# Department of Justice

Remarks by

ATTORNEY GENERAL NICHOLAS deB. KATZENBACH

at the

presentation to Francis Cardinal Spellman

of the

John LaFarge Memorial Award for Interracial Justice

by the

Catholic Interracial Council New York

Hotel Commodore
New York, New York
7 p.m., Tuesday, May 18, 1965

It is a great pleasure to join you this evening.

This very great turnout of distinguished men and women, and the presence of so many prominent clergymen of all faiths, is not only a significant tribute to Cardinal Spellman, it is also a formidable challenge for a lay speaker.

Nevertheless, I come as a Protestant, who has sometimes been mistaken for a Jew, to help honor a Catholic--and the spirit of ecumenicism so much fostered by the civil rights movement and so much in evidence here tonight.

I compliment Cardinal Spellman on his many years of work in the cause of interracial justice for which he is being honored today. Like his friend, the pioneering Father John LaFarge, who was working in the civil rights area in the 1930's, the Cardinal has been a great force behind the drive to give equality to all Americans, not only within the Catholic Church but in the entire community.

Much has happened in civil rights since 1939 when Cardinal Spellman joined forces with Father LaFarge here in New York City. It is an appropriate time for a new look at where we stand and where we are going.

In 1943, the Catholic Bishops of the United States issued a statement calling for the extension of equal rights and opportunities to all Americans. They said:

> ". . . there are among us millions of fellow citizens of the Negro race. We owe to these fellow citizens, who have contributed so largely to the development of our

country. . . the rights which are given them in our Constitution. This means not only political equality, but also fair economic and educational opportunities, a just share in public welfare projects, good housing without exploitation, and a full chance for the social advancement of their race."

In 1965, we have gone a long way toward fulfilling the first part of that debt. Since the bishops spoke, the courts have made it clear that separate but equal has no meaning in any area of the law.

The 1957 Civil Rights Act established the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and the Civil Rights Commission. The 1964 Act outlawed discrimination in public accommodations and facilities. It provides means to speed school desegregation and end discrimination in federally assisted programs and in employment.

And now, the Voting Rights bill, which I am confident will be passed by Congress with dispatch, will further hasten the end of official discrimination.

The role the churches have played in achieving these gains is profound and impressive. It will, I am convinced, be remembered as one of the truly significant developments of this decade. At no time in recent memory have men of the cloth had so large a part in shaping history. They have carried the banners of a revolution that is as much moral as it is social, and as much spiritual as it is secular.

No movement has done more for the ecumenical spirit than the joint participation of the various faiths. Almost every religious denomination has taken part. The movement has been local as well as national. The Catholic Interracial Council has counterparts in other religious groups and in other cities.

During the Selma march, the press was filled with pictures of nuns marching alongside Rabbis, and patriarchs of Greek orthodoxy standing beside Negro Baptists. Here was an issue and an occasion on which all who believed in the brotherhood of man could walk together without worrying about doctrinal differences. I think that the effect on the public of this demonstration of the unity of the churches has been enormous.

The 1963 National Conference on Religion and Race--initiated by Mathew Ahmann and the late Cardinal Meyer in which 800 Catholic, Protestant and Jewish delegates participated--had great psychological impact.

So did the joint testimony of the Reverend Carson Blake, Rabbi Irving Blank, and Father John Cronin before Congressional committees holding hearings on the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

So did the participation of so many church leaders in the March on Washington and the vigil by seminarians at the Lincoln Memorial.

The impact was twofold. Not only did it stir whites who had been relatively insulated from and indifferent to civil rights, it also--

for the first time--convinced the Negro community that the predominant force of church influence was really behind them.

Men as politically removed from each other as Andrew Biemiller of the AFL-CIO and Senator Russell of Georgia, both said that the participation of the churches is what made the difference in the passing of the 1964 Act.

Certainly not all church groups have taken part. There are still segregated churches. There are still churches which equivocate. There are still churchmen who interpret biblical passages to sanctify and sanction segregation. But there are, I think, far fewer than there have been.

We have seen everywhere before us examples of outstanding courage among churchmen in implementing peaceful integration and understanding in their communities.

There was the bold Christian resoluteness of the late Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans who integrated parochial schools in the face of violent community hostility.

There was the brave faculty of the Rosemary School in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, which held interracial meetings despite attempts to burn the school down.

There was Sister Michael Anne who assisted Jimmie Lee Jackson after he had been shot in the stomach in Marion, Alabama, and was refused aid at the Marion Hospital.

There are men like Father Ouellet in Selma and Father Law in Jackson who, often in the face of personal danger, have worked to reach settlements and accord under highly combustible circumstances.

There are the personnel of St. Jude Hospital outside Montgomery who subjected themselves to considerable public censure for providing a headquarters for the Alabama March.

These and many Catholic men and women, and their equivalents in other faiths, are fulfilling the debt to Negro citizens mentioned by the bishops in 1943.

The work is not complete. There will continue to be difficulties in enforcing legal guarantees. I do not mean to minimize these. But the legal principle is now established; the system of officially sanctioned segregation is in its death throes in the United States. The legal rights guaranteed to the American Negro have existed for a century. Now they are being put into effect.

But while the first part of the debt--equality before the law--is now close to being paid, there is still a long way to go in the second and more difficult area mentioned by the bishops--that of equality in economic and educational opportunities, in housing and social advancement.

These problems are more difficult because they reflect failures of our whole society. Slums, inferior schools, crowding, bad health, poverty--these are not Negro problems, they are American problems.

They are the result of a failure to meet the needs not only of Negroes, but human needs generally.

Similarly, the existence of ghettoes, whether they be of Negro poor, or Puerto Rican poor, or Irish poor, endangers and deprives and deprecates not only those in it, but the entire community.

This is an area in which the church can contribute something unique, for it is a field in which the government, no matter how devoted, can provide only the tip in the arrow of attack.

The fight for equality in the economic area must be fought on the parish level, and it is there where churches are best equipped to organize it. The foot soldiers in the battle must be not only clergymen, but lay individuals. The work demands private volunteers willing to help in the slum school or poor neighborhood.

There are already indications that the religious community will mobilize as mightily in these new battles as it has mobilized behind the drive for equal rights before the law.

There are already indications that clergymen will be as ready to work in the dreary slums and ghettoes of the North and South as they were to march in Selma. Their chores will lack the drama and excitement of Selma, but they are equally vital and must be performed.

These clergymen recognize, as all Americans must, that we cannot confuse protest with progress, or denunciation with achievement. It is easier to grow angry at police brutality in Alabama than to aid a

Negro child in the slum across town. And it may be easier to demonstrate in Mississippi--even at the risk of personal danger--than to confront respectable, conservative elements in one's own congregation.

Discharging our obligations on home ground will often be agonizing. They involve some of the most heated, controversial and sometimes delicate social issues of our time--rent, strikes, school boycotts, and the bussing of children to other schools.

Social change does not come about easily, for either side. The sense of restraint and dignity that has been shown by people who for years have suffered discrimination and lived in poverty and distress is remarkable. But understandably, resistance to change is often as great among those who have undergone generations of deprivation as it is among other groups who feel their higher status will be threatened by it.

These are changes about which Father John LaFarge wrote 28 years ago--changes to break down the wall of partition and erase "the handwriting of human hate and prejudice."

As President Johnson observed a year ago to a gathering of clergymen of all faiths at the White House: ". . . laws and government are, at best, coarse instruments for remodeling social institutions, illuminating dark places of the human heart."

Our job now must be to go beyond law. Our job now must be to find creative outlets for the frustrations and emotions that are the

inevitable product of social change.

To do so will require not only hard work and commitment but judgment and forebearance among all of us. For the changes that we seek will be brought about not only by governments and not only by institutions, but, at root, by individuals.

"In proportion as we further the Christian interracial spirit", concluded Father LaFarge, "shall we hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth."