

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Born this Day: Prophet Who Saw the “Far Deeper Malady”

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January 15 is the day on which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born, in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929.

He would go on to become one of the most powerful voices of all time against racism, oppression, violence, imperialism, and impoverishment.

Dr. King can rightly be described as a prophet in the fullest sense of the word, warning us in no uncertain terms of the consequences of deliberately continuing to violate the will of heaven, and advising us that until we face those violations head on and fix them, things will not get better but instead will get even worse.

Of course Dr. King is rightly remembered as a towering leader of Civil Rights, and that of course is an undeniable fact. But the fact that he very clearly and explicitly connected his struggle for Civil Rights and racial justice to the world-wide struggle against what he described as “old systems of exploitation and oppression” which enable “the privileges and the pleasures” and the “immense profits” which are enjoyed at the expense of constant wars of aggression and counter-revolution around the globe is all but forgotten today, especially by the controlled media which by its ongoing lies and dissimulation continues to support those systems of exploitation and those wars of aggression.

Even as the organs of the media and the government continue to give lip service to the memory of Dr. King each year on this day of his birth, they deliberately ignore his powerful and prophetic message on this crucial subject, a message which was at the very heart of the speech he gave on April 4th, 1967: one year to the day before he was brutally gunned down by criminal participants in an organized plot that included members of the very national security state which was perpetrating those wars of aggression and counter-revolution that Dr. King was opposing so powerfully in his oratory and with his life.

That speech was entitled “Beyond Vietnam,” and you can hear the entire recording in the **video below**.

Although Dr. King delivered that speech while the United States was embroiled in the hottest years of the Vietnam War, every word he says in his message rings as true today as on the day he spoke them, almost 54 years ago. In fact, every time he says the word “Vietnam” in that speech, the listener of today can imagine the names of other nations in which the United States now has military forces, either openly or clandestinely or towards the destruction of which the United States is sending weapons and fuel and other forms of military support: Afghanistan, and Syria, and Yemen, and Iraq, and the Ukraine, and countless others.

I would recommend that on this day of remembering the powerful life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it would be very fitting to listen to that entire message in “Beyond Vietnam,” along with any of the other speeches and sermons of Dr. King which one can today find very easily on the web.

Here are some paragraphs excerpted from that moving address, which will be even more moving if listened to in the recording above, and to which we are called to listen today, because we have yet to address and truly face those violations against the divine order which Dr. King prophetically called to our attention so many decades ago, and until we do, we cannot hope to correct them: [extended block quotation follows]

For those who ask the question, “Aren’t you a Civil Rights leader?” and thereby mean to exclude me from the movement for peace, I have this further answer. In 1957, when a group of us formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, we chose as our motto: “To save the soul of America.” We were convinced that we could not limit our vision to certain rights for black people, but instead affirmed the conviction that America would never be free or saved from itself until the descendants of its slaves were loosed completely from the shackles they still wear. In a way we were agreeing with Langston Hughes, the black bard of Harlem, who had written earlier:

O yes, I say it plain:

America never was America to me,

And yet I swear this oath —

America will be!

Now it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America’s soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read, “Vietnam.” It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. So it is that those of us who are yet determined that “America will be” are led down the path of protest and dissent, working for the health of our land.

[. . .]

Now there is something seductively tempting about stopping there and sending us all off on what in some circles has become a popular crusade against the war in Vietnam. I say we must enter that struggle, but I wish to go on now to say something even more disturbing.

The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality — if we ignore this sobering reality — we will find ourselves organizing “clergy and laymen concerned” committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy. So such thoughts take us beyond Vietnam, but not beyond our calling as sons of the living God.

In 1957 a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that

our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. During the past ten years we have seen emerge a pattern of suppression which has now justified the presence of US military advisors in Venezuela. This need to maintain social stability for our investments accounts for the counter-revolutionary action of American forces in Guatemala. It tells why American helicopters are being used against guerrillas in Cambodia and why American napalm and Green Beret forces have already been active against rebels in Peru.

It is with such activity that the words of the late John F. Kennedy come back to haunt us. Five years ago he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable." Increasingly, by choice or by accident, this is the role our nation has taken, the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investments. I am convinced that if we are to get on to the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin — we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West — investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries — and say: "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say: "This is not just." The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.

A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

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