

SPEECH BY SARGENT SHRIVER, DIRECTOR, PEACE CORPS AT THE NATIONAL
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In a powerful and moving essay the Negro author, James Baldwin, has described an incident which happened to him only a few miles from here--at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. He and two Negro friends--all well over thirty--were refused service in the airport lounge on the pretense they were too young. After a long, noisy altercation, and after calling the manager, they were finally served. During the entire affair not one of the many white people in the lounge said a word to help. When it was all over one of the Negroes, a Korean war veteran, turned to the young white man beside him and said, "You know, that fight was your fight, too." The young man turned to him saying, "I lost my conscience a long time ago," and turned and walked out.

The purpose of this meeting is to re-awaken that conscience--to direct the immense power of religion to shaping the conduct and thoughts of men toward their brothers in a manner consistent with the compassion and love on which our spiritual tradition rests.

In so doing you follow in a great tradition. From the time of the ancient Hebrew prophets and the dispersal of the money-changers, men of God have taught us that social problems are moral problems on a huge scale, that a religion which did not struggle to remove oppression from the world of men would not be able to create the world of the spirit. This tradition, one which is also deeply embedded in our own country's history, was never more evident than in the years preceding the proclamation of the emancipation whose centenary we celebrate now. At that time men of God, men of all faiths, men of the North and men of the South took to pulpits, to press and to public squares to demand an end to the moral evil of slavery.

Many religious leaders who followed this path suffered for it. Many were condemned by their congregations and deprived of their positions. Churches were burned and physical violence was often the reward of those who spoke freely. But their efforts were a significant force in ending slavery and in re-shaping our society. And by their actions they not only restored dignity and hope to millions of Americans, they immeasurably elevated and strengthened the churches which they served.

Today, a century later, we are given the same great opportunity. Today again the problem of racial wrongs and racial hatreds is the central moral problem of our republic. Today again hostility and misunderstanding, and even violence, awaits the man who attempts to translate the meaning of God's love into the actions and thoughts of men. Today again the hope for happiness of millions of Negro Americans can be profoundly affected by your efforts. And today again religion has one of those rare historical opportunities to renew its own purpose, enhance the dignity of its social role, and strengthen its institutions and its heritage by pitting itself against vast and powerful social forces which deny the role of God in the affairs of men.

It is, of course, difficult for me to speak of these matters to this audience of scholars and teachers, men of great learning and men who have shaped the religious institutions of today's America.

I am not a theologian.

I am not an "expert" in race relations.

My only credentials for speaking to you are my experience here in Chicago with the Interracial Council, my work with the Peace Corps, and a layman's strong interest in making faith personally meaningful in a disturbing world.

As an official of the Government, I am encouraged by a meeting like this. Justice for men is a common objective of religion and government and the exclusive domain of neither.

I hope the traditional American regard for the separation of church and state will never be interpreted as an excuse for either to preempt-- or ignore--the vigorous pursuit of human dignity and freedom which are the legitimate concern of both church and state.

But laws and government are, at best, coarse and inefficient instruments for remolding social institutions or illuminating the dark places of the human heart. They can deal only with the broadest and most obvious problems: guarding against segregation in schools but not against the thousands of incidents of discrimination and hatred which give the lie to what is learned in the schoolroom. They can carry sweeping mandates but the process of their enforcement is so ponderous that it takes the entire energies of the nation to secure entrance of a single Negro into an unwilling white university while thousands more are without hope of entering.

They can call for the highest standards of moral conduct, but those standards are only tortuously and imperceptibly imposed on a community which does not accept them, verifying the dictate of Walter Rauschenbush that "Laws do not create moral convictions, they merely recognize and enforce them."

For even though law can compel and even educate, in the last analysis the rule of law depends upon a legal order which embodies the convictions, desires and judgments of the men it governs.

If we recognize that laws alone are inadequate, that legislatures and presidents cannot impose moral convictions, then we must look to those institutions whose task it is to teach moral values, to restate eternal principles in terms of today's conflicts, and to conform the daily conduct of men to the guiding values of justice, of love and of compassion. Pre-eminent among those institutions is religion and the church.

Henry Ward Beecher once wrote, "That man is not a shepherd of his flock who fails to teach that flock how to apply moral truth to every phase of ordinary practical duty." This is one of the great lessons of the history of religion. It is a lesson of scriptures and tradition. And it was a lesson taught by Abraham and Moses and Christ.

I find it alarming, therefore, when the Government looks to the religious community for its share of the task and encounters, too often, a bland philosophy of laissez faire.

As a layman, for example, I wonder why I can go to church 52 times a year and not hear one sermon on the practical problems of race relations.

I wonder why a conference like this does not lead to a continuing exchange of views and ideas and to a coordination of efforts to solve specific problems throughout the year.

I wonder, furthermore, why each minister, rabbi, and priest does not map a specific program for his congregation--a program that will produce concrete gains over the next twelve months. Such a program could do many things.

It could bring to an end segregation in those churches and church schools where it exists.

It could include a pledge to double the number of Negro families in the congregations where Negroes now attend.

It could include the establishment of interracial councils where none exist.

It could introduce Negroes to every social and community event which the church sponsors or participates in.

It could train lay Negro teachers and leaders to participate fully in congregational affairs.

If such a program intended finally to bury religious laissez faire in racial problems were instituted, it would encourage each member of the congregation to pledge a tithe of his time to removing racial barriers at work, at play, and at worship.

I wonder why an appeal requesting every church member to give a tithe of time has not been made already. Just a few Sundays ago in a Catholic weekly newspaper, "The Sunday Visitor," the whole front page was devoted to this subject of tithing, but the discussion was focused primarily on the financial aspect of tithing. George Romney, the new Republican Governor of Michigan, impressed me with his recent statement acknowledging quite openly that he was accustomed to giving a tithe of his income to the Mormon Church. But isn't it easier to give a tithe of your money than a tithe of your time? Isn't the time you give yourself more important than the money?

Let me be more specific.

The Peace Corps has shown what Americans will do when they are challenged by a high purpose. They respond enthusiastically no matter what the personal cost.

Thousands of them volunteered to serve even in the days when the skeptics and cynics were ridiculing the Peace Corps as "a children's crusade," a "beatniks' boondoggle," and a "kiddie korps."

They deliberately chose a hard--and to some, an unpopular--course, because first, it is voluntary; second, it demands their utmost; and third, it is worthwhile.

These Volunteers have already written a moral to a story that is still being told. That moral: "A nation cannot require too much of its citizens if the cause is right."

Do our churches expect too little of their members in solving race problems?

Suppose five thousand congregations in America were to set up volunteer groups to combat racial prejudice and eliminate racial tensions in five thousand religious precincts throughout America.

And suppose the 5,000 were to become 10,000 or 20,000?

In thousands of communities religiously inspired volunteers would be inviting Negro families to personal social functions.

They would be organizing and joining interracial councils, securing entrance of Negroes into previously all white neighborhoods, ensuring enforcement of constitutional rights to equal opportunity, and improving living conditions in segregated neighborhoods.

A profound new force would be at work in America, emanating from the deepest wells of religious inspiration and reaching for the noblest summits of human aspiration. That combination would be invincible.

There will be those who scoff at so pointed an effort by organized religion to deal with a major social disorder.

Some will cry "Busy Bodies," but they will not be the first. When a group of English bishops tried to mediate the bitter British coal strike of 1926, Prime Minister Baldwin retorted by asking how they would like it if he referred the revision of the Athanasian Creed to the Iron and Steel Federation.

Some critics will want to ignore the church's word on the thesis that it is irrelevant--like the corporation president who said: "Of course, segregation is wrong from the Christian point of view. Let's not discuss it from that point of view."

Still others will argue: "So what? Go ahead. You won't do any good but you won't do any harm either."

Few people read much history--as William Temple reminded us. Otherwise they would know that history abounds with dramatic examples of the impact made by the spirit of religion upon the life of mankind.

The abolition of the Slave Trade, for example, was carried through by Wilberforce and his friends in the inspiration of their Christian faith. Other faiths can point to similar accomplishments.

More recently, efforts by churches and synagogues have illustrated what can be accomplished. After his school system was integrated, one Kentucky superintendent said: "I believe ministers and lay church leaders made the greatest contribution in getting the general public to accept desegregation."

You may be familiar with the inspiring experience in St. Louis. The 600-member Church Federation set aside a Sunday for thanksgiving prayer for public school desegregation. It challenged pastors and membership to take an open stand for integration. The Cardinal called in a general letter for all Catholic pastors to influence their hundreds of thousands of parishioners to cooperate. The Rabbinical Association urged all citizens to work and pray for its success.

On the other hand, we know what can happen when religious leadership is absent. Remember Clinton, Tennessee? Ugly violence flared there when desegregation was attempted. It took 650 National Guardsmen and 39 state highway troopers led by a burly, 290-pound commander to restore order after days of tension.

When a special report was written to analyze what had happened in Clinton, this significant sentence appeared: "Churches were not utilized to any extent in Clinton, Tennessee."

During the crisis a Baptist minister escorted Negro students through the howling crowds. He was beaten by the mob but his courage was unshaken. What might have happened in Clinton had the religious community rallied to support him?

One man is not enough.

There must be others.

I said earlier there is no reliable justice without the machinery of justice--the Government.

But the machinery of justice cannot be effective without men and women who have the will and character to make it work.

There is where we come again to religion. What is it that produces men and women with the will and character to make the machinery of justice work if it is not religious faith?

The maxim is true that politics is the art of the possible. The constant challenge we face in politics is to enlarge the area of the possible--"to lengthen the stakes" in Biblical language.

But to do that requires that men change their objectives. But they can't change their objectives unless they change their prejudices, and that requires changes in men's attitudes and that requires changes in men's minds and that requires changes in men's hearts--and the human heart is the business of religion.

So I ask: Is there any way of creating a social order of justice if religion does not do its work in the mind and hearts of men?

I don't think so.

Is there any way of winning racial equality if religion does not permeate its adherents with an urgent sense of personal responsibility for the injustice of our present system?

Again--I don't think so.

I cannot stress this too much. We believe the success of the Peace Corps is due to the fact that thousands of Americans are willing to take personal responsibility for bringing peace to the world.

They have seen their task and have set forth to do it.

In race relations there is a strong tendency to blame "society" for our errors. We pass the blame on to any one of a number of impersonal causes--environment, education, etc. Shakespeare was right:

"This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often in surfeit of our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we are fools by heavenly complusion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance."

But he was also right when he went on to say: "The fault, Dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

It is the province of religion to instill a sense of personal responsibility into mankind. "If you want to cleanse the stream," so the old proverb goes--"get at the source." The attitudes and concepts, the prejudice and hate which pollute the streams of American life--government can deal with their symptoms; religion must deal with their source. I think this is what the Presbyterian General Assembly had in mind one hundred years ago when it declared: "The sphere of the church is wider and more searching, than the sphere of the magistrate." Religion reaches into the sanctuary of human experience where attitudes are formed.

We can agree--government has its business, religion has its.

The important thing is to get on with the job.

We have tried in the Peace Corps to deal positively with the problem. For example, we set out deliberately to recruit as many Negroes and representatives of other minority groups as possible for jobs in every echelon. We knew Negroes would not ordinarily seek out these jobs so we decided to seek them out. Today 7.4% of our higher echelon positions are filled by Negroes. Other government agencies employ .8% Negroes in similar grades. Twenty-four percent of our other positions are filled by Negroes. The figure for other agencies is 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ %.

We sent a Chinese-American doctor to Ghana. When he rose to speak to his students they couldn't believe he was from the United States--"that place across the sea where no colored man can go to school." They thought he was a Chinese Communist.

In Nepal we sent four Volunteers to teach in a small college. Three of them were visited one night by a young Marxist student who had studied in Peking and who had already won a scholarship to Lumumba University in Moscow. This student had also just been elected to a place on the important "panchayat" council which runs the city government.

He came to rib the Volunteers about discrimination in America. "Just a minute," they interrupted him. "We'll let Carl Jorgenson talk about that," and they called for a fourth Volunteer who was studying in his room. Carl Jorgenson walked in--a tall young Negro, a top graduate of Harvard, the son of a leader of the NAACP in Washington. "Sure, let's talk about it," he said. And they did. The young Marxist--stunned that Americans would let a Negro in the Peace Corps, that a Negro could graduate from

Harvard, that he could be living with three white Americans--has come back time and time again to discuss America with the Volunteers.

In the first days of the Peace Corps we were told that Protestant volunteers would never be accepted in the villages of Latin America. We heard that the campesinos had been told that if they talked to a Peace Corps Volunteer their soul would be in danger of hell.

The truth, ladies and gentlemen, is that we have Volunteers all over Latin America--many of them Protestant young men and women--and there has not yet been one incident of discrimination.

I might add that the first two Volunteers killed in service died in a plane crash in Colombia with thirty-two Colombians. One was a Jewish boy from Chicago. The other a young Baptist from Missouri. They died in a Catholic country.

El Tiempo, the principal newspaper of Bogota, editorialized: "They were the first to fulfill the Rite of Blood which united them (with Colombians) in an indissoluble tie...Their bodies...have fallen with those of our fellow countrymen. The sacrifice of blood is thus consummated. Two races were forged together in this dramatic accident. That this be not in vain, is the ardent hope of millions of human beings."

There is only one real explanation of our success in the field of race relations. We made a deliberate effort to change old patterns. If I have any justification to speak to this august body, it is to encourage you to make a conscious, deliberate assault on racial barriers. From our experience in the Peace Corps, I know those barriers are vulnerable.

Let me close with a pledge and a request.

We in Government will continue our efforts. We will move with all the instruments at our command to achieve justice among men. That is our pledge to you.

My request is simply this: Help us. If there is to be a social order allowing the fullest possible development of individual personality, if there is to be the widest and deepest possible fellowship among men of different races, we need what Maritain has called Democracy of the Person. You can bring it about.

Help us to see what is our task. Inspire us with the faith that God is above us and with us and that He will help us if we will do what is right. Stir our consciences. Strengthen our will. Inspire and challenge us to take our principles into the toughest walks of life and make them work.

A religious scholar has written that the church "should be swiftest to awake to any individual suffering, bravest to speak against any wrong, and strongest to rally the moral force of the community against everything that threatens the better life among men." That today's religious institutions are equal to this grand role is demonstrated by this conference and by the distinction of those who have come to participate in deliberations on this most vital issue. The difficulties ahead are many. But we should be grateful for the opportunity given to religion today to wage a moral struggle as difficult, as hazardous and as important as many great battles of the past. For in such a battle we help not only those we fight for, but we are able to reconfirm and strengthen our own purpose and mission. We must be grateful for such a test.