg, since that visit would honor the creators and maintainers of the death camps, the S.S. troops; the president insisted^s on going, being willing to forget the victims and honor the victimizers.

We continued^d to plead that he cancel the Bitburg visit; the president responded^d, only after immense public pressure, by promising to "balance" the Bitburg visit with a visit to Bergen-Belsen, a public relations gesture that in ~~that~~ ^{the} context remains offensive.

We asserted^d throughout that it ^{is} ~~was~~ morally wrong to go to Bitburg; the president insisted^s, after all the discussion, that he had a "moral duty" to go there.

The president's words and deeds make a mockery of everything to which this Council is committed.

In the face of ~~the~~ presidential record, I am not persuaded ~~in the~~ ~~least~~ by the emotional speech at Bergen-Belsen, a text written for the president by someone else, the delivery of which was described by White House aides as an exceptional "performance." Mr. Chairman, it is not "performances" we need to avert a future holocaust and remember the past one; it is deep-seated and consistent moral conviction, and that moral conviction I find lacking in the president. Words crafted by another, even if read effectively, do not cancel out his own words and deeds.

To continue as "presidential appointees" of this president is to ^{give} ~~suggest~~ tacit approval of his denial of the need to remember, his equation of victims with victimizers, his honoring the killers, and his claim that these things are done in the name of morality. I do not want future historians to look back on us and ask, "Why, in the face of ^{such} ~~total~~ assaults on your convictions, did you not utter a loud and resounding "No"? Why did you continue to cooperate with the holder of such viewpoints?"

Mr. Chairman, ^{one final} ~~I have used my three minutes, but I ask your indulgence to give another~~ and even more personal reason for urging resignation. I am part of a community, the Christian church, that, with few exceptions, remained silent in the face of Hitler's assault on the Jews. Nothing we Christians do today can wipe out that complicity. But at least, learning from that failure, we need not repeat it. And having seen and heard, so clearly and so painfully, that what the president says and does is a particular affront to Jews, as well as to myself, I want to make clear that as a Christian I accept no part of it as valid, ~~and~~ it would be part of a personal act of resignation to make that clear, for it is a matter of particular personal

pain that the man who says and does these things also claims the name of Christian.

~~S-~~I hope that our repudiation, whether as Jews or Christians, will be loud and clear, so that at no future time will we be asked, "Where was your voice when the concerns of your collective lifetimes were being trampled upon?"

To me, Mr. Chairman, that loud and clear repudiation means resignation.