

STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOB DOLE

FEBRUARY 5, 1979

LET ME SAY AS I STATED ON FEBRUARY 18, 1976, I FIRMLY BELIEVE EVERY MEMBER OF CONGRESS DESIRES AND STRIVES TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF HIS OR HER CONSTITUENTS. OFTENTIMES, HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUES, WHETHER SIMPLE OR COMPLEX, WE FALL SHORT IN PROVIDING ANSWERS TO THEIR INQUIRIES.

IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT I, ALONG WITH SENATOR EDWARD ZORINSKY, AND REPRESENTATIVES ROBERT GIAIMO, RICHARD OTTINGER, HAMILTON FISH, AND G. WILLIAM WHITEHURST, HAVE ARRANGED THIS INFORMAL MEETING ON SO-CALLED CULT GROUPS IN THIS COUNTRY.

SOME HAVE MISINTERPRETED OUR INTENTIONS. I WANT TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR THAT THIS PROCEEDING IS NOT A CONGRESSIONAL HEARING; IT IS NOT AN INVESTIGATION; IT IS NOT A PUBLIC SPEECH-MAKING FORUM; IT IS NOT A "MEDIA-EVENT"; AND ABOVE ALL, IT IS NOT A DEBATE BETWEEN OPPOSING POINTS OF VIEW.

THIS MEETING SHOULD NOT BE LOOKED UPON TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS AND ALL THE ANSWERS TO THE MANY CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS ISSUE. IT IS INSTEAD, OUR DESIRE THAT THIS BE A STARTING POINT FOR MEMBERS IN THEIR SEARCH FOR A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THIS VERY SENSITIVE AND COMPLEX ISSUE.

NOTHING IN THIS MEETING SHOULD GIVE THE SLIGHTEST COMFORT TO THOSE WHO WOULD WEAKEN OUR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. THOSE LIBERTIES REMAIN ABSOLUTE AND INVIOLEABLE. INDEED, WE MIGHT ALL PONDER THE WORDS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON, WHO WROTE TO HIS FRIEND JOHN ADAMS, "I NEVER TOLD MY OWN RELIGION, NOR SCRUTINIZED THAT OF ANOTHER. I NEVER ATTEMPTED TO MAKE A CONVERT, NOR WISHED TO CHANGE ANOTHER'S CREED. I HAVE EVER JUDGED OF OTHERS' RELIGION BY THEIR LIVES . . . FOR IT IS FROM OUR LIVES AND NOT FROM OUR WORDS, THAT OUR RELIGION MUST BE READ."

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THAT IS THE SENTIMENT UNDERLYING THIS MEETING. THERE ARE TO BE NO JUDGMENTS MADE HERE. THERE ARE, INSTEAD, ONLY QUESTIONS TO ASK AND UNDERSTANDING TO BE GAINED.

IN 1976 I SPONSORED A SIMILAR MEETING BASED ON A PETITION I RECEIVED SIGNED BY OVER 14,000 PARENTS FROM THE STATE OF KANSAS, WHICH REQUESTED AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE THEIR CONCERNS REGARDING CULT GROUPS HEARD AND DISCUSSED. IN RECENT YEARS PARTICULARLY, THERE HAS BEEN A NEED FOR THIS COUNTRY TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THIS VERY COMPLEX ISSUE. WHILE I AM AWARE OF THE SENSITIVITY OF THIS ISSUE, WE MUST NOT FAIL TO ADDRESS IT. WERE WE TO DO SO, WE WOULD BE IGNORING A SOCIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY AND INDIVIDUAL.

THE SO-CALLED CULT PHENOMENON

WE HAVE HEARD OF UNFAMILIAR GROUPS AND "NEW RELIGIONS", ALL PURPORTING TO SUPPLY THEIR FOLLOWERS WITH ANSWERS TO PERSONAL PROBLEMS. COURTS ARE CHOKED WITH CASES INVOLVING QUESTIONS OF COERCION, KIDNAPPING, CONSERVATORSHIPS. NEW WORDS DESCRIBE STRANGE PROCEDURES. FOR SOME, DEPROGRAMMING MEANS THE SALVATION OF THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS IN THESE SO-CALLED "NEW RELIGIOUS GROUPS"; FOR OTHERS IT MEANS FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM. PARENTS CLAIM THEIR CHILDREN'S MINDS HAVE BEEN "TAKEN OVER". ACCUSED ORGANIZATIONS PROTEST. CIVIL LIBERTARIANS AND MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS EXPRESS CONCERN THAT PROTESTS AGAINST THESE SO-CALLED "NEW RELIGIOUS GROUPS" ENCROACH UPON FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS.

THE NEED FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

AND, AS THE NUMBER AND PROMINENCE OF SO-CALLED "NEW RELIGIOUS GROUPS" RISES, SO DOES AMERICA'S NEED TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THIS DEVELOPMENT. THERE ARE QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS. FOR INSTANCE, DO THESE GROUPS PROMOTE THE SPIRITUAL LIBERATION OF TRUE RELIGION OR THE SLAVERY OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAP? IN ADDITION TO WHAT APPEARS TO BE A VERY LUCRATIVE BUSINESS, IS DEPROGRAMMING A SYNONYM FOR KIDNAPPING AND A VIOLATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION? ARE WE, BY GRANTING TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR CERTAIN GROUPS, ACTUALLY SUBSIDIZING

ACTIVITIES PROHIBITED UNDER OUR TAX LAWS? WHAT, IF ANY, RESPONSIBILITY DO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE IN ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE? HOPEFULLY, TODAY'S PROCEEDINGS WILL PROVIDE US A STARTING POINT IN UNDERSTANDING AND FORMULATING ANSWERS TO THESE AND NUMEROUS OTHER QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS ISSUE.

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