

Daily Meditation 01-20-25

Speaking of Spiritual Warriors - MLK, Jr. Day, 2025

Good morning, and blessed Martin Luther King, Jr, Day. We are honoring him, and especially in light of the other occasion that is occurring today.

What I'd like to do is share some of his teachings, Martin Luther King Jr.s' that is, from his book, *Why We Can't Wait*, written in 1963. And these are passages I chose for my book *Christian Mystics*, in which he plays an important part, of course. But also his mentor, Howard Thurman, who went and visited Gandhi in the 1930s with his wife, and brought back Gandhi's thinking and practice, especially of non-violence, to Americans, especially the Black Church, and who was a very close friend or advisor, not only to Dr. King, but to others in the civil rights movement. Kind of the spiritual elder, if you will.

But here is Dr. King talking about his experience with organized religion:

When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders. All too many others have been more cautious than courageous, and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.

We see here the difference between religion and spirituality. And again:

In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I've heard many ministers say these are social issues, which, with the gospel, has no real concerns. And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion, which makes a strange unbiblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

Now this is the early 1960s. Of course, beginning in the 1980s it morphed into this other thing of fundamentalist Christianity, which takes the side, often, of autocrats. Again, Dr. King:

In deep disappointment, I wept over the laxity of the church. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? Yes, I see the church as a body of Christ, but oh, how we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect, and through fear of being non-conformist. There was a time when the church was very powerful, in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days, the church was not merely a thermometer, but recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion. It was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Small

in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated, to be astronomically intimidated.

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice, with an uncertain sound. So often, it is an arch-defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled. But the church is a silent, and often even vocal, sanction of things as they are.

So we realize in these words and thoughts, the critique of religion that the prophets of old were involved in in Israel, but that King certainly took on as his own vocation, as a cultural critic in his day and time. Again, he says:

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20th century.

Now, this call to commitment and to justice and speaking out about injustice, is of course as relevant today as it was in the early 60s, when King was having these experiences and writing about it. And he says: "Every day, I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust."

Now, I think that has blossomed since the early 60s, that disappointment and disgust with the church that young people feel about here in the 21st century. And of course, the revelations of priestly pedophilia and so forth. And of course, of the colonialism that religion has been involved in in so many centuries.

(This is my dog playing with her music toy. There, you see? Animals like to sing and make music.)

And the linking up with the 2025 Project that some churches are doing, in effect, have been at the front lines of that project. By churches, I mean Opus Dei, the fascist wing in the Catholic Church, but also many of the fascist versions of Christianity in the Protestant church. All this, I think, has rendered a whole generation, fed up, disappointed and disgusted.

And finally, this passage from King:

Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true Ecclesia and the hope of the world. But again, I'm thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity, and joined us as active partners in

the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia with us. Yes, they have gone to jail with us.

And of course, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel is an example of one rabbi who stood up on behalf of the oppressed in the 1960s, marching with King and others.

Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times.

And of course, we are still in troubled times. I would like to end with the dedication that I wrote for my most recent book, called *Trump and the MAGA Movement as Antichrist: A Handbook for the 2024 Election*:

I dedicate this book to the young leaders of the world, and all those who are not in denial about climate change, and recognize our Earth as sacred and worth saving. And to those who believe that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, is an aspiration worth struggling to preserve and improve upon, and who prefer Biophilia to necrophilia, joy to grievance, love to hate, and justice to greed that guarantees injustice.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.