

# *The Vision and Challenge of* Martin Luther King, Jr.

It boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. *Trumpet of Conscience*

## 1. Racial Justice

Race prejudice is based on groundless fears, suspicions, and misunderstandings. *The Strength to Love*

It is impossible to create a formula for the future which does not take into account that our society has been doing something special *against* the Negro for hundreds of years. How then can he [or she] be absorbed into the mainstream of American life if we do not do something special *for* him now, in order to balance the equation and equip him to compete on an equal basis? *Why We Can't Wait*

## 2. Nonviolence

I conclude that this award which I receive on behalf of the civil rights movement is a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time — the need for [men and women] to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Negroes in the U.S., following the people in India, have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation.... We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. *Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, 1964*

A basic fact that characterizes nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate ones opponents, but to win their friendship and understanding.... It avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. Nonviolent resisters not only refuse to shoot their opponent but also refuse to hate them. *Stride Toward Freedom*

To our bitterest opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail, we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the mid-

night hour and beat us and leave us half-dead and we shall still love you. But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory. *Strength to Love*

## 3. Economic Justice

The inseparable twin of racial injustice is economic injustice. *Stride Toward Freedom*

All too many of those who live in affluent America ignore those who exist in poor America; in doing so the affluent Americans will eventually have to face themselves with the question that Eichmann chose to ignore: How responsible am I for the well-being of my fellows? To ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it. *Where Do We Go From Here?*

## 4. The Church in the World

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. *Strength to Love*

## 5. "The World House"

A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "this way of settling differences is not just".... A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

We in the West must bear in mind that the poor countries are poor primarily because we have exploited them through political and economic colonialism. Americans in particular must help their nation repent of her modern economic imperialism. *Trumpet of Conscience*

*Next steps:* A good overview of Dr. King's thought is *I Have a Dream*, James M. Washington, editor. A fine brief introduction to King's life and thought is *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Spirit-Led Prophet* by Richard Deats which does justice to his political activity and spiritual thought. John Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* is superb in its exploration of religious themes. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* and *Jesus and Nonviolence* are outstanding on Christian nonviolence. Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence* is superb on nonviolence theory. For other useful insights see books by Branch, Cone, Dyson.... Excellent online sources on King: [www.stanford.edu/group/king](http://www.stanford.edu/group/king) or [www.mlkonline.org](http://www.mlkonline.org).

Lutheran Peace Fellowship offers workshops, resources, a youth program, and leadership training: 1710 11th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122 206-720-0313 [lpf@ecunet.org](mailto:lpf@ecunet.org) [www.LutheranPeace.org](http://www.LutheranPeace.org)