

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the 24th Annual Dinner of The Massachusetts Committee Catholics, Protestants and Jews, Boston, Massachusetts, May 11, 1961)

May I begin this evening by thanking The Massachusetts Committee Catholics, Protestants, and Jews for your generosity in making this award. May I only say I shall cherish it and try to be more worthy of it, now and in the future.

One is constantly hearing these days about brotherhood. Like so many other well worn words, I often fear it comes to represent sweet nothingness, or a formal badge that is proudly worn on appropriate occasions, like patriotism on the fourth of July.

It is a sad business that good and strong words like brotherhood do undergo this dilution by too frequent protestation and too casual use. If the word were a reality in all of our lives, there would be no need for occasions like this. I always fear that even good occasions are the means, all unwittingly, of multiplying the application of Gresham's law to semantics.

How can we avoid this? If no other way, I believe, than by meditating on the true and enduring value of words like brotherhood lest

they become as common and unmeaning as the conversations at cocktail parties.

Brotherhood allows us ample ground for meditation. The meditation should begin by recognizing the unity of the human race, in its origin, in its aspirations, in its dignity, in its rights, in its destiny. If we can be agreed upon this most basic common ground, then brotherhood will begin to have deeper meaning. Without this common ground, brotherhood is sentimental nonsense, enunciated easily in public, and in private practice, as easily forgotten.

What I am saying is that indeed we are brothers, whatever our race or religion, simply because we are human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, endowed by Him with unalienable dignity and rights, destined to be His children and heirs to His Kingdom. Religion, of course, greatly deepens the significance of this unity. If this is true of our unity, what could possibly be so important that it should separate us from one another, cause us to disregard or disrespect one another. If we are one in the dignity of our common humanity, what sin of man is greater than man's inhumanity to man, except perhaps his blasphemy of God, which indeed inhumanity to man also is, insofar as God's image in man is defiled and dishonored. In the words of Our Lord: "Whatsoever you did to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to Me."

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Given such a conviction of the spiritual order, I am sure that our practical problems would be much easier to handle. Indeed, without this deep spiritual conviction on the true meaning of brotherhood, I fear that no organization, or well-meaning zeal based on vague good will, will suffice to bring into daily play the great force of true brotherhood in our lives and in our times.

The tragedy of our day is that we constantly combat symptoms without coming to grips with the fundamental underlying cause of infection and disease. If we could <sup>persuade</sup> get Americans generally to accept the strong philosophical and theological truths that illuminate the meaning of brotherhood, it would be inconceivable that Americans would scorn one another in such juvenile and inhuman ways as are current today. You all know the symptoms: the empty lunch counter, the vote denied intelligent people, the exclusive club, the separate facilities, the unspoken ban, the crass assumption of superiority, the snide remark among friends, the barring of equal opportunity, economic, educational, or social, that is a cruel wound in the side of humanity in a land that professes to be the citadel of democracy.

When will there be an end to such stupid nonsense? Not until each American begins to sense the deep and abiding <sup>spiritual</sup> sense of humanity,

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common dignity and the common cause of uncommon importance in an age that will be the making or breaking of humanity's deepest hopes.

The time is long past when we can abuse the reality of brotherhood at home and still hope to oppose successfully a militant and vicious theory abroad that man is merely of the earth earthy, with no hope beyond time, with no rights beyond those granted by the state, with no freedom from inexorable economic determination and military might making right. Our hope of success in this central battle is indeed futile if we do not believe deeply and practice sincerely the ever present reality of our common brotherhood, based upon realities that transcend space and time and race. This is the substance of the issue. The real battle is being fought right now on Main Street, North and South, in your neighborhood, in your life. No one can disengage himself from this issue, and the alternatives are clearly delineated -- we act as though we are truly brothers, or we give aid and comfort to the enemy on a thousand fronts.

Any impartial observer of the American scene can clearly see that we are far off from making the promises of our Constitution for equal

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rights and equal opportunities come true. The excuses - sophisticated or stupid - are multitudinous, and the rationalizations and compromises are without end. But whether we really accept it or not, brotherhood is a concept and a reality and a truth that does not admit to any of this deception or hypocrisy, whether it be accomplished in a slick or in a stupid manner. You believe in brotherhood for deep and important, indeed eternal reasons, or you do not. You practice brotherhood in your life, or you do not. And all unsuspectingly, as your life gives the answer to these two questions, you are working for or against ultimate victory, for or against the realization of man's truest hopes in our times, and in our beloved country.

May God grant to all of us tonight the privilege of practicing brotherhood in its purest integrity. In no other way can America indeed become that of which we sing: the land of the free and the home of the brave. And remember that God is not mocked: brotherhood is the truest test of our freedom and our courage. If we do not pass this test, we do not merit either victory or survival.