

Ivy Day in the Empty Room

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I

ABOUT SIX YEARS AGO, at a time when the issues clustered around race still simmered on the back burners of national consciousness, I had a fierce argument with one of my oldest black friends. He had called me from his home in Lansing, Michigan, to report about a conflict between members of his group, people devoted to the memory of Malcolm X, and a group of black ministers who were partisans of the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. At issue between the two groups was the naming of a street in Lansing, one of the early homes of Malcolm Little, now known as Malcolm X. My friend's group wanted a certain street in Lansing named for Malcolm X. The black ministers wanted the same street named for Martin Luther King. I responded to the conflict by pointing out what I considered a bizarre contradiction. At a time when drugs, drive-by shootings, teenage pregnancies, unemployment, self-hatred and racism were decimating whole segments of the group, it seemed of little practical consequence whether a street in Lansing, Michigan, bore the name of either man. I said that it seemed of greater importance for the two opposing groups to unite their energies to advance the causes for which both men stood and for which they gave their lives. I went further, and enraged my friend, by saying that the worship of the images of these two martyrs, during such a bleak and deadly time, was in reality a substitute for meaningful actions, if not the institutionalization of a death wish. My friend and I broke off our communication after this exchange, and I fell to brooding over whether my response to him had grown out of my own insensitivity to the basic needs, of unsophisticated people, for positive images or role models. Still, the ease with which images were used to obscure substance continued to bother me.

Now, a few years later, the generation of men whose work in early life made the Civil Rights Movement is re-surfacing, though they are radically transformed in terms of public image. Vernon Jordan seems to be a Washington insider. Andrew Young seems to be an elder statesman. James Farmer was on television recently, speaking professorily as a repository of

historical memory. John Lewis is entrenched in the U.S. Congress. Ralph Abernathy, after publishing a book describing Martin King as a man of flesh and blood and bone, is dead. Malcolm X has been resurrected, more vital in his martyred youth than he probably was in life, by the cinematography of Spike Lee. To someone who lived through that period of transformation, the re-appearance of such familiar faces brings back memories of what might be called naive optimism about possibilities, both for oneself and for society. There seems now to be a nostalgia for these icons of a Golden Age, a lust for that Sacred Time. But what is missing from this pantheon of heroes is the human image, and the idiom, of the man who was the moral center of the movement they made.

Because Martin Luther King, Jr. has, through a process of iconization or reification, grown larger than life, he tends to exist on a plane far above the everyday concerns of ordinary people. He has been made to function as a caretaker of the Sacred, and any suggestion that he could have ever partaken of the Profane aspects of human life is viewed as something close to blasphemy. His memory has been democratized and fragmented. He lives on street signs, buildings, postage stamps, in biographies, arguments, vilifications. And on his birthday, which is now a legal holiday in every state. During the downside of the winter, a thriving cottage industry of multi-culturalists, diversity sages, merchants of nostalgia, mendicants and sentimentalists reminds us of the details of his life, and of his dreams. These are, for the most part, devotees of Martin Luther King, Jr., the icon, the public figure, mythologized now out of his birthright as a man of flesh and blood and bone.

It seems inevitable that this same process of iconization will also claim, and much more swiftly and efficiently, the man of flesh and blood and bone named Malcolm X. That aspect of American tradition derived from the ancient Greeks is relentless in its imposition of an ethic, in the case of large-souled men, a mythologizing which ensures survival after death, as one of society's highest rewards. But after the reward has been institutionalized, one basic issue still remains: would the human being at the center of the myth embrace the meaning that has been drawn from his life as the meaning he intended his life to have? Would Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, accept the version of his life that was filtered through the Greco-Roman perceptions of Paul of Tarsus? Would Martin Luther King,

the man of flesh and blood and bone, accept the uses that have been made of *his* life?

It is useful, while considering this, to speculate about what might have happened if Martin King had not died on April 4, 1968. He was then only a public figure who was already losing the interest of the media. But by 1968 he had begun to oppose the war in Viet Nam and was attempting to form a coalition of the poor in every racial group. Although he might have been less visible during the years after 1968, his support of the anti-war movement might have brought an end to the war much sooner, and his attempt to appeal to the common condition of all the poor might have energized Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Johnson, in turn, might have been able to negotiate a peaceful end to the war that would allow his domestic programs to continue and allow him to remain in office for another term. Robert Kennedy, that other partisan of the poor, might not have been assassinated. And the death of his brother, John F. Kennedy, earlier in the decade, might have been viewed as an aberration instead of as a signal that absolutely anyone in public life—King, Robert Kennedy, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, John Lennon, George Wallace, even Jimmy Carter (and his rabbit)—was vulnerable. These three men, King, Johnson, and Robert Kennedy, might have maintained for a while longer the moral high point of that cycle of history, and might have brought about the necessary transformations in American life. They might have filled, with their voices and through their actions, what has now become an empty public square. We might not have become such a fear-filled people. We might have trusted longer in something larger than ourselves. We might have become much more human.

If such large-spirited men had remained active in public life, perhaps the right-wing reaction, cultivated by Richard Nixon and his silent/moral majority, might not have come to power with such a sense of vengeance in 1968, or 1972, or 1980, or 1984, or 1988. And the sense of security in the public sphere, dependent in large part on continuance at the highest levels of power, might not have been undermined. Moreover, the evangelical idiom employed by King might have become better democratized, but with a meaning that transcended politics. The cause of Civil Rights, which began as a point of entry for excluded minorities into the larger society, might have helped to revitalize the American democratic ethos, as King had intended.

If King had remained active, the status of black Americans might not have remained frozen someplace between desegregation and integration, and the word “integration” itself, which is now in extreme disfavor, might have re-claimed its original meaning, moving from the physical or material plane to an ethical or spiritual one (“Integration is genuine intergroup, inter-personal doing . . . based on unenforceable obligations”); as King had anticipated. We might have tried much harder to become a better people, or at least better than we are now.

Of course, no one man could possibly change the course of a nation of people devoted to a variety of different ends, but King’s voice, had it lasted, might have counseled modifications in the means we chose toward those ends. Even if I can now imagine King as only a featured guest on talk shows, answering questions about the current state of “race relations,” I am confident that, even in such mundane contexts as “Larry King Live” or “Oprah,” he would still be insisting on an ethic that would be a guide to *human* behavior. He would still be speaking a moral language. He would still be speaking confidently about what is *right*.

And as a deeply personal matter, his voice would have helped me to resolve stories that have been stored in my memory for twenty-five years.

April 4, 1968: *My girlfriend, Devorah Watkins, runs into my apartment screaming. She has just heard, in the office of her employer, Robert Coles, the news that King has been shot in Memphis and that riots are beginning in all parts of the country. The Boston police are putting up a blockade around Roxbury, the black section of Boston, while in Cambridge there is the most oppressive silence. We call Devorah’s mother in New Jersey. She is crying, too, and keeps saying to me, “Take care of my little girl.” I decide to take Devorah to her own apartment on Linnaean Street near Central Square. We leave my apartment with my television set and begin our walk from Harvard Square up Massachusetts Avenue toward Linnaean Street. Ahead of us, in the night, we can see stalled traffic and crowds of silent people. One crowd is moving as a group, a body, seeming to stop and accost other people in cars and on the street. This moving crowd is white. I tell Devorah, “We must keep walking past that crowd. White people are capable of anything! If they try to stop us, I’ll throw this television and try to fight them while you run.” This becomes our plan. The crowd seems to get larger and larger and whiter and whiter as we approach. We cross Massachusetts Avenue several times to avoid it. Then we are spotted and the crowd crosses after us. Both of us are ready to run when we begin to see, in the streetlights, individual faces. They are all young people, probably*

students. They follow us and keep saying, as they must have said to individual black people the whole length of Massachusetts Avenue, "We're sorry! We're sorry!" But I am not listening. My mind and my emotions and my imagination have become polarized by now. I am thinking about the police blockade going up around Roxbury. I am thinking, "Suppose they never take it down? Where would I want to be: here in Cambridge, or over there with the majority of black people?" I think and think and think all the way to Deborah's place on Linnaean Street . . .

Twenty-five years later, I still have not resolved this issue.

July, 1968: My employer, the editor of the Bay State Banner in Roxbury, Massachusetts, has given his permission for me to do a story for the paper on Resurrection City, a sea of tents occupied by representatives of the nation's poor on the Mall, alongside the Reflecting Pool, in Washington, D.C. Because this black paper is poor and understaffed, I pay my own way to the Capitol, and take my own pictures. Martin King has been dead since early April, but a decision has been made by his staff that the long-planned in-gathering of the nation's poor from all groups should proceed as planned. There are many hundreds of tents and many thousands of people, most of them poor, camped out alongside the Reflecting Pool under the brooding, squirrel-hunting, narrow eyes of Father Abraham and the oblivious, blinking red eye of the Washington Monument. Jefferson's statue, off at a distance, is not visible. They have come, the nation's orphans and outcasts, to claim their birthright. They are whites from Appalachia, black people from the South and from the cities, poor farmers from the Midwest, Spanish from the cities and from the Southwest and the West, Indians from their reservations. King is dead, but a nervous spiritual solidarity, something close to hope, remains among them. But a white Park Policeman cautions me to not enter the city. They are savages, he says. They are all poor and angry and looking for something to steal. They may kill me, just to get my camera and my suitcase. And he, the Park Policeman, can provide me with protection only on this side of the picket fence. But my press credentials get me past him and onto the avenues of the vast tent city. Everything around me seems improvised. Ralph Abernathy is there. He is dressed in overalls and is giving a press conference. There are rumors that he sleeps in a luxury hotel and comes to Resurrection City, dressed for that occasion, only to hold press conferences. Jesse Jackson is also there. He is sprawled on the grass, looking elegant in overalls, with a crowd of people clustered around him. He seems to know that a great responsibility is floating in the air, looking for someplace to lodge itself. He speaks cautiously and

confidently to the people around him, who are mostly black. He says, "Now, if I were to riot and loot a liquor store, I wouldn't just grab anything. I'd grab the Chivas Regal . . ." A material age is dawning . . .

Within a few years, these human beings will be relegated to an abstract category called "the underclass." There will be few people left with the language to remind us of who they were, and are. Twenty-five years later, they will no longer knock on the doors of our imaginations except as worrisome symbols of homelessness on the evening news.

II

If Martin King, the man of flesh and blood and bone, were alive today, if he had not died in 1968, I think that he would have tired very soon of his ritual appearances on television talk shows. Like one of his mentors, Mahatma Gandhi, he might have sought out an alternative forum. But instead of an ashram, he might have attempted to re-claim his own meaning from the mythologies that have been imposed on his life. He might have withdrawn from enforced obligation to the persona that has grown up around his name, and he might have discovered that the one place where he could truly be centered again was his old jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama. He might have gone there, reflected back on the goals he had set for himself, and measured these against the image of himself, the iconization, that had grown up around his name.

I imagine him looking back over what he had written, and bringing to bear on it the wisdom of maturity and deeper understanding of some of the less admirable, or even tragic, aspects of both human nature and of his own country. I imagine him sifting through his old writings, discarding some ideas and refining others. He might just write another letter, perhaps because that ancient form of communication has also fallen into disfavor. Perhaps this letter would be an open one, addressed to everyone, black *and* white and others, instead of one addressed to only his Fellow Clergymen. Perhaps this letter would begin as his own attempt to reclaim his own basic humanity, his own flesh and blood and bone, from the abstraction and sterility that results from iconization. Perhaps he would go on to generalize, and be much more explicit about, some of the basic moral flaws he criticized in his Fellow Clergymen in his first letter from that jail on April 16, 1963.

He wrote then: "One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, 'Why don't you give the new administration time to act?' . . . For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has always meant 'Never.' It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. . . ." Beneath this language, there might have been a broader criticism, one that his maturity of years might have allowed him to express much more fully. It might be about what happens when a commitment to an abstraction, like "Wait" or "Time," becomes a substitute for meaningful action. This new language might say:

There is in human nature a nostalgia for perfection. The source of this hunger might pre-exist in the human soul, or it might result from a belief in Democracy as a substitute for a religious sense, or it might derive from the romanticism at the basis of Western tradition. Whatever its source, this hunger for abstract perfection can lead to perverse ends when people, even the most well-meaning of people, give the nerve-centers of their consent, the totality of their value-content, over to the quality of an abstract commitment rather than to the thing to which they profess to be committed. Those who are seduced into this abstract commitment, this idealization, are personally challenged by any reality, outside of this specific ideal, that threatens the purity of their commitment. The perfection of the commitment then, like Ahab's holy pursuit of the white whale, becomes an idol. And the quality of the commitment is viewed as of more importance than the reality of the human community out of which the commitment grows. So Ahab abandons the ship "The Rachel" in order not to be distracted from the purity of his pursuit of Moby Dick. So "liberals" give money to do-gooder organizations so as not to be bothered by the faces and the pleas of homeless people on the streets. So Fellow Clergymen make an icon of Time, and worship it, and avoid learning of what waiting does to Time's victims.

This lust for unbothered purity of commitment was the focus of King's letter to his Fellow Clergymen. They worshipped the God of Time. But the very same critique might also be aimed at many other groups, who have gained the attention of the public square, in the years since King's death: white and black nationalists, feminists, liberals, paleo-conservatives, neo-conservatives, seekers after middle-class status, environmentalists, even those who sing "We Shall Overcome" on January 18th but who do not speak to black people, or white people, on January 19th. King might even apply this critique to the cult that has grown up around his own flesh and

blood and bone. To salvage his own personal meaning from the meaning that has been imposed on his life by the processes of iconization, he might have warned, in his mature years, his own partisans of this tragic mistake: “I make my commitment an idol when the quality of commitment itself becomes more important than the thing to which I am committed.”

King might also address himself to the current impasse in the black community concerning the issue of Civil Rights. He might reflect on the reasons why, twenty-five years after his death, the humanly transcendent movement he inspired is still mired in debate over the means toward specific ends; why his beloved community is still stuck in a cycle of desegregation—re-segregation—increasing demands for desegregation. During the past twenty-five years of this cycle, advocates of desegregation have been assigned a new category—the Civil Rights Community—and are viewed, sometimes admirably, as creative users of the various laws to break down the racial walls which, somehow, always find ways of reforming themselves—in schools, in neighborhoods, in jobs, and in personal relationships—as soon as the written law looks the other way. The end toward which the strategy of desegregation was only a means, integration, has itself become a kind of category, subject to the control of the rule of law.

The entire affirmative action industry grows out of an effort to apply the technology of law to organic human relationships. It also seeks to achieve some balance in artificial human categories, white and black, which are assumed to be natural and unnatural, superior and inferior, privileged and deprived, if not depraved. Moreover, the focus on affirmative action, the legal protection given to oppressed minorities, has led group after group to retreat from association with what used to be called the universals of life and has encouraged the location of the true, the good and the beautiful exclusively within the precincts of one’s own category or group. To qualify for this special status, one only need prove, in court, that biology, or life, has made one a victim. Over the past twenty-five years the domain of law has all but replaced, or eroded, personal codes of conduct which once had the potential to create a vital human center, a body of shared assumptions about the commonality of human life in its spiritual precincts. In the absence of such a human center, in situations ripe with spiritual hunger, sects, groups, and ideologies provide substitutes for what used to be assumed as basically human.

Martin King, in his letter from his jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama, seemed painfully aware of the limitations of law as a guide to human doings. He cautioned his Fellow Clergymen: “An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.” From his new cell in Birmingham, King might have reflected more on this dilemma. He might have been brave enough to re-think the basic strategy of the entire Civil Rights Movement, which is at the basis of the racial and sexual and group-oriented balkanization of American life.

The Movement itself was premised in the language of American law. Its basic strategy, forcing the American legal system to concede that separate could never be equal, assumed a model of white American society as the norm to which black Americans should aspire. This norm was implicit in the legal attack made by the pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement.

Charles Hamilton Houston, born in the shadow of the Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a *Law Review* graduate of the Harvard Law School, the first black recipient of a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, studied Civil Law in Spain following his graduation. During the 1930s, when he took over the Howard Law School and its students, Houston began to evolve the theories that would lead eventually to a legal challenge of the *Plessy v. Ferguson*, separate but equal, precedent. The Civil Law in Spain that interested Houston was the remnant of old Roman Law. It was what the Romans of the Empire called *Jus Gentium* or *Jus Naturale*, the Law of Peoples or the Law of Nature. That is, the ancient Romans, seeing their Empire consolidated under Julius Caesar and Augustus, evolved a special body of laws, based on the perceived habits of the foreigners in their ports and in their cities, in order to provide legal remedies for their disputes. This body of law was considered natural to *them*, but had no relation to the body of law, the *Jus Civile*, reserved for Roman citizens. The Roman Jurisconsults, who administered the laws, applied one set of “universal” or “natural” laws to non-Romans, and another set of laws, the *Jus Civile*, to Romans. Jurisconsults would not stoop to applying Roman law, the *Jus Civile*, to non-Romans.

In one of history’s great ironies, Charles Houston’s life-long effort to erode the *Plessy* precedent, which resulted in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, succeeded also in resurrecting, within the framework of the U.S. Constitution, a special set of laws which are comparable to the old Roman

Jus Gentium. Black Americans, in the almost forty years since the *Brown* decision, still remain separate, and institutionalized, within the special legal category called “Civil Rights Law.” One result is that native-born, multi-generation American citizens, and their basic rights under the Constitution, still remain captive to every shift in the political climate, every modification in the nuanced language of each new political administration. A collective shudder runs through the corporate black community each time a new Justice Department (*Jurisconsult?*) assumes control of law enforcement. *The issue is always whether protection of Civil Rights will be extended once again to foreigners. The issue is never whether the alleged foreigners are in reality U.S. citizens, from many generations back, whose basic rights have been in continuous violation over a period of centuries.*

This legal stasis, or limbo, has encouraged a deep cynicism toward the law among black Americans. In the larger American community, it has contributed to an erosion of belief in the applicability of “universal” standards within the context of an American community of citizens equal under *the same set of laws*, a truly American *Jus Civile*.

One might go further and speculate as to whether this separate category has become the basis of a new civil religion, with every group which perceives itself as outside the scope of traditional law, because of biological fate or personal choice, defining itself into *Jus Gentium* and the scope of its protections. It also raises the question of whether each new group which claims the virtue of victimization can lay claim to a special category of legal protections that is much more valid than the claims that might be made under a universally applicable common body of laws. If this is indeed the direction in which we are heading, then Martin Luther King, Jr., the icon, has been elected as High Priest of the new civic religion named Civil Rights. Also, a brilliant Constitutional lawyer and former U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall, is being remembered as only “Mr. Civil Rights.” Monuments and museums are steadily being built to sanctify this special, peculiar status. And the processes of desegregating streets and buildings, and most especially minds and spirits, which were once only a means, have become perpetual ends in themselves.

Meanwhile, while we retreat into a debate over which group is more victimized and deserving of close attention, the larger and more important issue remains: just who, even under the purview of the old Roman *Jus Gentium*, remains a foreigner, and what is left of the Romans who maintain

the remnants of the old *Jus Civile*? The antagonistic cooperation, the creative tension, between the rule of law and a settled code of conduct, could be ripe with human possibilities. The Americans of the coming centuries will emerge, and mature, out of this tension. According to my own thinking, they will be the ones who act, and who encourage others to act, in areas beyond either a fixation on Civil Rights or on the preservation of the more negative and reductive aspects of the white *status quo*, both of which have produced nothing more than human stasis. They will be the ones who accept the greater challenges and goals of full and equal citizenship, of a higher ethical responsibility towards the human individual, in a space far above and beyond the fires of two radically opposed camps. But after the destruction of most of the country's large-souled men, and during this time of fear, such people, even if they do exist, have no good reason to announce their presence among us, even if they were welcomed.

III

Homo sum nihil a me alienum puto.

I am a man; no other man do I deem a stranger.

Some version of this phrase has always been at the basis of the professed public values of Westerners, of what was once called Christendom. The Latin ancestral voices of the older cultures have always found subtle expression within the American context. It may well be that our current fixation on the law and on legal processes tends to close out alternate means of achieving desired ends. We are witnessing now a dawning realization of the limitations of the law. The hypothetical "reasonable man" of American jurisprudence now confronts a situation that is much too complex to be open to reason alone. Other cultures admit ethical as well as reasonable voices into their jurisprudence. The Japanese, for instance, admit into their law the question, "In such a circumstance, what would a human being do?" I believe that this culture has now reached a point at which moral models offer much more vitality and possibility of renewal than legal models.

In his last public address, or essay, published in *Playboy* magazine in January, 1969, King attempted to outline what he called "A Testament of Hope." It was fitting that *Playboy* should have been the forum for King's last public words. By 1968, when he died while trying to help garbage men

who were on strike in Memphis, King had been all but shut out by the respectable media. The fact that *Playboy* published his last public words, while *The Atlantic Monthly* had published his first, might have confirmed for him the reality of a relation between the Profane and the Sacred.

Almost stripped of all his worldly hopes, King, in the pages of *Playboy*, sandwiched between the nudes and the risqué cartoons, offered his insights into what it would take to revitalize a decadent American democratic ethos. “When Rome began to disintegrate from within,” he said, “it turned to a strengthening of the military establishment, rather than to a correction of the corruption within the society. We are doing the same thing in this country and the result will probably be the same—unless, and here I admit to a bit of chauvinism, the black man in America can provide a new soul force for all Americans, a new expression of the American dream that need not be realized at the expense of other men around the world, but a dream of opportunity and life that can be shared with the rest of the world. It seems glaringly obvious to me that the development of a humanitarian means of dealing with some of the social problems of the world—and *the correlative revolution in American values that this will entail*—is a much better way of protecting ourselves against the threat of violence than the military means we have chosen. On these grounds, I must indict the Johnson administration . . .”

King died shortly after he wrote this testament.

There has emerged no large-souled black American leader since King because the black American community has learned, very, very well, the price that will be exacted for such principled stands. And yet King did call for, in his last Testament, the emergence of such a moral chauvinism on the part of black Americans. I sometimes think that the black American obsession with material gain, over the past twenty-five years, is only an ironic confidence game. I suspect that most thinking black Americans are really saying, through their actions, “Don’t you see? I am only trying to make it. I want to demonstrate my distance from any moral stance that will cause me to be killed. I am not, and never will be, a Martin Luther King, Jr.”

And yet we are. And so we name streets after *him*, the better to protect *ourselves*.

Perhaps a fitting resting place for King’s legacy, and for his language, should not be within the monuments built to celebrate, or to contain, the

spirit of the movement he tried his best to lead. Perhaps he and his language deserve to occupy an integrated room in the national pantheon, a room set aside to honor his basic ethic: "Integration is genuine intergroup, interpersonal doing . . . based on unenforceable obligations." If there ever comes an Ivy Day for those who evolved, and attempted to safeguard, the American Sacred Language, his roommate should be John Winthrop, who laid the spiritual foundations of the tradition that King tried to follow. Winthrop's language and King's language derived from the same sources. Both men renewed the quality of the moral discourse of their day. John Winthrop said, aboard ship, just before landing at the Massachusetts Bay in 1630 essentially what King repeated all during the 1960s:

Thus stands the cause betweene God and us. Wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke, wee have taken out a Commission, the Lord hath given us leave to draw our own Articles, wee have professed to enterprise these Accions upon these and these ends, wee have hereupon besought him of favor and blessing: Now if the Lord shall please to heare us, and bring us in peace to the place wee desire, then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission [and] will expect a strickt performance of the Articles contained in it, but if wee shall neglect the observation of these Articles which are the ends wee have propounded, and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnall intencions seeking greate things for our selves and our posterity, the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against us, be revenged of such a perjured people and make us knowe the price of the breache of such a Covenant.

Now the onely way to avoyde this shipwracke and to provide for our posterity is to followe the Counsell of Micah, to doe Justly, to love mercy, to walke humbly with our God. For this end, wee must be knitt together in this worke as one man, wee must entertain each other in brotherly Affeccion, wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, wee must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, wee must delight in

each other, make others Conditions our owne, rejoyce together, mourne together, labor and suffer together, allwayes haveing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body, soe shall wee keepe the unite of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us as his owne people and will command a blessing upon us in all our wayes, soe that wee shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truthe than formerly wee have been acquainted with. Wee shall finde that the God of Israel is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantations: the Lord make it like that of New England: for wee must consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us: soe that if wee shall deal falsely with our God in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall shame the faces of many of Gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither wee are going . . .

This is a vision of the Beloved Community that King was trying to create. This was one of the goals of integration. This was one of the sources of the moral language used by Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a language that is in very short supply in these bleak days. If King had lived, he would have made another heroic attempt to reclaim it and to re-apply it to our wounded spiritual circumstances.

This effort to try again would have been the true source of his greatness as a man, of flesh and blood and bone.