

Mr Chancellor,

Our honorary graduate and esteemed guest today, Ambassador Andrew Young, is a legend of the American Civil Rights movement. He has already been honoured by many universities around the world: he holds no fewer than 45 honorary degrees. Some might say, Mr Chancellor, that he does not need another one. But this honorary degree, we believe, is special. Today is an occasion of double significance: by honouring two of the most influential ‘Christian ministers and social revolutionaries’ of our time, we are both commemorating and making history anew. Though his visit to Newcastle was brief, Dr King embraced it as a treasured moment of ‘inestimable value’ that would remain dear to him ‘for so long as the chords of memory shall lengthen’. Recognition from people of goodwill so many miles from his home gave him renewed vigour, he declared, for the continuance of what he called his ‘humble contribution’ towards making justice and racial equality a reality. Here too on that very day, 13 November 1967, was one of Dr King’s closest friends and advisors – Andrew Young.

Born in New Orleans in 1932, Andrew Jackson Young Jnr could have chosen middle class comfort and become a dentist, like his father before him. But, on graduating from the elite Howard University in Washington DC, he began to experience a growing religious awakening that led him to graduate school at a theological seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1954, he was called to ministry at a church in Marion, Alabama. The black population in that small town in the Deep South had bitter first-hand experience of racial discrimination. African Americans during the 1950s lived with legislated subordination and everyday fear. In many Southern states, under Jim Crow,

they knew that if they dared speak out, they faced the very real possibility of being lynched.

It was in Marion, Alabama that Andrew met and married his first wife, Jean Childs, with whom he went on to have four children. Jean's friend was a fellow townswoman named Coretta Scott. Coretta was married to another Baptist pastor, known to posterity as Martin Luther King Jr. Coincidence, Andrew Young says, is 'God's way of remaining anonymous'. In 1955, Pastor Young moved his family to Georgia and then went to work at the National Council of Churches in New York City. By 1961, sit-in protests had begun in Nashville, and the civil rights movement was taking off. Dr King invited him to a meeting in Montgomery Alabama, after which Andrew sold his house, quit his job, and went to join the United Church of Christ in Atlanta. In 1964 he became Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Congress (SCLC) and began working side by side with Dr King as one of his principal lieutenants. Andrew says it was like being in team of wild horses working alongside one another, without hierarchy. On one side were the headstrong young radicals, wanting freedom, and wanting it now. Andrew's role was as a key strategist and negotiator, and a politically-astute contrarian, allowing Dr King to take a compromise position between polarized, opposing views.

Andrew Young was at the heart of the most iconic Civil Rights Campaigns of the 1960s. He was there when they marched on Birmingham, St. Augustine, Selma, and Atlanta, and suffered imprisonment with many others, though he was more useful to Dr King out of jail. The bravery of the SCLC leaders and thousands of their supporters was witnessed in their consistent use of non-violence in the face of vicious racist attacks. Uniformed brutality against their peaceful protests was broadcast around the world: the outcry that followed

provoked President Lyndon B Johnson at last to act. Congressional passage of the Civil Rights Act was won in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

But there was no respite for the SCLC leaders. New controversies surrounded Dr King's public stand against the Vietnam War. It was in this context that they came, battle-weary, to Newcastle in November, 1967. Just a few months later, on 4th April 1968, Andrew Young was with Martin Luther King Jnr in Memphis, Tennessee, on the day of his assassination. Dr King's death came as no surprise to his inner circle of friends - he'd been stabbed, bombed, bound in chains, imprisoned. He had spoken of his passing on a daily basis, and had tried to make light of it, promising that when he reached glory, he would preach his friends into heaven.

It was left to Andrew Young and to the other civil rights leaders of his generation to keep the flame alive. He was three times elected a Congressman from the State of Georgia, in 1972, 1974 and 1976. He was an early supporter of Jimmy Carter for President from among the Democratic Party's black caucus. In 1977, under the Carter administration, Andrew Young became the first African American to be appointed US Ambassador to the United Nations, a position he held until August 1979. During this time, he became a world figure, among other things a vocal critic of apartheid in South Africa. Controversially he spoke out against injustice wherever his conscience dictated. In 1981 he was elected Mayor of Atlanta, and re-elected in 1985 with a remarkable 80% majority of the vote. During that time, he brought over \$70 billion of investment in the city, and was instrumental in bringing the 1996 Olympics to Atlanta – making him one of the truly great Mayors in modern US history.

ANDREW J YOUNG: DCL

Ambassador Young's accolades have been many. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980 by Jimmy Carter, the President's highest civilian award. France awarded him the *Légion d'Honneur*, the NAACP the Spingarn Medal. He also received an Emmy, awarded for Lifetime Achievement. His work continues today through the Andrew J Young Foundation. After losing his first wife in 1994, he married Carolyn McClain and his family now includes eight grandchildren.

The author of many inspirational books, Ambassador Young has spoken and written often about the divine source that he believes has given him the direction and courage for his lifelong mission. He says: 'I've felt an invisible hand has guided me all my life from within'. The distinguished elder we see before us today has fulfilled the journey he began all those years ago. The chords of his memory are long and venerable. He has remained true, working tirelessly towards promoting worldwide social justice and equality. Now 'ripe and full of years', he has not wavered in his struggle, nor given up where others would have chosen comfort and retirement. 'We all have to plan to be 100', he says, 'Moses was 80 when he figured out what God wanted him to do'.

So, how far have we progressed in the last fifty years? Looking down on us, I wonder what Dr King would make of it all. In these troubled times, the arc of the moral universe seems at times not so much bending towards justice, as doing a u-turn. From Charlottesville to Grenfell Tower, there are too many signs that we still have a long way to go before justice, peace and freedom have been won for all. But there is always hope. As Ambassador Young says: 'There could not have been a Civil Rights Movement without love. There cannot be faith or hope without love. There can be no positive future without love'.

ANDREW J YOUNG: DCL

Mr Chancellor, in honouring a legend of the American civil rights movement, I present to you Andrew Jackson Young Jnr for the award of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Helen Berry, Public Orator

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