

(Address delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame, at the Aquinas Center of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, October 26, 1988)

I am grateful to the Aquinas Center of Theology, its Director, Father Bob Perry, and its Associate Director, Anne Russell Mayeaux, for their generous invitation to address a few welcoming words to the participants to this conference, "For the Trumpet Shall Sound: Protest, Prayer and Prophecy."

In a larger sense, I am grateful to Emory University and its distinguished President, Jim Laney, for the presence of the Aquinas Center on this campus. The Methodists founded many outstanding universities: Boston, Syracuse, American, Duke, Northwestern, Denver, Southern California, and Southern Methodist, to name a few. However, I do not see in any of these others, the theological, moral, and ethical concerns that are so much at home here.

I have my own explanation for that. Emory's President is an active theologian and minister. I do not believe that any of the other universities mentioned can claim that, and therein lies the difference. When our University of Notre Dame went under lay control in 1967, the lay Trustees wisely insisted in the new statutes that the President always be a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the founding religious order. Interestingly, in the ecumenical setting of Emory, our new President, Father Edward Malloy, is a Holy Cross priest with a doctorate in theology from Vanderbilt University, of Methodist origin.

I was delighted to learn of the theme of this conference. Again, it presents for more intense study, interesting contrasts, as well as important similarities. Both King and Merton are clergymen, one a Baptist minister, the other a Trappist monk and Catholic priest. One was on the battle line, the other behind the lines. Both, in their own way, were in the center of the battle. Both began the campaign focusing on civil rights in America, both eventually were led into deeper waters of worldwide peace, with special emphasis on the Vietnam debacle. Both men could be characterized as men of theology and men of prayer, but it took some time for both to mature in applying the impact of their theology and prayer life to the active conflict for human dignity and world peace. Both became increasingly ecumenical as the struggle for justice continued. Both grew from obscurity to nationwide and indeed worldwide influence in their prophetic roles. Both espoused, both in their personal lives and actions, a deep conviction that non-violent confrontation was the only way to victory. Because one was on the firing line, he often went to jail. The other, in a confinement of his own making, moved to the center of conflict by launching powerful ideas and encouraging activists from behind the lines.

King and Merton were very much different, yet very much alike in what counts for this conference: protest, prayer, and prophecy. One was a true martyr for the cause; the other found death, or death found him, far from his monk's cell in a wider quest for religious peace between East and West

I believe that both of them experienced a special kind of religious conversion that led them into a new world of active, though peaceful, conflict that neither had anticipated.

What would Martin Luther King's life have been had Rosa Parks not have refused to move to the back of the bus that day when her feet were tired? What would Thomas Merton's life have been like if in retreating from the world, he had refused to ponder and feel crucified by the moral agonies he had left behind and outside the monastery walls?

We cannot underestimate the inner conversion of heart that occurs when compassion for those suffering wells up, leads to deep inner moral indignation and a new resolve to really do something about it, no matter what that involves. There is a deep gulf between the modest church in Birmingham where Martin was an unknown pastor and the balcony at the Lincoln Memorial where he proclaimed his dream and the later balcony in Memphis where he fell mortally wounded. There is a similar gulf between the Thomas of the Seven Story Mountain and the much later scarred Thomas of his last diary where he agonizes over whether he has done enough since leaving the world seeking God and finding Him in His suffering members.

I believe that conversion is central to the lives of these two modern prophets -- just as it was central to the life of St. Paul or Thomas a Becket. Certainly, the theological content of their words and prophecy is central, too. I have to believe

that God's good grace and the impulse of the Holy Spirit are central to any understanding of what happened to them and around them. Many had read and heard of Thoreau and Ghandi -- very few acted on what they read and heard.

To end where I began, King and Merton may seem to some to be an improbable pair. Indeed they were different in many ways, but not in their fidelity to divine inspiration and grace, not in the courage and vision that brought them from obscurity to worldwide attention.

I commend the Center and all of you for being here to study these themes and especially these central actors of a drama that peaked some twenty years ago.

We have long since enlarged the themes of human rights and peace to a larger world scene. In fact, the themes have begun to intersect. At recent meetings in Europe and here at the Carter Center with the Russians, it becomes more and more apparent that little will be accomplished between the Russians and ourselves in the area of world peace unless we simultaneously make visible progress in the field of human rights in both our countries. Peace requires a growing trust between nations, but there can be little growth in real trust if the dignity of human beings is abused.

By way of personal parenthesis, may I say here in Atlanta that one of my final pleasures, as President of Notre Dame, was to confer our honorary doctorate on two valiant Atlanta ladies:

Coretta King and Rosalynn Carter, both deeply concerned with the issues to be discussed here.

Now I have the additional pleasure of introducing a friend who will deliver the keynote address tonight, Archbishop Eugene Marino of Atlanta.

I sincerely wonder if he would even be here had not Martin Luther King and Thomas Merton not engaged, with so many others of us, in the great crusade that changed the face of America two decades ago. All was affected by that monumental change, including the churches.