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Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Methodist Student Leadership Conference Address*



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Bishop [Kenneth W.] Copeland, Miss Foreman, and to all of the delegates attending this significant conference of the Methodist Student Movement, ladies and gentlemen:

I need not pause to say how delighted and honored I am to be here tonight, and to be a part of this very significant conference. And I certainly want to express my deep personal appreciation to the committee and to all of you for extending the invitation. It is always a rich and rewarding experience for me to take a brief break from the day-to-day demands of our struggle for freedom and human dignity and discuss the issues involved in that struggle with college and university students and concerned people of goodwill all over this nation and all over the world. And so I can assure you that it is a great privilege to be here with you tonight.

I'm deeply grateful to you for your warm expressions of support, and I bring you greetings from those hundreds and thousands of individuals who are involved in the civil rights struggle all over this nation. Many of you are involved in that struggle and we're all in it together. And by and through the grace of God and continued work we will be able, I'm sure, to solve this great problem which is the chief moral dilemma of our nation.

I'm sure that most of you have read that arresting little story from the pen of Washington Irving entitled Rip Van Winkle. The one thing that we usually remember about the story of Rip Van Winkle is that he slept 20 years.



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But there is another point in that little story that is almost always completely overlooked: it was a sign on the inn in the little town on the Hudson from which Rip went up into the mountain for his long sleep. When he went up, the sign had a picture of King George III of England. When he came down, 20 years later, the sign in the inn had a picture of George Washington, the first President of the United States. And When Rip Van Winkle saw the picture of George Washington, he was amazed. He was completely lost; he knew not who he was.

This tells us that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle is not nearly that he slept 20 years, but that he slept through a revolution. While he was peacefully snoring up in the mountain, a great revolution was taking place in the world, a revolution that, at points, would change the course of history. And yet Rip Van Winkle knew nothing about it; he was asleep.

There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution. One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people find themselves standing amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to achieve the new attitudes, the new thought patterns, the new mental outlooks that the new situation demands. So many people fail to remain awake through great revolutions.

Now, I need not remind you tonight that there is a great revolution taking place in our nation and in the world. It is a social revolution, sweeping away an old order and bringing into being a new order. We've seen it on the international scale with the demise of colonialism. And we see it in our own nation with the gradual decline, the gradual defeat of the system of racial segregation.

The wind of change is blowing all over our world all and all over our nation. The great challenge facing everyone assembled here tonight, the great challenge facing America, the great challenge facing every Christian is to remain awake through this great social revolution, for we have basic Christian responsibilities and great -- basic Christian challenges as a result of this new age which is emerging. And so tonight, I would like to suggest some of the things that we must do, if we are to be responsible Christians in the midst of the racial revolution that is taking place in our nation and in the world.

First, I'd like to say that we're challenged more than ever before to achieve a world perspective. Any individual or any nation that feels that it can live alone today is sleeping through a revolution. But in a real sense we are all interdependent.

Now, it is true that the geographical wonders of our age has come into being, to a large extent, because of man's scientific ingenuity. Man, through his scientific genius, has been able to dwarf distance and place -- time and change. And our jet planes have compressed into minutes distances that once took weeks and even months. I think Bob Hope has adequately described this new jet age in which we live. And I know it isn't the usual thing for a Baptist preacher to be quoting Bob Hope, but I think he's described this age very well.



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He said it is an age in which it is possible to take a non-stop flight from Los Angeles to New York City, a distance of almost 3,000 miles, and, if on taking off in Los Angeles you develop hiccups, you will "hic" in Los Angeles and "cup" in New York City. You know it is possible because of the time difference to take a flight from Tokyo, Japan on Sunday night and arrive in Seattle, Washington on the preceding Saturday morning, and when your friends ask you when you left Tokyo you will have to say, "I left tomorrow." This is the kind of world in which we live.

Now, this is a bit humorous. I'm trying to laugh a basic fact into all of us, and it is simply this -- that man, through his scientific genius and his technological genius, has made of this world a neighborhood. And now we are challenged through our moral and ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. For we must all learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together as fools. This is a great challenge facing our nation and our world today. No nation can live alone. No individual can live alone. And it is necessary to see this.

I remember some time ago Mrs. King and I had the privilege of journeying to that great nation known as India. And I never will forget the experience. It was a marvelous experience to meet and talk with the great leaders of India, and to meet and talk with hundreds of thousands of people all over the cities and villages of that vast country. These experiences will remain dear to me as long as the cords of memory shall lengthen.

But my friends I say to you tonight, that there were those depressing moments -- for how can one avoid being depressed when he sees evidences with his own eyes of millions of people going to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks every night. They have no beds to sleep in. They have no houses to go in. How can one avoid being depressed when he discovers that out of India's population of more than 400 hundred million people, some 380 million make an income of less than 90 dollars a year. And most of these people have never seen a doctor or a dentist.

As I noticed these conditions, something within me cried out, "Can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned?" And an answer came, "Oh no, because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India and every other nation." And I started thinking about the fact that we spend millions of dollars a day to store surplus food in our country. And I said to myself, "I know where we can store that food free of charge: in the wrinkled stomachs of the millions of God's children in Asia and Africa, in South America, and in our own nation who go to bed hungry tonight." It may well be that we spend far too much of our national budget establishing military bases around the world rather than bases of genuine concern and understanding.

All I'm saying is simply this: that all life is interrelated, and in a real sense we are all courting an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.



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For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality. John Donne caught it years ago and placed it in graphic terms: No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." And he goes on toward the end to say: Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that a recognition of this is a basic responsibility that we, as Christians, face in the midst of the social changes that are taking place in our world.

Let me say secondly, that we have a Christian responsibility, in this racial crisis, in this revolution, to reaffirm the essential immorality of racial segregation. Now over the last few years, we have had many important legal battles, and all of these battles of been for the purpose of establishing the constitutionality of integration and the unconstitutionality of segregation. It was very important to have these legal battles; very important to have the Supreme court standing up in 1954 saying, "that separate facilities are inherently unequal" -- that the old Plessy doctrine of 1896 must go, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. This was important and it remains important.

But we, as Christians, must come to see not only the unconstitutionality of segregation, but we must reaffirm over and over again that racial segregation is sinful and immoral, whether it's in the public schools, whether it's in housing, whether it is in the Christian church, or any other area of life. Segregation is morally wrong and sinful. Segregation is evil, to use the words of the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, because it substitutes an I-It relationship for the I-Thou relationship. To use the thinking of Saint Thomas Aquinas, segregation is evil because it is based on human laws that are out of harmony with the moral, natural, and eternal laws of the universe. Somewhere the great theologian Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. What is segregation but an existential expression of man's tragic estrangement -- his awful sinfulness, his tragic separation. And every Christian must see this, and see that segregation in any form is a cancer in the body politic of our nation which must be removed before our democratic and moral health can be realized. We must set out to get rid of segregation all over America -- now, henceforth, and forevermore. This is the challenge facing every Christian.

Now, the Church has another thing that it can do in the ideational realm. It is necessary now to get rid of the notion once and for all that there are superior and inferior races. The tragedy of segregation, the tragedy of slavery is not only what it does to one in terms of physical inconvenience, but what it does to the soul. These systems scar the soul. They damage the personality. They end up giving the segregator a false sense of superiority, while leaving the segregated with a false sense of inferiority. The whole doctrine of white supremacy has been based on this idea of one racial group being superior to another racial group.



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Now, certainly many of the scholars and in academic circles we have found individuals working in these areas and they've made it clear that there is no evidence for this. Great anthropologists, like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, the late Melvin Herskovits, and others have made it clear that as a result of long years of study they see no evidence for the idea of superior and inferior races. There may be superior and inferior individuals intellectually, academically within all races, but there are no superior or inferior races, and yet this notion still lingers around.

Now, there was a time, strangely enough, that men tried to justify this notion on the basis of the Bible. It's so tragic what people will do with religion and the Bible to crystallize the status quo and rationalize and try to justify their own prejudices. And so the Bible and religion were misused to preserve an unjust status quo. It was argued that the Negro was inferior by nature, because of Noah's curse upon the children of Ham. And then the Apostle Paul's dictum became a watch word, "Servants be obedient to your master."<sup>2</sup> And one brother had probably read the logic of the great philosopher Aristotle; and you will remember that Aristotle did a great deal to bring into being what we now know as formal logic in philosophy. And in formal logic there's a big word called the "syllogism", and the syllogism has a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. And so this brother decided to put his argument for the inferiority of the Negro in the framework of an Aristotelian syllogism, and came out with his major premise: All men are made in the image of God. Then came his minor premise: God -- as everybody knows -- is not a Negro; therefore, the Negro is not a man. This was the kind of reasoning that prevailed.

Now, on the whole I think people have gotten away from this. I hope so, because I read the other day where one of our white brothers in Mississippi said that God was a charter member of the White Citizen's Council. But I think on the whole people have gotten away from the biblical and the religious justification for it.

Now, it's done on subtle sociological and cultural grounds. You've heard the arguments: "The Negro is not culturally ready for integration, and if you integrate all the schools and all areas of life you will pull the white race back a generation." And then comes the other argument: "The Negro's a criminal. You see he has a large, a great crime rate" -- and the arguments go on ad infinitum.

And the individuals who set forth these arguments never go on to say that there are lagging standards in the Negro community, and there certainly are. They lag because of segregation and discrimination. Criminal responses are environmental and not racial. Social isolation, economic deprivation, disease, poverty, breed crime whatever the racial group may be, and it is a torturous logic to use the tragic results of segregation as an argument for the continuation of it. It is necessary to go back to the cause of root.

Somewhere we must come to see all over this land that all men are made in the image of God, and that there is no truth in the idea that there are superior and inferior races.



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We've had enough examples of individuals who were members of oppressed groups somehow going amid the long night of oppression and rising up to plunge against cloud-filled nights of affliction; new and blazing stars of inspiration thereby justifying the conviction of the poet:

*Fleecy locks and black complexion cannot forfeit nature's claims. Skin may differ, but affection dwells in black and white the same. Were I so tall as to reach the pole or to grasp the ocean at a span, I must be measured by my soul. The mind is the standard of the man.*<sup>3</sup>

And with this we can see the truth in the equality of all mankind.

Now, after we've worked in these various areas of clearing up ideas, Christian responsibility means that it is necessary to engage in creative and massive action programs to get rid of segregation and discrimination in our nation, and racial injustice wherever it exists in the world. In other words, we must work not only in the realm of developing, or rather, clearing up false ideas; but it is necessary to work in the realm of action in order to bring about the kind of reforms that will bring the changes that are necessary to make racial justice a reality.

Now, if we are going to do this, several things are necessary. First is the churches to move out into the arena of political action. I mean into the arena of a massive action program that must remove the yoke of segregation from its own body. This is a great challenge facing the Christian community all over this nation.

And I need not remind you, my friends, that in spite of the progress that has been made -- and certainly some strides have been made that make us all very happy, you've done things in the Methodist church that are most significant in this area, and we're all inspired by it. I just talked with my good friend Bishop [James] Thomas, who has just been appointed to serve in an area where the Negro Bishop has never served and most of the congregations that fall under his jurisdiction happen to be white congregations. This happens to be a marvelous step forward, and it is always great to see the Church moving on to remove the shackles of segregation from its own body.

But in spite of the progress, in spite of the noble pronouncements that have been made by so many ecclesiastical counsels and so many of the conventions and conferences of our great denominations within Protestantism and within Roman Catholicism, we know that these pronouncements filter down all too slowly in some situations to local congregations. And as I stand before you tonight I must still say that the Church is the most segregated major institution in America, and we must face the shameful fact that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, when we stand to sing, "In Christ there is no East or West" -- we stand in the most segregated hour of America; and the most segregated school of the week is the Sunday School.



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This means that all too many Christians have had a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. But thank God we are beginning now to shake the lethargy from our souls, and it is my hope that we will move on to get rid of segregation in all of its dimensions within the Church. That not only means the Church itself, but church institutions such as hospitals, such as colleges and universities. And I must face the fact that in my own hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, and I live right around the corner from the Georgia Baptist Hospital; it's one of the largest hospitals in Atlanta. But a Negro cannot be treated in that hospital. A Negro boy was hit by an automobile not many months ago and carried to that hospital. That boy was all but dying and they refused service. This is a hospital that has the name of a church, a big denomination, indeed the largest denomination in the south. And so this means that there is a great deal of work that must be done if we are to be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if we are to make it relevant in this social situation

Now, the other thing that the Church must do as it removes the yoke of segregation from its own body in an action program: It's got to get rid of one or two myths that make it impossible to engage in action as long as you believe in them; and one is what I call the "myth of time." I'm sure you've heard this argument: that "only time can solve the problem of racial injustice." And there are those who still say to the Negro and his allies in the white community: "Just be nice and patient and continue to pray and in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out, because only time can solve the problem." I believe that there's an answer to that myth and that is that time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively.

And I'm afraid, my friends, that the forces of ill will in our nation -- the extreme rightists of our nation -- have used time much more effectively than the forces of goodwill. And it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely from the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people who will bomb a church in Birmingham, Alabama, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, "Wait on time." Somewhere along the way, somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be coworkers with God. And without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. And so we must help time and we must realize that the time is always ripe to do right.

Now, there is another myth that gets around a lot and I hope it will not influence the Church. It has influenced all too many segments of the Church, but I hope it will not do it any longer. And that is the idea that legislation can really play a role in this period of social transition because you've got to change the heart. We heard that a great deal during the presidential campaign, and apparently there are those who believe that. And we heard Senator Goldwater repeat this over the nation a great deal, that legislation can't solve the problem that we face in civil rights. You've got to change the heart, and you can't change the heart through legislation.



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Now, I would admit that at least of those that follow that idea are uttering a half- truth. I would agree that if this problem is to be solved ultimately, it will be necessary for men not merely to be obedient to that which can be enforced by the law; they must rise to the majestic heights of being obedient to the unenforceable. I realize that if this problem is to be solved ultimately, it will be necessary for every white person in this nation to delve down within to search his own heart and soul and come to see that integration is what should be because it is natural and right and not merely because the law says it. If this problem is to be solved ultimately, every white person of this country must treat every Negro, a member of any minority group, right -- because at bottom all men are brothers. I realize this.

But I must go on to give the other side, because I am convinced that those who say that legislation can't deal with this issue happen to be uttering a half-truth. It may be true that you cannot legislate integration, but you can legislate desegregation. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law can't change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me and I think that's pretty important also. And so while the law may not be able to change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men. And when you begin to change the habits of men, pretty soon their attitudes will be changed and their hearts will be changed.

And so it is the role of the Church to support meaningful legislation. And I am happy to say that as we were struggling to get the civil rights bill through, we had the support of so many elements and segments of the Church community all across this nation. And I am convinced that the civil rights bill is a reality today because the religious forces of our nation were willing to join with the civil rights organizations and the other forces of goodwill. And it was this coalition of conscience that brought it about and this kind of coalition of conscience must continue, if our problems are to be solved.

We have a problem now in many states. No state really can boast of clean hands in the area of brotherhood, but we know that some are worse than others. And there is a state in our union which I believe everybody here tonight is concerned about, even those who may live in that state, because one cannot love a situation unless somehow in the midst of that love, in love, they seek to rectify the situation. I live in the South, and I say to you I love the South, and I'm going to stay there and work with this problem in my love for the South.

And I think it is time for all people of goodwill in this country, including the people of goodwill who live in the state of Mississippi, to rise up now and say, "Mississippi cannot continue to trample over its Negro citizens with the iron feet of oppression." There are almost a million Negroes living in Mississippi -- some 970,000 to be exact. And almost 475, 000 are of voting age. And yet only about 28,000 are registered. Last year, the state of Mississippi only allowed 1,600 and some Negroes to register. And if she continues at this pace it will take exactly 132 years to get half of the eligible Negroes in the state of Mississippi registered. This cannot continue. Something must be done to arouse a conscience of the state of Mississippi. Something must be done to cause persons within that state to rise up.



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And no state in our union has more blatantly trampled over the basic human rights of its citizens than the state of Mississippi. No state in our union has brutalized and terrorized its citizens as much as the state of Mississippi. No state has murdered as many individuals without having anything done about it. And now something must be done.

And there is a challenge getting ready to take place next Monday. It is a challenge that should concern everybody of goodwill. And that challenge will be on the basis of the fact that the congressmen of that state are improperly elected because of the wholesale denial of the right to vote to the Negro citizens of the state of Mississippi. And it is my hope that everyone assembled here tonight will tonight or tomorrow morning write your congressmen and let him know that you want him to vote in favor of the challenge, so that these congressmen will not be seated and that the "fairness resolution" will go through and the state of Mississippi will have to stand down.

Now, if our House of Representatives will go on record seating these five congressmen it will only give encouragement to the brutality, to the violence, and to man's inhumanity to man existing in the state of Mississippi. And so it is a challenge for the Church to work even in this area because this is so basic. After we have cleared up the myths that surrounds us and supported legislation, it is necessary for the Church to support the action programs which move out into the arena of political action, and which move out into the realm of peaceful, nonviolent demonstrations when they are necessary. And I would like to say just a few words about the philosophy and the method of nonviolence, since it has been so basic in our struggle across these years.

As I said, I want to open by saying that I'm still convinced that nonviolence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity. I'm still convinced that if the Negro succumbs to the temptation of using violence in his struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless rain of meaningless chaos. There is another way. This way of nonviolence has a way of disarming the opponent. It exposes his moral defenses. It weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience and he does not know how to handle it. If he doesn't beat you, wonderful. If he tries to beat you, you develop the quiet courage of accepting blows without retaliating. If he doesn't put you in jail, wonderful. Nobody with any sense loves to go to jail. But if he puts you in jail, you go in that jail and transform it from a dungeon of shame to a haven of freedom and human dignity. Even if he tries to kill you, you develop the inner conviction that there are some things so dear, some things so precious, some things so eternally true, that they're worth dying for; and if a man has not discovered something that he would die for, he isn't fit to live. And this is what the nonviolent movement does.

So, there is power in this way because it has a way of disarming the opponent. But not only this: It gives individuals engaged in a struggle a way of seeking to secure moral ends through moral means. One of the great debates of history has been over the whole question of ends and means.



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And there have been those individuals, philosophers in many instances, whole systems of government in some instances, who argue that the end justifies the means. I think, along with many others, one of the great weaknesses of tragedies of communism is found right here.

Read Lenin, as he says in substance that any method is justifiable to bring about the goal of the classless society. This is where the nonviolent movement would break with communism or any other system that argue that the end justifies the means. This can't be true, because in a real sense the end is pre-existing in the means. The means represent the ideal in the making and the end in process; and in the long run of history, the immoral means cannot bring about moral ends. And it is marvelous to have a method of struggle which will take into account the ends that you seek, as you move through the methods. So as you seek justice as an end, you use just methods to get there. And as you seek a nonviolent society in the end, you use nonviolence means to get there. And it is wonderful to have a method of struggle which says that it is possible to struggle to secure moral ends through moral means.

Another thing about this philosophy is that it insists that it is possible to struggle against an unjust and evil system and yet maintain an attitude of active goodwill for the perpetrators of that unjust system. In points, this is the most misunderstood aspect of nonviolence when one seeks to live it as a creed and not merely use it as a strategy. It says that you somehow place the love ethic at the center of your struggle. People begin to say what do you mean? How can you love those who are oppressing you? How can you love those who are using violence to destroy ever move you make? And I always have to answer by saying that when I talk about love in this area, I'm not talking about emotional bosh. I'm not talking about a sentimental response -- talking about something that's deep. It would be nonsense to urge oppressed people to love their violent oppressors in an affectionate sense. I realize this.

Fortunately, the Greek language comes to our aid in trying to determine the meaning of love at this point. There are three words in Greek for love. There's the word eros. Plato used to talk about it a great deal in his dialogues -- the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. It has come now to mean a sort of romantic love; and so in this sense we all know about eros. We've experienced it in its dimensions and we have read about it in all of the beauties of literature. In a sense I guess Shakespeare was talking about eros when he talked about the beauty of love. "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove." "It is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempest and is never shaken. It is the star to every wandering bark."<sup>4</sup> In a sense I guess that Edgar Allen Poe was talking about eros when he talked about his beautiful Annabelle Lee with a love surrounded by the halo of eternity. This is eros.

The Greek language talks about phileo with is another level of love. On this level you really love because you are loved. You love people that you like. It's a sort of reciprocal love. This, indeed, is friendship.

And then the Greek language comes out with another word. It's the word agape.



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Agape is more than Eros; it's more than an aesthetic or romantic love; it is more than friendship. Agape is understanding creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. And so when one rises to love on this level, he loves every man, not because he likes him, not because his ways appeal to him, but he loves every man because God loves him, and he rises to the level of loving the person who does an evil deed while hating the deed that the person does.

And I think this is what Jesus meant when he said "love your enemies." I'm happy he didn't say "like your enemies," because it's pretty difficult to like some people. "Like" is an affectionate quality and it's pretty difficult, frankly, to like some people. I must frankly say that I don't like some of the things that Senator Eastland and Senator Thurmond and Senator Stennis and Senator Russell -- it's hard to like, but Jesus says love them and love is greater than like. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. And it can be a strong demanding love, for in the process it demands justice.

And I believe that it is this kind of love that can take us through this period of transition and we can come to that brighter day. This is what we've tried to do. In the midst of our struggle we haven't always succeeded, but somehow in some of the dark moments we have been able to stand up before our violent oppressors and say:

*We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. And so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Burn our homes and threaten our children and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Yes, send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hours and drag us out on some wayside road and beat us and leave us half dead, and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves, we will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory.*

This is what the nonviolent discipline says in the final analysis. And I believe that it can lead us out of this dark night into a new and noble day and help every one of us go into the new age which is emerging, fully awake; can help us to go into the new age which is emerging, with the right attitude. Whether we are white or whether we are black we will go in with understanding goodwill. And we happen to have been on the oppressed end of the old order. We will not go in to pay those back who have oppressed us. We will go in with lots of levels of forgiveness. We will not seek to substitute one tyranny for another. We will know that a doctrine of black supremacy is as dangerous as a doctrine of white supremacy and in the final analysis God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men; but God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race, and the



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creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers and every man will respect the dignity and the worth of human personality, and so the challenge ahead is to move out with a strong action program undergirded by a philosophy and method of nonviolence. And if we will do this, yes, we will be a part of that creative movement remaining awake through a great revolution.

If we are to solve this problem really, we must continue to have a sort of divine discontent. There are certain technical words within every academic discipline that soon become stereotypes and clichés. Every academic discipline has its technical nomenclature. Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word in psychology -- it is the word "maladjusted." And this word is the ringing pride of modern child psychology, and suddenly we want to live a well adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities.

I would like to say to you this evening my friends that there are some things within our nation and within the world of which I am proud to be maladjusted, which I call upon all men of goodwill to be maladjusted until the Good Society is realized. I must honestly say to you that I never intend to become adjusted to racial segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to become adjusted to economic conditions that would take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self defeating effects of physical violence, for in a day when scrub necks and explorers are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere no nation can win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence and the alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a greater suspension in nuclear tests, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation. And so I say to you that there is need for a little maladjustment.

It may well be that we need a new organization in our world: The International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment. Men and women who will be as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day could cry out in words that echo across the centuries: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream";<sup>5</sup> as maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free; as maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could scratch across the pages of history words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"; as maladjusted as our Lord and our Master who would say to the men and women around Galilee: "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword";<sup>6</sup> and who could look into their eyes and say "love your enemies," bless them that curse you, "pray for them that despitefully use you."<sup>7</sup> And through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.



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And so I call upon you tonight not to be spectators on the sideline, not to be individuals who are looking on, to be involved participants in this great struggle to make our nation a greater nation and to end all of the evils of racial injustice, poverty, and the evil of war. And if we will all be involved participants we will be able to speed up that day.

I must admit to you that there are not always pleasant moments when you stand up in this struggle. I must be honest enough to say to you if you stand up in this struggle it may mean that you will have to suffer for righteousness sake. It may mean that somebody will be called bad names and will be misunderstood merely because they're standing up. It may mean losing a job. It may mean somehow facing all of the agonies and all of the frustrations of our days. It may mean that somebody will have to face physical death, like Medgar Evers faced in the civil rights workers in Mississippi this summer. Physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children and their white brothers from a permanent psychological death and a permanent death of the spirit. Then nothing can be more redemptive.

The thing that must always console us is that as we struggle, we do not struggle alone. And there is something in our Christian faith to remind us of this: The God that we worship is not some Aristotelian "unmoved mover" who merely contemplates upon himself. He's not merely a self-knowing God, but He's an other-loving God working through history for the salvation of his children. And there is an event at the center of our faith which reminds us that Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumphant beat of the drums of Easter. There is something in our faith which reminds us that evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy the palace and Christ the cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into AD and BC so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name.

There is something in this universe which justifies Carlyle in saying, "...no lie can live forever."<sup>8</sup> There is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying, "Truth, crushed to earth, [shall] rise again."<sup>9</sup> There is something in the very structure of the cosmos which justifies James Russell Lowell in saying,

*Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,— Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.*<sup>10</sup>

This is our faith, and this is what will carry us through.

We have a little song that we sing in the movement. Many of you know it. It has become the theme song of our movement. And I still believe in it and I can still sing it: "We shall overcome. We shall overcome deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome." And there is another stanza: "The Lord will see us through. The Lord will see us through. Deep in my heart I do believe."



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And with this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to somehow speed up the day. And every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill will be made low. Rough places will be made plain and the crooked places straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last, free at last thank God almighty we are free at last.<sup>11</sup>

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Both quotations taken from Dunne's work *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:5

<sup>3</sup> William Cowper, *The Negro's Complaint*

<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 116*, "Let me not to marriage of true minds admit impediments"

<sup>5</sup> Amos 5:24

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 26:52

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:44 -- followed by "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (45).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (Vol. I, Book 1.VI., Ch. 1.6.III.)

<sup>9</sup> William Cullen Bryant, *The Battlefield* (9th stanza)

<sup>10</sup> James Russell Lowe, *The Present Crisis*

<sup>11</sup> "Free At Last" from *American Negro Songs* by J. W. Work