

Civil Disobedients must take consequences

"People who practice civil disobedience must always be willing to take the consequences of their acts," warned Dr. Walter Harding, noted Thoreau scholar and University Professor of English at Geneseo, in his address to the third all-college convocation opening the academic year last week.

Civil disobedience, professor Harding explained, is not a universal solvent, it is not to be used in every situation. There are a number of important qualifications that the good citizen must consider before invoking those principles. It is essential to the structure of organized society that the citizen resort to civil disobedience only when all ordinary channels of reform have been exhausted. Civil disobed-

ience must always be based on moral grounds.

Civil disobedience should not be invoked in matters of simple inconvenience. We owe it to ourselves and the society within which we live to make certain before we commit an act of civil disobedience that we are not objecting merely for objection's sake. "Civil disobedience for the sake of civil disobedience," said Dr. Harding, "is as pointless, as unethical, as war for war's sake."

He added that it also is essential to remember that civil disobedience is not only based on non-violence, but that the use of physical violence of any type is completely antithetical to the philosophy of civil disobedience on the grounds of both morality and expediency. "Civil disobedience must be civilized," he concluded, if it is to work. We must be certain that in obtaining our own rights we are not violating the rights of others. He who invokes civil disobedience must have as much concern for the rights of others as he is asking them to have for his."

and expediency.

Dr. Harding traced the history of civil disobedience pointing out that it is not new. Even though the men on the street and the student in college, suddenly

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Civil disobedience

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aware of civil disobedience, think they have found something new the phrase "civil disobedience" was coined by Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau hoped that by going to prison for his principles he could awaken his fellow citizens to the evil they were condoning so they would either repeal the laws permitting slavery or join him in prison in sufficient numbers so that the law would become unenforceable.

He defined civil disobedience as deliberate violation of a civil law on moral grounds with a willingness to take the consequences of that violation.

The convocation was held on the Geneseo campus in Schrader Gym and marked the beginning of the 1968-69 academic year. Faculty and administration in academic regalia participated in the opening and closing procession. The invocation and benediction were pronounced by Rev. David Carter, Episcopal Chaplain of the College. Professor Harding was introduced by Erik Wilson, president of Student Senate. Dr. Robert W. MacVittie, president of the College, presided at the colorful ceremony.