

Rabbi Arthur Schneier

Mr. President, Edwin Artzt, my dear friend and closest associate Angier Biddle Duke, Rev. Clergy, Your Eminences and Excellencies, dear friends:

For once I'm speechless. This is more than a dream come true. When we first started in 1965, there was religious oppression. There was percussion and violation of human dignity in human rights under Communist tyranny; and when my colleagues and I of the Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Baptist and now I'm delighted, Islam, when we first went to Moscow, we were like beggars. We were told by the then Minister of Religion, God is for old people. What are you talking about? But God is very much alive. And the tyrants have disappeared.

I just have to look around at this magnificent gathering of men, women of faith, and I see the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations here, Prime Minister of Bulgaria, who until one year ago, was in the opposition to Communism and now heads the United Nations General Assembly. When I see religious leaders from different parts of the world where freedom did not exist it really is a source of gratification satisfaction for all of us that we have lived to see this day.

I want to pay particular tribute to our Dinner Chairman, Dr. Paul Stern, who has done an excellent job in putting this dinner together. It's a mutual admiration. Rarely have I met a man who has the dimension, the vision and the commitment that Paul Stern

has. Not only the leader of Northern Telecom, but Paul knows how to communicate. And that's your great strength. He is a communicator between people and we salute you, Paul. We salute the Co-Chairman Steven Friedman and John Hennessy and Paul Volcker, and the Vice-Chairman, and the members of the Dinner Committee, and we are most grateful for helping us reach a milestone in the development of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Friends, when we lived to see the Berlin Wall come down, when we lived to see religious freedom regained and the process of the mecretization in Eastern Europe in the form of the Soviet Union, little did we anticipate that the persecution of minorities, xenophobia and anti-Semitism would emerge as the weapons of rabid nationalists, threatening democracy across Eastern and Central Europe. We were not prepared for this. There was such euphoria, there was such excitement, there was such elation and President Salinas visited Budapest, Hungary just this summer. As I mentioned I preceded you by a week and informing Prime Minister Antal what a great visitor you will have. And he did.

But this is what we are facing across Europe. This is what we are facing in the former Soviet Union, and barriers are coming up again. And this is the new challenge for the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. Protection of minorities, because the test of any nation's devotion to democracy is the freedom and equality that is afforded to its racial, religious, ethnic and national minorities. Protecting those minority groups is the major challenge facing free Europe today.

On the eve of the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur, some of my colleagues, Archbishop McCarrick, Avraham Donney, Dr. Reed, and many others, gathered to welcome the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Pavle. And we were engaging in a dialogue, what can religious leaders do; what must religious leaders do to exert moral leadership, to put an end to that human misery and suffering, bloodshed in the former Yugoslavia. We have too witnesses here of that tragedy. We have the former Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia, Budimir Loncar in our midst. We have the permanent representative of Bosnia Herzegovina. We cannot accept impotence. We must give a moral message and end to this bloodshed and misery, and this is just an example of what persecution of minorities can mean, what "ethnic cleansing" is all about, and Paul, you mentioned that I am a Holocaust survivor, I can tell you what begins first with "ethnic cleansing"; what begins first with persecution of a minority, ends up with an attempt of a "Final Solution", the extinction of a people. We must stand guard against that.

And so it's with great pleasure that I salute, on behalf of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, truly a World Statesman. Ed, you gave away his age, but he doesn't mind it, and he shouldn't. Remarkable personality. And, Mr. President, you have received so many messages from fellow statesmen as the Ambassador Duke mentioned. President Weizsaecker and so many of the others. In a way, this gathering is the feast after San Antonio, Texas. It's not only a personal tribute to President Salinas, but it is

also a tribute to the leadership if offered in bringing down the barriers between two great nations, Mexico and the United States. And we don't forget Canada because Canada is very well represented. Thank you. I have not forgotten Canada.

You heard so many laudatory messages from previous speakers and that's the disadvantage when you are the last speaker, Mr. President. But let me put in context what I believe you are, and let me put it in biblical context, because if you look around this distinguished dais, you have a Primate of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America, the Greek Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Protestants, so many. We're all gathered to give you comprehensive coverage, a comprehensive ecumenical blessing for all you've done.

And so, let me put into context your role on the world scene. You know when God wanted to find an architect to build the Tabernacle, there were many, many applicants, many applicants. It was the most challenging task to build a sanctuary. And one candidate made it. You know his qualifications were qualifications that you possess. And I give you the wording from the Bible in Hebrew and English. "He had wisdom and he had heart." And because of the fact that he had wisdom and heart, Bezalel was anointed to build the sanctuary. He built it, and that was a tribute through all generations to a gifted mind of heart. Mr. President, you have endowed God gave you a brilliant mind and intellect.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of Mexico has an academic career. He has not one Master's degree, but two Master's degrees in Economics, and a Ph.D., not Honoris Causa, but hard earned and well-earned at Harvard University. His cabinet is known as the Economic Cabinet. But that's the intellect, the man of grand design, of vision, who believes in economic and social revolutionary changes in this country, including the strengthening of the religious freedom in Mexico, but let me tell you the man of heart. And I'm sorry that your beloved wife, Cecilia, is not here to listen to this. But it's recorded. She is presiding over a UNICEF function in Mexico City with the President and Mrs. Salinas' three children.

A man of heart. This man of conscience religiously, every week, takes off on Thursdays and Fridays, to reach out to the poor, to get a sense of their needs, and to respond to their needs. Every Thursday and Friday, this is a sacred commitment on the part of the man of heart. And furthermore, he is behind a great movement, the Solidarity movement that seeks to bring relief to the poor, to give them hope, to give them inspiration, to get them jobs, and to provide them with basic human dignity.

It is my great pleasure and privilege, on behalf of our ecumenical Appeal of Conscience Foundation, to cite the President, His Excellency Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico, with the World Statesman Award. And since it is the President, I will ask the entire dais to rise and let us give this great leader a resounding applause, and May God Bless You. Amen.