(Address given by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the 63rd Annual Founder's Day Service, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, March 30, 1980)

I am delighted to be here with you today to celebrate Founder's Day on this Palm Sunday, the eve of your Centenary Year. I feel a special brotherhood with you today, since Tuskegee began in a shack next to a church and my University, Notre Dame, began in a wilderness log cabin that doubled as a mission chapel. Your distinguished founder, Dr. Booker T. Washington, was a step ahead of ours -- yours had $2,000.00 when he began, whereas our Father Sorin had only $300.00. However, they both had something that was infinitely more important: faith in an educational vision that they brought to birth, helped grow, and passed on to us -- a dream come true.

I have always felt a special kinship to your nationally revered President, my old and dear friend, Dr. Luther Foster. We began as presidents at about the same time in the early fifties, we shared hopes and dreams, we worked together, still do, on many commissions, and later we suffered together during the sixties and seventies. We had our share of successes and learned together how to begin again after failure. It is fair to say that we entered the eighties together -- about the only survivors left in our early presidential class -- bearing a few similar scars, earned in human rights and educational campaigns. We still share our deepest hopes for a better America and a better world. We are still willing to keep working for what we have faith in, hope for and love, mainly our very special institutions, Tuskegee and Notre Dame, that dare to be different, and to excel, and to be a source of legitimate pride for our people.

You have all heard the nay-sayers, the pessimists, claim that a great black university is either an impossible dream or an anachronism -- a relic of another age. In the same line, no less a person than the famous George Bernard Shaw said that a great Catholic university is a contradiction in terms, another impossible dream. Both Luther Foster and I know that both of these statements are false. In a way, we have been giving our lives to prove that they are false. Tuskegee and Notre Dame are the proofs and you have not seen anything yet. Our schools are still growing; they are better each year. We still hope and we still have faith in what can yet happen in the further development of these institutions that we love and serve.

Luther Foster and I shared another dream, not unrelated to higher education, namely that human dignity and human rights and human hope could be a reality for all black Americans. He was helping that hope become a reality here, and I on the original Civil Rights Commission when Tuskegee and the Commission made common cause in nearby Montgomery.

I will never forget that occasion. The Commission was having its first public hearing, on voting, in the former seat of the Confederacy where very few blacks could register to vote. Before coming down, we wrote all the main hotels in town requesting room reservations and telling them that one of our federal Commissioners, Mr. Ernest Wilkins, the Undersecretary of the Department of Labor,

was black, as were some of our staff members. Every hotel denied us rooms saying they could not welcome a mixed black and white group into their hotels.

Our Chairman, John Hannah, also a former Founder's Day speaker here, applied for rooms at the Officers Quarters of the Air University in Montgomery. The Commanding General refused us saying that the local community would be offended by the presence of this mixed group. Dr. Hannah repeated the request to the Secretary of the Air Force and was again refused. Undaunted, he requested the Secretary of Defense, and an old friend of his, former President of General Motors, Mr. Charles Wilson, to let us have the rooms and was again refused.

Then John Hannah, a mild man, lost his temper and called President Eisenhower who had fortunately heard of the desegregation of the Armed Forces by his predecessor, President Harry Truman. Well, we finally did find rooms at the Air University. Thanks to a Presidential Order, a federal establishment admitted a federal commission to use its rooms. The year was 1958.

At the public hearings, our worst witnesses were the voting registrars, most of whom were high school drop-outs. One of them had refused a black applicant for an alleged error in spelling on the application and the registrar spelled it "spilling," dutifully dotting the "i." Our best witnesses were Tuskegee professors and their wives, mostly with Doctor's degrees, who were nevertheless

being denied the right to vote by high school drop-outs. Even the three Southern members of our Commission were outraged. One of them, former Governor of Virginia, John Battle, whose grandfather was Alabaman Colonel Battle, gave the hearing room full of people a very strong lecture on the right and duty of all Americans, black and white, to vote.

An even better lecture was given in the response to my question on the part of a Tuskegee Biology Professor's wife, who herself had a Master's degree.

"Why do you want to vote?" I asked her.

"I am trying to raise four children to be good American citizens," she responded. "I tell them America is different because we pick our leaders. What do I tell my children when they ask me: 'Then, mommy, why don't you vote?'"

Tuskegee people were the living proof during that hearing that America was far from justice and that the first step on the road to monumental change would have to be the vote. Blacks educated at Tuskegee could not be told that they were unprepared to vote. It had to stop.

I remember two other incidents regarding the Montgomery hearing. The county judge ignored our order subpoena to deliver the voting registration records; he said he would burn them first. He was told by the federal judge to give us the records or someone else would get burned. It was a preview of future confrontations between these two yet to come. The federal judge was Frank Johnson

and the county judge was George Wallace. Years later, Notre Dame gave Frank Johnson an honorary doctorate in Law for his integrity and courage.

My second remembrance was on the night of the last presidential election. The final chance for Jimmy Carter to be elected was to win in the State of Mississippi. The majority of white voters there voted against him, but thanks to the 1965 law, passed in large measure because of what we learned first here in Montgomery and later in the ten day hearing in Jackson, Mississippi, the blacks were now voting. They gave Jimmy Carter his final winning votes. Without them, he would have lost the election.

I do not think that this fact was lost on him, because early in his presidency, he voiced special and increased support for the historical black colleges. They had led the way and were leading the way to a better America by educating half the blacks who go to college and their graduates now people our professional schools in increasing numbers.

Luther Foster and I are often asked where the human rights struggle now stands. My flippant answer is "on dead center," but let me try to give you a more thoughtful answer.

You know how far back we began in 1957 when it was difficult to get the Commission members to look at education and employment, as well as voting. When the two-year life of the Commission was renewed in 1959, we were able to enlarge our work to cover housing and the administration of justice as well. George Washington Carver

would have loved the fact that the Commission's next renewal was only made possible by tacking it on the final bill to clear the Congress that year -- the peanut subsidy bill that no Southerner could vote against. The lowly peanut saved our life.

I think it can be fairly claimed that we, as a nation, made more progress in civil rights during the decade of the sixties than historically any other civilized country ever has made, thanks mainly to Martin Luther King and the young students and graduates of black colleges throughout the South who followed him and Andy Young and their colleagues, black and white. They would not be denied. Over 70% of the tough recommendations of our Commission on voting, housing, education, employment, and the administration of justice were enacted into federal law in 1964, 1965, and 1968. We dismantled the institution of apartheid throughout the land and institutionalized equality of opportunity in its place. That alone did not do and will not do the job. Institutions and laws, by themselves, will not bring us to the promised land. We still need leadership, people with vision, faith, and courage. I strongly believe that only education will produce such leadership. Tuskegee Institute, its President, its faculty, and its graduates have proved this much.

Leadership at the top of our nation faltered during the Nixon years. We have been attempting to recover ever since, not always with great success. But one striking fact is clear: black leadership which was mighty thin when Luther Foster first personified it, has now reached legion proportions. Ebony Magazine has a difficult time

identifying the hundred main black leaders of the year -- not because they are few, but because they are many.

How did this happen? I do believe that the Tuskegees of this nation led the way. Education is at the core of our advance. When a young man or woman is educated to competence and excellence, a wide range of employment and advancement becomes possible. As they become more affluent, better homes in better neighborhoods are available and this, in turn, means better schools for their children.

The system does not always work perfectly; prejudice is not dead and probably never will be, but without education, the cycle of advancement never begins. For so many young blacks, education was made possible because Tuskegee and its sister institutions were here. Without them, the process would never have begun -- no education, no vote, no job, no housing, no justice. Because Tuskegee was and is here, we can have hope in promoting further advance on all these fronts. We do not have time for discouragement or a slackening of our efforts to move forward. We have no good reason for complacence either -- as Robert Frost says -- "We have miles to go and promises to keep before we sleep."

If I should give one word of advice, looking to the future of black leadership -- might I suggest that as your President has done, you show interest in human rights and human development all around this shrinking world. Luther Foster is a charter member of the Board of the Overseas Development Council in Washington, which is

concerned with the poor of the Third and Fourth Worlds. Luther was promoting educational development in Africa long before it was popular. Luther served on a Kennedy and Johnson Commission to further educational and cultural exchange in all the world. In a world as small as ours, justice is indivisible, as is freedom. I hope many of you will follow your President's lead in promoting freedom and justice for all, men and women, everywhere.

Once more, may I share your joy as we begin, in three months, the one hundredth year of Tuskegee Institute. May I suggest to you for this occasion, the wonderful phrase on the front of the U. S. Archives in Washington, D.C., "What is past is prelude." May your wonderful past and wonderful leaders, Presidents Washington through Foster, be the prelude of even more wonderful leaders and even more wonderful accomplishments yet to come. I am sure that my dear friend, Luther Foster, will join me in this prayer and all of you, too. May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, descend upon this wonderful place and all its dedicated people and remain forever more. Amen.