

SPEECH

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 1964

*Dr Carl Granrud*  
*Wm Fisher*  
*Bill Connell*  
*my staff*

*Miami*

FREEDOM OF DIGNITY

I deeply appreciate the honor of receiving the Distinguished Service Lutheran Brotherhood award. This great fraternal insurance organization has no peers and few equals in the development of brotherhood and spiritual and social solidarity of human beings. I know of no higher service. I am proud to be a member.

*and friendly*  
America is a leader in the world in developing this *Warm* ~~kind of~~ concern for fellow human beings. Lutheran Brotherhood has been a leader in America. But the concept you represent is only one of the ways in which religious groups - operating within the context of religious freedom in America - have enabled freedom and dignity to flourish here as nowhere else in the world.

Four freedoms - Freedom of Speech, Freedom of worship  
Freedom from want, Freedom from fear  
- 2 -

Freedom and dignity - or as I prefer to put it  
the freedom of dignity - is what I want to talk about, ~~this~~

~~morning.~~ Religious organizations and the churches in America  
are the custodians of <sup>that</sup> dignity *because it is God-given*

One of our finest hours is now upon us - if the  
churches do what only they can do ~~in civil rights~~, in the  
*in Civil Rights, in the struggle for peace*  
war on poverty, and in showing all the world that democracy  
can solve the human social problems better than any other  
form of government.

Permit me to thank you for  
the great work of the Lutheran  
Church + other religious denominations  
in the Food for Peace Program -

- Peace Corps -  
- For Aid -

L Governments do not make social values - they administer them. Political institutions work best when they administer the consensus of social values. If an important issue is so divided that there is no consensus, politics does one of two things: It either compromises the issue or it ignores it. Up to a point there is something to be said for this. Sometimes "muddling through" is clearly better than tyranny, and time takes care of some matters.

L But some issues do not go away. They demand decisions. The moral issue grows sharper. And the government necessarily looks for clarification to those institutions who shelter and nurture the roots of moral value.

✓ The moral value of human dignity is a basic tenet  
of all our religions. Jesus said simply, "When your  
brother asks you for bread, ye do not give him a stone."  
I am sure these words have never left our conscience. Yet,  
we have all muddled, compromised, and ignored some of the  
complexities of our common life in the vain hope that the  
tough issues will go away. But the issue of human dignity  
is not going away. We are faced today with the same kind  
of decision Martin Luther had at the Diet of Worms. I  
think we need his capacity to say, "Here I stand. I can  
do no other. God help me."

My assignment as Floor Leader for the Civil Rights bill in the Senate is the most challenging of my legislative career ~~and~~ I feel honored that I have been chosen ~~because~~ I consider this an assignment of conscience and conviction. But I have said before and I say again that if we are to succeed in the Senate, if we are to pass a fair and effective bill, it will only be because of the active and strong support of the spiritual leaders and the church people of America.

We are at a crossroads in history. We are a great nation - but there is unfinished business. We have come a long way - but we dare not stop now. We have the duty, the moral obligation to bring the Freedom of Dignity to all of our citizens.

The Freedom of Dignity is a rarer freedom than you might think. Dignity involves pride - pride in one's self, in one's family, in one's group.

Crush that pride and you crush the soul - you extinguish the spark that makes a human a man. That pride need not be crushed by one massive blow. It can be crushed just as easily by the seemingly little things - the subtle forces of daily humiliation.

These subtle forces have been at work in this country far too long and we're seeing the results today.

We see it in the shame and loss of self-respect of the so-called lower classes - for the Negro, the poor migrant laborer, and for the new citizen from Puerto Rico.

We see it among the millions of our elderly citizens who have suffered the indignity of being cast on the employment scrap heap because they are past the age of 65. They suffer the indignity of having to ask for charity because their life savings are wiped out by catastrophic or chronic illness.

✓ We see it among the millions of our handicapped who suffer indignity because we have not learned to look past their birth defects or disease or disability and <sup>to</sup> see them for their true worth.

✓ We see it among the millions of our citizens who are are uneducated <sup>or</sup> ~~are~~ undereducated. They are condemned to suffer the indignity of being shackled to lifelong menial labor, even though their minds and hands ~~could be~~ <sup>could be</sup> trained for a better place in life.

✓ Yes, millions of Americans are being scarred and wounded every day by invisible blows that cut deeper than a sword. Those who have not experienced humiliation and indignity may not be able to understand how harsh their effects can be. But let the doubters recall the words of Shakespeare:

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound."

L The elderly, the handicapped, the uneducated in America have been wounded and scarred, but no group in American society has suffered more blows, visible or invisible than the 20 million Americans of the Negro race.

L Americans have been shocked by the ugly violence used against our fellow Negro citizens demonstrating for their rights. They were shocked when they saw fellow Americans struck by fire hoses, police clubs and electric cattle prodders, or set upon by police dogs. But these indignities hurt no more than the hidden humiliation which American Negroes suffer every day of the year. What would the promise of freedom have for you if you were told from the age of 3 on, "Black child", "stay in your place."

But, What place? The bottom of the scale, the worst of everything. The lowest, the last, the shoddiest, the back of the bus, the worst of the tenements, the most crowded school.



oh, Never mind if the child has the potential of a George Washington Carver, a Ralph Bunch, a William Hastie, a Marion Anderson, a Carl Rowan, or a Martin Luther King. *Lack,*

↳ How long are 20 million Americans supposed to take all this?

↳ Is it any wonder that a Negro revolution has swept the land?

I tell you the real wonder. It is the wonder that the revolution came so late and that it's so self-disciplined, so responsible, so moderate, so patient.

↳ The Negro is demanding "freedom - now" *equal opportunity* The Negroes in every section of our country who are marching in the streets, sitting in at the restaurants and at the construction sites, are fighting for their freedom as surely as our ancestors did nearly two centuries ago.

President Lyndon B. Johnson pointed this out clearly in one of his most eloquent addresses at a Memorial Day gathering in Gettysburg last year.

The President said "In this hour, it is not our respective races which are at stake - it is our nation. Let those who care for their country come forward, North and South, white and Negro, to lead the way through this moment of challenge and decision.

"The Negro says 'Now.' Others say, 'Never.' The voice of responsible Americans - the voice of those who died here and the great man who spoke here - their voices say, 'Together.' There is no other way.

"Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact. To the extent that the proclamation of emancipation is not fulfilled in fact, to that extent we shall have fallen short of assuring freedom to the free."

Those are the words of our President.

We are in the process of declaring "together" in the Senate. We are trying to enact a law that will carry out our creed of liberty and justice for all - a law that will make emancipation a fact, not just a proclamation.

This session of the 88th Congress will be the Freedom Session and 1964 will be the Freedom Year. Shakespeare once spoke of the "tide which taken at the flood leads on to fortune; omitted, all the journey of life is in the shallows and in miseries."

L The tide for civil rights is at its peak. We dare not lose it.

But I can tell you that this civil rights bill cannot be passed in the Senate unless the national consensus that has been growing rises to a pitch and intensity that will demand the passage of the bill.

This bill must be approved by the people before it can be passed by the Senate of the United States.

L I feel that great consensus growing. I can feel the stirrings in the churches, among business groups, educators, great fraternal organizations like yours - not alone in the Negro groups themselves.

The eyes of America have been opened. The "Invisible man," the Negro, who was not really seen by millions of fellow Americans, stands clearly before us - a man who suffers, a man who yearns, a man who has much to give and has a right to all the freedom and dignity that we who were born white enjoy.

*He seeks to be a participant in American life - He does not want to separate*

Yes, the conscience of America has been stirred. But it will not be enough to feel. It is necessary that America act.

*be  
Pursued  
Assured*

The American people can not remain spectators to this great national historic event. They must become participants. They must be mobilized. And once they are, we will pass the civil rights bill and close the citizenship gap that has shamed this country for more than 100 years.

History has taught us one clear lesson through the  
ages - that "evil triumphs where good men fail to act."

But this year good men will act. We will take the first  
step by enacting a strong civil rights law and then  
march "forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human  
rights, and bring not only equality but dignity to all  
men.

now let me thank you for  
your good work - Bill Fisher

Lutheran World Relief Inc {

(Church World Service  
Catholic Relief ~~World~~ Services)

School Lunch

Korea, India

Jordan Taiwan

Yugoslavia



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)