

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING

Thank you kindly for your heartwarming applause. I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here, and to be a part of this significant convention. I have looked forward to this moment with great and eager anticipation. I can assure you that it is a great privilege for me, as well as a great honor, to address the International Luther League Convention and I am sure that this is certainly one of the most significant audiences that has ever assembled anywhere in America.

To see you in such large numbers and to see you expressing your concern with such vital issues is certainly an inspiring experience. Whether you realize it or not, you are assembled here in Miami in one of the most significant and momentous periods of human history. In a real sense this is a great time to be alive. You are privileged to observe many changes taking place on the human relation horizon. An old order is passing away and a new order is coming into being.

Now, each of us is familiar with this old order that is passing away because we have lived with it and we have seen it in all of its dimensions. We have seen the old order in other nations dressed in the garments of colonialism. Of the approximately 2,800,000,000 people in our world, the vast majority live in Asia and Africa; some 700,000,000 in China; about 500,000,000 in India and Pakistan; 100,000,000 in Indonesia; about 96,000,000 in Japan; and more than 220,000,000 in Africa. For years most of these people have been dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated by foreign powers. But as Prime Minister Macmillan said recently, "The wind of change began to blow", and what a mighty wind it is.

We must realize that more than 1,500,000,000 of the former 1,700,000,000 colonial subjects have their independence today. They've broken loose from the yoke of colonialism. This has happened in just a few years. Twenty-five years ago there were only three independent nations in the whole continent of Africa. I remember when Mrs. King and I journeyed over to Ghana to attend the independence celebration in 1957, there were only seven independent countries in the whole of Africa. Now that number has leaped to twenty-eight. This reveals to us that the old order of colonialism and imperialism is passing away and the new order of freedom and equality is coming into being.

But not only have we seen the old order in other nations we have seen it in our own nation, in the form of slavery and segregation. We all know the long history of the old order in the United States. It had its beginning in 1619 when the first Negro slaves landed on the shores of this nation: not like the Pilgrim Fathers who landed at Plymouth a year later. These slaves were brought here against their will. Throughout slavery the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion. He was a thing to be used, not a person to be respected.

The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrated the status of the Negro during slavery; for in this decision the Supreme Court of our nation said in substance that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States, he is merely property, subject to the dictates of his owner. So, living with the conditions of slavery and later segregation, many Negroes lost faith in themselves and came to feel that perhaps they were inferior, that perhaps they were less than human.

But then something happened to the Negro. Circumstances made it possible and necessary for him to travel more; the coming of the automobile, the upheaval of two World Wars, and the great depression. And so his rural plantation background gave way to urban industrial life. His economic standard of living was gradually rising through the growth of industry and the influence of organized labor and even his cultural life was rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. All of these forces conjoined to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. Negro masses all over began to re-evaluate themselves. The Negro came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all of His children and that all men are made in his image.

Now the Negro could not unconsciously cry out with the eloquent; port, fleecy locks and dark complexion, cannot forfeit nature's claim. Skin may differ, but affection dwells in black and white the same. And 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 a man, and with this new sense of dignity and this new sense of self-respect, a new Negro came into being with a new determination to be free; a new determination to struggle and sacrifice and suffer until the walls of segregation have finally crumbled.

Along with this something else happened. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the nation rendered a new decision. They rendered, as I have just stated, the Dred Scott decision in 1857; in 1896 it had rendered what was known as the Plessier vs Ferguson decision, establishing the doctrine of separate but equal as the law of the land. But now in 1954 the Supreme Court decided to come out with a new decision, and this decision said in substance that the old Plessier doctrine must go; that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. As a result of this decision we stand today on the threshold of the most constructive and creative period in the history of our nation in the area of race relations. To place it figuratively in Biblical language, we've broken loose from the Egypt of slavery and moved through the wilderness of segregation; now, we stand on the border of the promised land of integration. The old order is passing away and the new order of integration is coming into being.

But there are many people who are not happy about this; there are many people who are determined to revolt against this emerging new order. These people have lived with segregation and discrimination for many years and they are determined to preserve segregation at any cost. This has brought about tension in race relations all over the world. These forces of resistance are often expressed in white citizen's councils, in the Ku Klux Klan and in glaring violence. These forces are determined to keep the new order from becoming a reality in our nation and so we have a crisis in race relations.

This crisis develops in society when an old idea exhausts itself and a society seeks to re-orientate itself around the new idea. Suddenly the old idea of segregation--the old idea of paternalism--has outlived its usefulness, and American society is now seeking to re-orientate itself around the idea of integration. The idea of person-to-person relations is the basis of the crisis of our age.

Whenever a crisis emerges in society, whenever we find a tension packed-period in history, the Church has unique responsibilities. And suddenly, the Church has a basic responsibility in this period of social change in our nation. Why? Because, at bottom, this is a moral issue. It is not merely a political issue; it is not merely a sociological issue; it is not merely an economic issue. The Church, being the moral guardian of the community, has a basic responsibility in this tense period of transition. Let me make it palpably clear, as I move on, that the Church has a basic responsibility, not just in the South, for we must face the fact that no section of our country can boast of clean hands in the area of brotherhood. Segregation is still a glaring reality in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana and all over the South, but we still confront discrimination and segregation in its hidden and subtle forms all over the North and all over the nation. So the Church has a basic responsibility all over the United States in this tense period of transition.

Now, I would like to suggest some of the things that the Church must do in order to make its witness firm, forthright and clear. Things that the Church must do in order to remain true to the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. First, the Church must instill within its worshippers a world perspective. The world in which we live is geographically one, and now we are challenged to make it spiritually one. Now, to a degree, the geographical oneness of our nation has come into being as a result of man's scientific ingenuity. Man through his scientific genius has been able to dwarf distance and place, time and change.

Just a few days ago we read where a cosmonaut dashed through outer space at a speed of 18,000 miles per hour. So, modern man, through his scientific genius, has been able to carve highways through the stratosphere. Our jet planes have compressed into minutes, distances that once took days. I think Bob Hope has described this new jet age in which we live in very adequate terms. Now, I know it isn't the usual thing for a preacher to be quoting Bob Hope, but I think he has a very good description here. He says, "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 more than 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." That's really moving pretty fast. You know, it is true, that because of the time distance you can take a non-stop flight from Tokyo, Japan on Sunday morning and arrive in Seattle, Washington on the preceding Saturday night. When your friends meet you at the airport and ask you when you left Tokyo, you will have to say you left tomorrow. This is the kind of world in which we live.

Now, this is a bit humorous, but I am trying to laugh a basic fact into all of us--and it is simply this: that the world in which we live is a neighborhood, and we face the moral responsibility of making it a brotherhood. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. This is the challenge facing men all over this nation and all over the world. Every individual must feel a sense of dependence on every other individual; every nation must be concerned about every other nation.

Some months ago Mrs. King and I journeyed over to the great country of India. We had the opportunity to meet and talk with the great leaders of that country and to meet people in the cities and villages throughout that country. It is something that I shall always remember. As we journeyed through India there were also some depressing moments, for how can one avoid being depressed when one sees with his own eyes millions of people going to bed hungry? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks at night? In Calcutta alone more than a million people sleep on the sidewalks every night. In Bombay more than six hundred thousand people sleep on the sidewalks at night. They have no houses to go in, no beds to sleep in. How can one avoid being depressed when one discovers that out of India's population of 400,000,000 people, more than 370,000,000 of them make an annual income of less than \$60.00 a year, and most of these people have never seen a doctor or a dentist.

As I stood there and noted these conditions something deep within me cried out, can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned? An answer came to me. Oh, no! Because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India and every other nation. Also, I started thinking about the fact that in our country we spend more than a million dollars a day to store surplus food, I found myself saying, I know where we can store that food free of charge in the wrinkled stomachs of the millions of people in Asia and Africa and South America, and our own nation, who go to bed hungry at night. It may be that we've spent far too much money in our military bases around the world, rather than establishing a basis of genuine concern and understanding among nations. All I'm saying is this: all life is inter-related and we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny so that whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

As long as there is extreme poverty in this world no man can be totally rich, even if he has a billion dollars; as long as diseases are rampant and millions of people cannot expect to live more than 28 or 30 years, no man or woman, boy or girl can be totally healthy, even if he just got a check-up at Mayo Clinic. Strangely enough, 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 inter-related structure of reality. John Donne some years ago placed it in graphic terms: "No man is an island entirely of itself--every man is a piece of the continent--a part of the main." He goes on toward the end to say "any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, therefore never to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." We must develop this sense of concern, and the Church must instill within its worshippers this world perspective, if we are to survive in this Atomic Age.

The second thing that the Church must do is get to the ideational roots of racial prejudice. Racial prejudice is always based on fears, suspicions and misunderstandings that are usually groundless. The Church has an important responsibility of destroying the half-truths and the false ideas that are disseminated concerning minority groups, and this is something that the law can't do. The Church and religious institutions throughout the nation have the unique responsibility of destroying these myths and these half-truths that are so often disseminated. The Church can reveal to the nation and to its worshippers the true intentions of the Negro; it can make it clear that the Negro is not seeking to dominate the nation or to upset the social structure. He is merely seeking to live with dignity just as other people and to have the capacity to develop his talent just as other people. The Church can make it clear that the Negro is not innately inferior in academic, moral or other standards by revealing that these lagging standards, if they exist, are environmental and not racial.

Poverty, ignorance and disease breed crime, whatever the racial group may be. It is torturous logic to use the tragic results of segregation and discrimination as an argument for the continuation of them. The Church can make it clear that the basic thing to do is get rid of the cause of bias. We must make it clear in our country that racial discrimination strips an individual of his "self-hood", his "person-hood", his self-respect and his sense of dignity and as long as these conditions exist, there will be problems in our nation and in the world. So, the Church has a basic responsibility to get down to the roots of racial prejudice and destroy all of the ideas, the false ideas, which bring racial prejudice into being.

However, it is not enough to work in the realm of ideas. The Church must move out into the realm of social action. It is not enough to clarify the ideas, an action program must be developed. One of the first ways the Church can develop this action program is to remove the yoke of segregation from its own body. We must face the tragic fact that when we stand at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, singing, "In Christ, there is no east or west", we stand in the most segregated hour of Christian America. So often as Christians we have a "high blood pressure" of creeds and an "anemia" of deeds. The Church remains the most segregated major institution in our country--this is tragic and appalling. Thank God we are beginning to shake the lethargy from our souls and here and there, churches are courageously integrating their congregations.

All of the major denominations within Protestantism, the Catholic Church and Judaism have made it clear that the Supreme Court was right in its decision. They have condemned segregation from the moral point of view. But these noble pronouncements have filtered down all too slowly to the local congregations and now the job is to get them to work in local congregations all over America. The day must come when churches will serve people and the community by making it clear that whosoever will, let him come.

Too often, Christian churches have actually moved out of the community. This is particularly true in the North where Negroes and other minority groups have moved in. The churches that remain in these communities are merely symbols of a dying Protestantism, and as long as the Church moves away from the people, particularly when minority groups begin to move in, the Church is moving away from the basic principles of the Christian religion. In its own action program, the Church must remove the yoke of segregation from its own body.

It must also move out into social reform outside itself, in the whole of society. The Church must support meaningful legislation; it must support all action programs that will bring an end to housing and employment discrimination. We must face the tragic fact that 43% of the Negro families of America still make less than \$2,000.00 a year while just 17% of the white families of America make less than \$2,000.00 a year. Twenty-one percent of these Negro families make less than \$1,000.00 a year, while just 6% of the white families make less than \$1,000.00 a year. Eighty-eight percent of the Negro families make less than \$5,000.00 a year as compared to just 57% of the white families. Economic injustice then, is still a glaring reality all over our nation. The Church must make it clear that this is tragic--that it is against everything the Christian religion stands for. The Church must support meaningful legislation and meaningful action programs to bring an end to these evils in our society.

I know that there are people who say to all of us, North and South, that we can't solve this problem through legislation. They say that the only way to solve the problem is through education. I would answer that by saying that it is not either education or legislation, but both are necessary. It may be true that we cannot legislate morals--there may be some real truth in this--but behavior can be regulated. We must come to see that this is what can be done through the law. A law cannot change bad internal attitudes--religion and education must do that--but the law can control the external effects of bad internal attitudes. It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me--and I think that is pretty important! The law cannot change the heart but it can restrain the heartless. This is a situation society has always faced and we in the Church must make it clear that while we work through the channels of education to change attitudes through religions, the final authority is through legislation. We must work to get the Federal Government to bring about the necessary executive orders and the necessary legislative action to bring an end to discrimination in all of its dimensions.

That is another thing that I must mention, as I move toward my conclusion. The Church must urge its worshippers to enter this new age, which is emerging, with understanding and redemptive good will in their hearts. In other words, the Church must make it clear once more, that love is the most durable power in all the world--that it is through love we will solve this problem which is destroying our nation and the nations of the world.

All people must develop this. Certainly those who have been on the oppressed end of the old order must go into the new age with a sense of penitence; must go into the new age with an understanding, redemptive good will. They must examine themselves to see if they have removed all vestiges of prejudice and unjust action and thoughts from their hearts. They must examine themselves to see if they believe, at any point, in a doctrine of white supremacy. So, former oppressors of the old order must be sure that they have removed all of these attitudes that existed in the old order and come to see that a doctrine of white supremacy is not only rationally absurd, but morally unjustified.

I try to say, as I go all over America that not only must the oppressors enter the new age with understanding good will, but those who have been oppressed also. That is why I have said to my people so often, we must not become bitter. We must not use violence as a weapon in our struggle, for if we do our unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness. . . our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.

I'm convinced that that is still a voice crying through the vista of time saying to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword." History is replete with the bleached bones of nations. History is cluttered with the wreckage of communities that fail to follow this command. This points to another form of struggle. It is possible to stand up against an unjust system with as much determination, zeal and courage as the individual who uses violence, and yet not stoop to that low level in the process.

People ask me often, "What do you mean when you say to love the people who are oppressing us? What do you mean when you say to love the people threatening our children, and inflicting economic reprisals on us?" I always have to pause and try to give the meaning of love in this context. It is interesting that the Greek language comes to our aid at this point. There are three words in Greek for love. The first is the word, "eros" meaning a sort of aesthetic love. The great philosopher Plato who lived in the great days of Greek culture used to speak of eros in his dialogues. It has come to mean to us a sort of romantic love. We all know about eros--we've read about it in the beauties of literature; we have experienced it and it is beautiful in all of its dimensions. In a sense, Edgar Allen Poe was talking about eros when he wrote about his beautiful Annabell Lee with the "love surrounded by the halo of eternity." In a sense Shakespeare was talking about eros when he said, "Love is not love which alters when its alteration finds, bends with the remover to remove. It is an ever fixed mark that looks on tempest and is never shaken; it is a star to every wandering bard." This is eros.

The Greek language has still another word--phileo. It means the kind of love which is sort of intimate affection between personal friends. It is friendship--a reciprocal love. On this level you love the people you like and know--roommate in college or your high school friend. These are the people that you visit and like the best. This is a wonderful and noble type of love, something within the person--within the object--arouses this love within you.

The third Greek word for love is agape. Agape is more than romantic love and more than friendship. Agape is understanding, redemptive, creative good will for all men. It is a spontaneous love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When we rise to love on this level we love men not because we like them or because their ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. We rise to the point where we can love the person who does an evil deed while still hating the deed that the person does. I think this must be what Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies."

I'm so happy he didn't say "like" your enemies, for like is a sentimental, affectionate sort of thing. It's pretty difficult to like some people. It's difficult to like the person who's trying to destroy every move you make toward becoming a first class citizen. It's pretty difficult to like someone who will bomb your home and threaten your children. It's pretty difficult to like someone who will spend all of his days in congress blocking meaningful legislation that will make democracy a reality. But Jesus said, "love them" and love is greater than like. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men; this is what we seek in this period of transition and I firmly believe that if we follow this way, we will be able to bring into being a new nation and a new society.

We will be able to develop right here in this nation, a real brotherhood. We must develop the capacity of saying to those opponents and reactionaries who would resist our movement with violence that we will match their capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet their physical force with soul force. Do to us what they will, we will still love them. We cannot in all good conscience obey their unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as cooperation with good. If they place us in jail, we will go with humble smiles on our faces. If they bomb our homes and threaten our children, we will still love them. If they send their hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hours to drag us out on some way side road and beat us until half-dead, we will still love. Be assured that we will wear them down by our capacity to suffer and one day we will win our freedom.

Not only will we win freedom for ourselves, we will appeal so to their hearts and consciences that we will win them in the process. Our victory will be a double victory. This must be the message of the Negro as he struggles in the days ahead, and I believe that this is the way that we will be able to bring into being this new society. In this new world in which we all seek, we are challenged to go out with renewed vigor and determination to bring this into being and to make America a truly Christian nation.

This is the challenge facing the Church--it is the challenge facing every individual in this nation; for as I said earlier, discrimination on the basis of race is a glaring reality all over our country. It is one thing to rise up in righteous indignation when a Negro is lynched in Mississippi; when a bus is burned in Anniston, Alabama; when Freedom Riders are beaten in Birmingham, Alabama. All men of good will must rise up with as much righteous indignation when a Negro cannot live in his neighborhood; when a Negro cannot get a job in a particular firm merely because he is a Negro; when a Negro cannot join your particular professional academic society or your fraternity or sorority; when a Negro is discriminated against at any point because of race or color. This problem will not be solved, my friends, until enough people in this country come to see that it is morally wrong and are willing to take a stand against it.

There are certain technical words in every academic discipline which soon become cliches. As I come to my conclusion, I would like to mention a word that is used probably more than any other word in modern psychology. It is the word "maladjusted." I know you've heard this word, for it is the ringing cry of modern child psychology. I know that each of you wants a well-adjusted life. I know I do, and I would like to see every young person here growing up living a well-adjusted life and avoiding neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are certain things within our social order of which I'm proud to claim as maladjusted. I call upon each of you to be maladjusted to all of these things until a good society is realized. I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will 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. In this day when sputniks 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 non-violence. It is either non-violence or non-existence, and I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of war.

I call upon you this morning to become maladjusted to all of these things, because it may well be that the destiny and salvation of our world lie in the hands of the maladjusted. Let us be 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 run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream"; 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 cry out in 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 inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who could say to the men and women of his generation, "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."

I am convinced that it is through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate night of man's inhumanity to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. This will be a great day--it will be the day when America will become a truly great nation, when we will be able to live together as brothers and every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. As we struggle, let us realize that we do not struggle alone. Let us realize that as we struggle to make the dream of America a reality and bring the Christian society into being, we have cosmic companionship.

The arch of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. There is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle saying, "no lie can live forever." There is something in this universe that justifies William Cullen Bryant saying, "truth crushed to earth will rise again." There is something in this universe that justifies James Russell Lowell in saying:

Truth forever on the scaffold
Wrong forever on the throne
Yet, on that scaffold sways the future
And behind the dim unknown standeth God
Within the shadows keeping watch above his own.

This is our faith--this is our hope. Let us go out to our various communities and into our various churches and schools, and make this a reality. This will be the day when all of God's children--black men and white men--will be able to join hands all over the United States singing the word of the old Negro Spiritual "free at last, free at last, thank God a'mighty, we are free at last."