

CLOSING ADDRESS
EUROPEAN BAPTIST ASSEMBLY
AMSTERDAM HOLLAND
By: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr,
August 16, 1964

REVOLUTION and REDEMPTION

It is indeed a pleasure to meet with fellow Baptists from all over Europe and the world. And it is a special privilege for me to share with this Christian body some of the concerns which the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings to the hearts of men in these times of revolution and change.

The gospel message is sharper than a two edged sword, but little did we realize just how sharp when we began to share this message with the nations or the non-Western world. Little was this realized when the slave masters of the United States began to read the Bible to the house servants and encourage them to preach to the others. The fact that we are living in a world of revolution is in a large measure attributable to the preaching of the Gospel, and the work of missionaries around the world.

Now we have a world in turmoil, but we must remember that the turmoil is in part due to the preaching of God's Word and to the belief of the brethren.

It was Christian preaching that first spread the idea of the Brotherhood of all mankind throughout the world. It was Christian preaching that gave men and nations something in which to hope. It was Christian preaching that began the movement of education for all. It was finally Christian preaching that convinced men that the evils of the world might be overcome, and that these nations of the West, under Christ, would lead them into a new earthly Kingdom where men might live together as in the Kingdom of God. They heard our promise and took it literally. Now they are demanding that the promise of the Kingdom be fulfilled here and now.

We now realize that much of this was based on an unbiblical theology and that in our own enthusiasm to bring the world to Christ we allowed our faith in Christ and our faith in Western culture and technology to become interchanged, but this does not relieve us of responsibility for our preaching.

Now many Christians have forgotten our involvement in the beginnings of this revolution and see only a mass of humanity shouting Freedom. They have forgotten or denied their involvement in the beginnings of this world revolution. They have allowed the Communist to take full credit for the revolutionary state in which the world finds itself. Western Christians have too long been identified with comfortable stable existence to adapt readily to a world of change. Yet this is just what God requires of us in these times. We must not forsake our earlier efforts to bring the World to Christ merely because it does not come to Christ as we imagined it would.

There are two aspects of the world which we must never forget. One is that this is God's world, and He is active in the forces of history and the affairs of men. The second is, that Jesus Christ gave his life for the redemption of this world, and as his followers, we are called to give our lives continuing the reconciling work of Christ in this world.

Let us look for a moment at the nature of the revolutions of our time. We may discern more of the hand of God moving amongst them than we have heretofore realized.

At the bottom of every revolution is the dawning of the idea that all men are created equal. In the Southern Freedom Movement of the United States, we say that the movement begins when men and women realize that they are children of God. If we are all really God's children, then all of us are entitled to the same opportunities, pleasures, and responsibilities. This is the seed from which all the aspirations of humanity grow.

This aspiration is so wide spread that it assumes national proportions in our time. Not only do individuals want to take their places along side other men, but we are engaged in a struggle of nations, each fighting for her own national place in the sun. Any force which seems to stand in the way of this drive is destined to be overturned.

The means through which mankind has decided to gain equality is human ingenuity, better known as technology. The resources of men's minds and the machines of their creation now seek to build a world where every man might share in the bounties and rewards which in former times were only available to the rich.

What this means is that man is now truly a partner with God in the continuation of his creation. No longer does he wait and pray for some supernatural power to deliver him from his misery; he has marshaled his talents and organized his skills and anxiously proceeds to build a world to answer his needs and desires.

The emergence of technological man has led him to create for himself huge metropolitan complexes. Our entire way of life has changed within this generation. The move to the city is the most widespread phenomenon in the world today. Minority groups and nations may cry freedom., but men of every nation., rich or poor; black, white or in between; now move to the city in an unexpressed search for freedom from want, deprivation and the simple village life of their fathers.

The total impact of these and other forces is a world in motion. Just where the world is moving is an open question. But there can be no denial of the fact that the whole creation is anxiously seeking some sort of fulfillment.

The immediate temptation for the church is to attempt to call the world back to more stable times; to admonish our congregations not to forsake the ways of their fathers. But to do this is to forget the God who promises to "make all things new" (Rev. 21: 3) and whose plan it is for the fullness of time "to unite all things in Him, things in Heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1: 10). Our calling is much more difficult and hazardous, for again God calls us as he did Abraham to venture into a land which we know not. He calls us to live with Christ in the midst of a world in revolution.

Admittedly, we are no more prepared to enter this world than was Abraham to venture out into the desert., but there is no choice for us at this point, for to remain in a secure 18th century existence while the world moves on, will certainly mean the death of the church., and without the prophetic witness of the church, the entire world may become one great holocaust.

Indeed, we see the evidence of this already. The church has remained silent these past years and allowed the world to go on unattended, and we are witnessing the gradual corrosion of both church and world before our very eyes. Here in Europe, the decline of church attendance makes this fact obvious; but in the United States, the same thing is true. What we are witnessing there is a last desperation rush to the church in hopes that Mother Church might defend us from the insecurities of this age and keep us safe in her bosom for the age to come. But in spite of the masses who gather each Sunday, there is the constant deterioration of community and family life and the corruption of our national life as evidenced by the popularity of a presidential candidate who promises to return the nation to a world of the past, where there will be no taxes., no foreign aid, no social security, and no problems that can't be solved by nuclear power. And the very people who are making this candidate so popular are the people who fill our churches in the Midwestern and Southern States.

The alternative to escape is a creative and courageous attempt to enter the world in revolution and there struggle with the principalities and powers of this age as though we really believed that Christ has overcome the world, not just our little private world of salvation for my own soul, but the world of rockets, steel mills, and hungry over-populated nations.

Negro Christians are in many ways fortunate. We have no choice. There can be no escape. We must trust God and live the life he has placed before us. Necessity has forced us to cling to Him in faith. When we were in slavery and had no money, no education., no worldly power whatsoever, we learned that we could sing of Sweet Chariots which would come and carry us home when the burden got too heavy. We learned that Jeremiah's question does have an answer and that there is a "balm in Gilead., to heal the sin sick soul". We learned that in the darkest hours of frustration and despair God will make a way. And so we know of God's power in ways that are as real to us as the forces of this revolutionary world. Therefore it was not hard for us to believe, the theme song of our movement "We Shall Overcome".

It was difficult however to move from the private spheres of faith into the public and social orbit. For many years American Negroes sought to overcome the evils and temptations of society through individual acts of faith and worship. This offered very little hope. It did teach us that we must work together, seek together and suffer together if we are to overcome the powers which enslave us.

It was Montgomery, Alabama that God chose to teach us this lesson. God took a simple incident of a woman being mistreated on a public bus to teach the Negroes of Montgomery and the entire United States, of the power of group action and witness. From this humble beginning,, he has led us and taught us many things about the organization and mobilization of love and good will into a powerful action movement, which is capable of coping with the tremendous forces of this age.

In Birmingham, Alabama, we saw this movement come to fruition., and witnessed the entire wheels of a nation turn to cope with the problem of racial justice. The organization in love of three thousand citizens, brought about the most sweeping legislature on the question of race and color that this nation has known since the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

What we have learned from this is that the individual faith, hope and charity of our congregations must be mobilized into group witness, if we are to make any impact on the conscience of our world. We have an expression that "anything 10,000 people in the United States become convinced of and are willing to suffer for can become a reality." The freedom movement so far has borne this out as fact.

I say this to you, because race is not the only issue which confronts our world, and Negroes are not the only Christians who are in need of justice. It is time that the methods of organized good will, or Truth Force, as Gandhi would have called it, become applied to the questions which confront the church in every area of life.

For example, our New Testament charges us to be concerned about the hungry, those in prison...the least of these my brethren. In an age of revolution, this is exactly what the masses of men and women are asking for, that we do something for those poverty stricken millions who inhabit the under-developed nations of the world.

In a mass technological society, it is not enough to send missionary baskets. It is not even enough to build schools and hospitals. If the millions are to be fed, clothed and housed, the resources of the nations must be put to the task. Mammoth programs of area development, comparable to the Marshall Plan which aided in the rebuilding of Europe, must be developed to aid Africa and Asia. Christians must encourage, yea demand that their governments act as though the financial and technical resources entrusted to them belong to God, and that these resources are used to the Glory of God for the care of God's children wherever they may be in need.

This is the road evangelism must take in these times. Nations have identified Christianity with the West, and while we must fight this identification, we must also accept responsibility for the governments which we elect, or allow to be elected through our indifference. A Christian might well find himself fighting for a dam or hydro-electric power unit for an under-developed nation, because he realized that this is the key to opening the resources of a nation to the extent that it can provide a modest life for it's population. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is a complex business in our time, but nevertheless it must be done, and God has called us as his children to see to it that it is done.

In the near future the Church must find some way to direct her concern toward the question of world peace. This is the World for which Christ died. We cannot sit idly by and watch it destroyed by a group of insecure and ambitious egotists who can't see beyond their own designs for power. We are now in a delicate balance of power which results in a condition most near to peace than any we have known for the past twenty-five years. Now is the time for Christians to develop a creative approach to this problem and break the stalemate on disarmament and bring about a thaw in the cold war before it becomes a hot war.

We have heard of the offer of the Vatican to act as a mediator in international disputes. This concern is to be commended, yet one must hasten to say that all Christians have lost the right to serve as reconciling agents in international disputes because of our inaction and cautious strategies in the midst of two past world conflicts. The Church must first discern what God is calling Christians to do in the presence of international conflict, and make this witness known, not merely through pronouncements but by the submission of their bodies as living witness to the truth of Christ. This means both personal bodies and institutional bodies must be willing to bear the burden of the cross. Whole churches may be crucified, but it is our faith that God's way of change is through resurrection, and there can be no resurrection without crucifixion.

Dr King Comments – Freedom Summer II 1965

During the 1965 preparations for the second Freedom Summer a student asked Dr. King, "Do you see any way in which nonviolence can be effectively applied to problems of world importance, particularly to Vietnam and especially to world peace?" Dr. King replied:

Oh, yes. I think that first it is important to say that this must be done. I think that the problems of war are so serious now and the danger of universal annihilation is such a great threat that we must experiment with the nonviolent method in international dimensions. Now there are ways in which this must be done. I don't quite have the answer now in terms of one, two, three. But I think that if we were as diligent in studying the meaning of nonviolence in all human conflict situations, as we are in studying the conflict situations within races, then we could evolve a method.

...Maybe the time has come for men committed to the idea of nonviolence and committed to peace to develop the idea of a peace army which will stand alongside and over against the standing armies of the world. There are nonviolent techniques that can be used and that must be used if we are to survive. If mankind assumes that he has a right and a need to survive, then we must find some alternative to war. And maybe there will come a day and a time when a group of nonviolent devotees will say that we will present our very bodies, whether it's in a Vietnam or in a Dominican Republic, or wherever it is - without weapons, without arms - and we are doing this to bring it to the conscience and the consciousness of the world and even if it means death we are accepting that in order to save the soul of humanity.