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# Martin Luther King Jr. on Economy, Ecology, and Civilization: Toward a MLK Jr-Inspired Ecotheology

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9 January 2018

## **Martin Luther King Jr. on Economy, Ecology, and Civilization: Toward a MLK Jr-Inspired Ecotheology**

Theodore Walker Jr.

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## Preface

Connecting *economics* and *ecology* to *theology* [eco-theology] is no longer a new idea. Since the pioneering publication of John Cobb's *Is It Too Late? : A Theology of Ecology* (1972), and—with Herman E. Daly—*For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (1989), eco-theological literature has grown to more than a hundred titles. Nevertheless, connecting economics and ecology to the theological ethics of Martin Luther King Jr. is still relatively new.

Perhaps the first collaborative research linking King's theological ethics to economics and ecology started with *Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization*, a 4-7 June 2015 international conference on global ecology and climate change held at Pomona College in Claremont, California. This conference was a convergent meeting of the 10th International Whitehead Conference, the 9th International Forum on Ecological Civilization, the Inaugural Pando Populus Conference, Pilgrim Place Centennial Celebration, and Process & Faith Summer Institute. Inspired by John Cobb Jr., this conference was organized by the Center for Process Studies, in cooperation with the Institute for the Postmodern Development of China, the International Process Network, Pando Populus, and others. (See online: <[www.ctr4process.org/whitehead2015/](http://www.ctr4process.org/whitehead2015/)>, <[www.postmodernchina.org](http://www.postmodernchina.org)>, <[www.internationalprocessnetwork.com](http://www.internationalprocessnetwork.com)>, <[www.pandopopulus.com](http://www.pandopopulus.com)>, and <[www.processphilosophy.org](http://www.processphilosophy.org)>.) Attended by more than a thousand persons from various nations and disciplines, including more than a hundred individuals sponsored by the government of China, this was one of the largest trans-disciplinary conferences ever held on behalf of the planet.

From among the conference's 12 Sections (distinguished by key themes) and 82 Tracks (small working groups researching particular issues), Section 2—"An Alternative Vision: Whitehead's Philosophy" (Roland Faber, section leader/coordinator; Helmut Maassen, section plenary presenter) included five tracks. Theodore Walker Jr. served as leader/coordinator for Track 4—"Whitehead's Value Theory and Ethics: Implications for Ecological Civilization."

Track 4 Description: Modern philosophies and visions of the world continue encouraging ecologically unsustainable practices. This track concerns Whiteheadian advances toward an alternative value and moral theory, and how Whiteheadian visions *and other alternative visions* can encourage technological and moral guidance toward ecological civilization. (Italics added)

Among *other alternative visions* encouraging ecological civilization, there are visions inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. Accordingly, several Track 4 presentations included attention to King.

Track 4 presentations were: "Conceiving of Worthy Alternatives, Or Why Bill McKibben is not the MLK Jr. of Ecology" and "Decision Making in the Ethics of Creativity" (5 June 2015) by Brian Henning, "Whitehead's Theistic Ontology and Axiology" (5 June 2015) by Rem B. Edwards, "The Great World House: MLK Jr. and Global Ecological Civilization" (6 June 2015) by Hak Joon Lee, "Economic Prerequisites of Ecological Civilization: Insights from Economic Analysis of King's Beloved Community" (6 June 2015) by Michael Greene, "King's World House: Beyond Civil Rights to Human Rights and Ecological Civilization" (6 June 2015) by Theodore Walker Jr., "More Connections: MLK Jr., Liberty, Nature, and Ecological Civilization" (6 June 2015) by Leslie A. Muray, "Open Theism and Ecological Civilization" (7 June 2015) by Vaughn W. Baker, and "Metaphysics of Freedom, Deep Empiricism, and Ecological Civilization" (7 June 2015) by Derek Malone-France; plus critical and constructive responses by Cynthia E. Lynch, Thomas Lynch, Rick Marshall, Thomas Jay Oord, Olav Bryant Smith, Michael Wolfsen, and others (including some from other working groups, notably Carl

Anthony, Joseph Bracken, Andrew Sung Park, and others). Other conference participants and associates include: Reginald Broadnax, Philip Clayton, John Cobb, Philip Devenish, Ron Engel, David Ray Griffin, Myron Jackson, Lillie Jenkins, Rick Marshall, Thomas Jay Oord, Bill McKibben, Santiago Sia, Alexander Vishio, and Michael Wolfson.

This present work—*Martin Luther King Jr. on Economy, Ecology, and Civilization: Toward a MLK Jr.-Inspired Ecotheology*—is a January 2018 revision of “Our Common Home and the World House: Pope Francis and MLK Jr. on Ecological Civilization” [also called “Francis and King on Earth”] (12 August 2015) in *Pando Populus*, online at <[www.pandopopulus.com/francis-and-king-on-earth/](http://www.pandopopulus.com/francis-and-king-on-earth/)>, reproduced with permission from *Pando Populus*. Both this January 2018 revision and the August 2015 edition include material from my unpublished 6 June 2015 presentation—“King’s World House: Beyond Civil Rights to Human Rights and Ecological Civilization” presented at *Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization ...* (4-7 June 2015).

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## I. Abolishing Poverty

Abolishing poverty is a major theme in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper & Row, June 1967 [subsequently Boston: Beacon Press, 1968 paper, and 2010 with foreword by Coretta Scott King and introduction by Vincent Harding]) by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In chapter six—“The World House,” King argues that we can avoid increasing global chaos only by achieving global community via nonviolent methods, including especially the global “abolition of poverty” (2010 [June 1967: 166, 167-191]: 175, 177-202). In addition to solving the problems of violence, racism, and “neocolonialism” (2010 [June 1967]: 185), King wrote: “Another grave problem that must be solved if we are to live creatively in our world house is that of poverty on an international scale” (2010 [June 1967]: 187). According to King:

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. ... *The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.*  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 175, italics added)

Like a monstrous octopus, it [poverty] stretches its choking, prehensile tentacles into lands and villages all over the world. Two-thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry at night.  
...  
The time has come for an all-out world war against poverty.  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 187-188).

A genuine program on the part of the wealthy nations to make prosperity a reality for the poor nations will in the final analysis enlarge the prosperity of all.  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 190).

In King’s judgment, the possibility of living creatively in our “world house” depends upon our abolishing poverty and enlarging the prosperity of all.

### Economic Progress

According to conference presenter Michael Greene, author of *A Way Out of No Way: The Economic Prerequisites of the Beloved Community* (2014), King’s way of thinking about abolishing poverty requires that we find alternatives to sheer economic growth (infinitely expanding the economic pie) as the measure of economic progress (Greene 6 June 2015; also Daly 1996, T. Jackson 2009, Rieger 2009). For King, simple economic expansion is not an adequate measure of economic progress toward shared prosperity.

Concerning economic expansion, King wrote, “no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands, it does not eliminate all poverty,” and therefore we must “create full employment” and new “forms of work that enhance the social good,” plus we must provide an adequate-to-human-flourishing “guaranteed income” (2010 [June 1967]: 172-73).

[Concerning society-enhancing new forms of work, King cites *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth - The Remedy* (1879) by Henry George.]

### **Resisting King’s Economic Agenda by Restricting Him to Civil Rights**

In 1967, there were King-critics who insisted that—as a civil rights leader—King should not address non-civil-rights issues such as economic policies, global poverty, and war.

King acknowledged that his proposed program for abolishing poverty reached beyond civil rights. He wrote that his proposal “*is not a ‘civil rights’ program*, in the sense that that term is currently used” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 174, italics added). According to then-current usage (and according to present usage), “civil rights” are political rights—especially voting rights—attached to US citizenship and protected by the US Constitution and constitutional amendments, including the [political] Bill of Rights.

### **Amending the US Constitution with an economic Bill of Rights**

Unlike political rights, “economic rights” are not constitutionally protected. King recognized that economic rights extend “beyond the boundary of the US Constitution” (Lee 2011: 56). Hence, for the sake of abolishing economic poverty [“not a ‘civil rights’ program ...” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 174)], King called for a “social and economic Bill of Rights, to supplement the Constitution’s political Bill of Rights” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 211; also, Greene 2014: 35-48).

[For a historical, critical, and constructive account of “economic rights,” with particular attention to President Carter’s support for economic rights, and including ethical and theological contributions to debate about economic rights, see *God Bless the Child That’s Got Its Own: The Economic Rights Debate* (c1997) by Darryl M. Trimiew.]

Similarly, in 1963, King had proposed “a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged” in chapter 8—“The Days to Come”—of *Why We Can’t Wait* (2010 [1964/c1963]). Here King wrote:

I am proposing, therefore, that, just as we granted a GI Bill of Rights to war veterans, America launch a broad-based and gigantic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged ... A Bill of Rights for the Disadvantage would immediately transform the conditions of Negro life. ...  
(King 2010 [1964/c1963]: 163)

It is a simple matter of justice that America, in dealing creatively with the task of raising the Negro from backwardness, should also

be rescuing a large stratum of the forgotten white poor. A Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged could mark the rise of a new era, in which the full resources of the society would be used to attack the tenacious poverty which so paradoxically exists in the midst of plenty.  
(King 2010 [1964/c1963]: 165)

Furthermore, King had prescribed that the civil-rights legislation passed in 1963 should be followed *immediately* [“can’t wait”] by an economic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantage “written into the books in the session of Congress now sitting” (King 2010 [1964/c1963]: 166).

## **Human Rights**

In the absence of an economic Bill of Rights, proposing to abolish economic poverty throughout the nation reaches well beyond constitutionally protected civil rights. Moreover, proposing to abolish poverty throughout the world house reaches much further. It reaches into the area of human rights. King wrote:

Now we are approaching areas where the voice of the Constitution is not clear. We have left the realm of constitutional rights and we are entering the area of human rights.  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 138)

Accordingly, Michael Greene insists, “It is imperative, then, that those who seek to bring King’s beloved community into fruition use the language of human rights” (2014: 93 [also Thomas F. Jackson 2007]).

## **II. Abolishing War**

### **Resisting King’s Philosophy of Nonviolence by Restricting Him to Civil Rights**

King saw another serious difficulty with being restricted to civil rights. When bracketed by civil rights, the philosophy of nonviolence has nothing to say about violence among nations. When the philosophy of nonviolence is placed under the category of ‘civil rights,’ that philosophy is thereby reduced to prescribing that US citizens should be nonviolent with respect to other US citizens. And according to some of King’s critics, because King was a ‘civil rights leader,’ he should have said nothing about the non-civil-rights issue of war and peace in Vietnam.

In “Beyond Vietnam” (a sermon delivered at Riverside Church in New York City), King complained about “those who ask the question, ‘Aren’t you a civil rights leader?’ and [who] thereby mean to exclude me from the movement for peace” (4 April 1967:143-44). Rather than being restricted to domestic civil rights, and thereby excluded from international affairs, King

argued that “the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence” is “by no means” excluded from addressing “relations between nations” (2010 [June 1967]: 194).

As an advocate of nonviolence, King did not restrict himself to domestic civil rights. Instead, King prescribed putting “an end to war and violence between nations” (2010 [June 1967]: 195). And rather than speaking as a civil rights leader, King explained that he was speaking as a preacher committed “to the ministry of Jesus Christ” and obedient “to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them” (4 April 1967: 144-45).

### **War as “an Enemy of the Poor” and of “Beloved Community”**

In “Beyond Vietnam” (4 April 1967) and in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos of Community?* (June 1967) King connected continuing militarism and war with continuing poverty. He saw militarism and war as enemies of the effort to abolish poverty. He wrote:

... America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.  
(King 4 April 1967: 142)

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 199)

War is an enemy to the poor. Moreover, violence yields more violence and chaos, not community. By contrast, the “aftermath” of nonviolent resistance to evil is “beloved community” (King 2010 [1958]: 90-91, 215; also 2010 [1964/c1963]: 44)

[Nonviolent resistance to evil is affirmed in *Workin' on the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History* (2009 [2000]) by Walter Mosley (author of the best-selling Easy Rawlins mystery series). He says: “A real understanding of the strategies of the civil rights movement would change the landscape of resistance in America today. And make no mistake: We all need to resist if we want to survive intact.” (Mosley 2009 [2000]: 53). Also, see *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, c2011) by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Sephan.]

### **III. From Civil Rights to Global Revolution**

Significant portions of King’s June 1967 book—*Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*—were summarized by King in a speech with the same title as the book, “Where Do We Go from Here?” (16 August 1967), delivered at the eleventh annual convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC]. The book adds historical context. In addition



to being influenced by collaborative exchanges with his SCLC colleagues, King's 1967 deliberations emerged, in large part, from his June 1966 collaborations, conversations, and debates with Stokely Carmichael (and others from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]) and Floyd McKissick (and others from the Congress of Racial Equality [CORE]). These conversations and debates occurred while King, Carmichael, and McKissick were continuing James Meredith's march through Mississippi. Indeed, while Meredith was in the hospital recovering from a sniper's gunshot, the march he initiated continued under the tripartite leadership of late-comers: McKissick, Carmichael, and King. "Floyd, Stokely and I," wrote King, "agreed that the march would be jointly sponsored by CORE, SNCC ... and SCLC ..." (2010 [June 1967]: 25). During and after the Meredith march, each of the three leaders wrote public policy deliberations that continued their June 1966 conversations and debates.

Their mutually influential conversations and debates become obvious when we study each of their almost-immediately-after-the-June-1966-Meredith-march books:

[1] *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos of Community?* (June 1967) by Martin Luther King Jr.;

[2] *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (June 1967) by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton; and

[3] *Three-Fifths of a Man* (1969) by Floyd McKissick.

In these books, the Baptist preacher (King), the political black power advocate (Carmichael), the political scientist (Hamilton), and the constitutional lawyer (McKissick) are so much in conversation and debate with each other that fully appreciating any one of these three books requires fully appreciating the other two.

[Also, along with study of Malcolm X (el-Hajj Malik el-Shabbazz), appreciating this literature is essential to understanding the origin of the philosophy of black power (notice King's distinction between denotative and connotative meanings of black power, his favorable contribution to the denotative meanings, and his critical rejection of the connotative meanings, in his second chapter—"Black Power"—in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (June 1967); and appreciating this literature is essential to understanding the origin of the "Black Theology" that appreciated "Black Power" in *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) by James H. Cone. Also, see *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) by James H. Cone.]

Studying these books reveals that the 'civil rights' label is appropriate to the Carmichael-Hamilton emphasis, and appropriate to McKissick's emphasis; but *not* appropriate to King's emphasis. The 'civil rights' label is fully appropriate to the Carmichael-Hamilton emphasis upon domestic political voting rights. Like Malcolm's emphasis upon favoring ballots over bullets in "The Ballot or the Bullet" (Malcolm X, 3 April 1964), the Carmichael-Hamilton-"Black Power" emphasis—upon black voters organizing a separate black political party—is about exercising domestic political civil rights. And 'civil rights' is an appropriate label for much of McKissick's emphasis upon rights protected by the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution (violations of which could lead to a black declaration of independence, and a separate black nation [a black nationalism]). Unlike with McKissick's emphasis upon US Constitutional law, and unlike with emphasis upon ballot-power as black-power politics in "Black Power: The

Politics of Liberation in America” (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967); the domestic ‘civil rights’ label is *not* appropriate to King’s emphasis upon economic power, not appropriate to King’s emphasis upon nonviolence among nations, and not appropriate to his emphasis upon advancing human rights throughout “the world house.” Contrary to much popular remembering of Carmichael and King, in 1966-1967, Carmichael was the civil rights leader, and King was the radical revolutionary.

[See *The Radical King* (2014) edited by Cornel West.]

### **Beyond Civil Rights and National Interest to Ecumenical Loyalty and Revolution of Values**

Going beyond civil rights, King called for a global “revolution of values” (2010 [June 1967]: 196-202). In “Beyond Vietnam,” where King speaks “as a citizen of the world” joining with “the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam” in prescribing an immediate end to “war against the people of Vietnam” (4 April 1967: 153-154), he says a “genuine revolution of values” entails “ecumenical loyalties” that transcend the national interest. King said:

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our *loyalties must become ecumenical* rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.

This call for a *worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class, and nation* is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all mankind. (King 4 April 1967: 160-61) [italics added]

Unconditional love and ecumenical loyalty to all (including our enemies) is genuinely revolutionary. It promises to change our world.

King prescribed “a true revolution of values to accompany the scientific and freedom revolutions engulfing the earth” (2010 [June 1967]: 196). Prophetically, as if writing about contemporary unease with the poverty-wealth contrast, King wrote:

A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look at thousands of working people displaced from their jobs with reduced incomes as a result of automation while the profits of the employers remain intact, and say: “This is not just.” It will look across the oceans and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the [198/199] countries, and say: “This is not just.” It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin 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 hands on the world order and say of war: “This way of settling differences is not just.” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 198-199)

And King envisioned the possibility of the USA leading the way in this revolution of values. He wrote:

America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. ... There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen ... There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum—and *livable*—income for every American family. ... (King 2010 [June 1967]: 199)

According to King, it is only “lack of social vision” that prohibits us from “guaranteeing an annual minimum—and *livable*—income to every American family” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 199). And King extended his social vision beyond the United States. He was concerned for the well-being of everyone on planet Earth.

## **Global Ethics**

According to conference presenter Hak Joon Lee, King was advancing “global ethics” (2011 [also conference associate Ron Engel 2004]). Our domestic ‘civil rights’ box is much too small to contain King’s global ethics.

Nevertheless, by our constantly focusing almost exclusively upon ‘civil rights’ and the 1963 ‘I Have a Dream Speech,’ we have, laments conference presenter Michael Greene, “ended up with an utterly domesticated King—a King stripped of his radicalness and rendered harmless” (Greene 2014: 21). Remembering King as only a ‘civil rights leader’ wrongly domesticates and secularizes King’s global ethics. And such wrongful remembering renders us unable to appreciate King’s prophetic vision of the “world house” (1967).

## **IV. World House (MLK Jr), Common Home (Pope Francis), and Ecological Civilization (Pan Yue, Jia Zhibang)**

The visionary idea of a world house is a prophetic precursor to the contemporary idea of a global ecology. The words *ecology* and *economy* derives from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “house” or “household.” Hence, world house or global household/*oikos* implies global ecology, global economics, and global ethics.

In *The Great World House: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Global Ethics* (2011) Hak Joon Lee argues that, in an increasingly global world, there is an increasing need for a constructive global ethics; and he offers a constructive “Kingian global ethics” (16, 22-24).

When we repent of our wrongfully restrictive habit of falsely remembering King (re-membering King) as only a domestic ‘civil rights’ leader; we can better recognize that his conception of our “world house” (King 1967) is fully resonant with contemporary ecological thinking about our “common home” (Pope Francis 2015).

[See “Our Common Home and the World House: Pope Francis and MLK Jr. on Ecological Civilization” (12 August 2015) by Theodore Walker Jr. in *Pando Populus*, online at <[www.pandopopulus.com/francis-and-king-on-earth/](http://www.pandopopulus.com/francis-and-king-on-earth/)>.]

We may safely speculate that if King had lived even a little beyond 4 April 1968 (perhaps until the first Earth Day in 1970) he would have made fully explicit the clearly implicit connections between world house, global economy, and global ecology. And no doubt, King would have encouraged advances toward ecological civilization (conference presenter Leslie Muray 6 June 2015).

King appreciated natural environments. Prior to the 1963 Birmingham campaign, he retreated to a SCLC training center near Savannah, Georgia for three days (King 1964). And he sometimes retreated to a little house overlooking a wild marsh at Penn Center, South Carolina (conference associate Ron Engel 27 April 2015).

No doubt, King’s appreciation for nature would have combined with increasing public awareness of ecological problems, and inspired him to do what we are now doing: connecting King’s vision of the world house (and his call for civilizing ourselves by abolishing poverty and violence) to contemporary visions of ecological civilization.

### **King on Civilization**

In *Stride toward Freedom* (2010 [1958]) King describes nonviolent resistance as injecting “new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization” (51-52); and he follows Arnold Toynbee in saying “it may be the Negro who will give the new spiritual dynamic to Western civilization that it so desperately needs to survive” (220).

In *Why We Can’t Wait* (2010 [1964/c1963]) King says, “Civilization, particularly in the United States, has long possessed the material wealth and resources to feed, clothe and shelter all of its citizens” (152), and that (instead of waiting) we should do so immediately.

In his “Acceptance Address for the Nobel Peace Prize” (10 December 1964) [printed in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (2001) edited by Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard] King says:

*Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts. ... Sooner or later, all the peoples of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace ...*  
(King 2001 [10 December 1964]: 106) [italics added]

In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (2010 [June 1967]) King identifies many of the immoral and uncivilized features of our contemporary world, including violence, materialism, war, racism, and poverty (68-74); and he prescribes that we “civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty” (175 [italics added]).

Domestically and globally, abolishing poverty immediately [can’t wait] is essential to the process of civilizing ourselves. King says Alfred North Whitehead says “civilization is shifting its basic outlook” and approaching “a major turning point in history where the pre-suppositions on which society is structured are being analyzed, sharply challenged, and profoundly changed” (179). King says we are seeing “a freedom explosion” (179), that morality and spirituality lag behind the scientific progress of Western civilization (182-83), that racism “dogs the tracks of our civilization” and “is no mere American phenomenon” (183), that racism “can well be that corrosive evil that will bring down the curtain on Western civilization” (186), that racism, materialism, and militarism are “the giant triplets” (196-97), and that prevailing “moral and spiritual bankruptcy” makes civilization impossible (197). Concerning military violence; we must choose between “violent coannihilation” and “nonviolent coexistence” (202), between “chaos” and “community.”

And *beloved community* is occasioned only by nonviolent resistance to evil (2010 [1958]: 90-91, 215; also 2010 [1964/c1963]: 44). King judged that materialism, racism, violence, militarism, war, and poverty are incompatible with a civilized world house.

### **King on Worldwide Neighborhood**

Decades before the worldwide web, King was prophetically announcing the emergence of our “worldwide neighborhood” (2010 [June 1967]: 177). He wrote:

However deeply American Negroes are caught in the struggle to be at last at home in our homeland of the United States, we cannot ignore the larger *world house* in which we are also dwellers. Equality with whites will not solve the problems of either whites or Negroes if it means equality in a world society stricken by poverty and ... doomed to extinction by war.

*All inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors.* This *worldwide neighborhood* has been brought into being largely as a result of the modern scientific and technological revolutions. The world today is vastly different ...

(King 2010 [June 1967]: 177) [italics added]

King prescribed recognizing that we are all neighbors in an increasingly interrelated worldwide neighborhood.

[Process-relational philosophers appreciate King’s affirmation that all humans “are interdependent” and “all life is interrelated” (2010 [June 1967]: 191). Process-relational philosophers also appreciate King’s appeal to Whitehead in thinking about civilization (2010 [June 1967]: 179). Also concerning Whitehead’s influence upon King, conference

presenter Brian G. Henning says: “Though there are doubtless many sources of inspiration for King, it is interesting to note that he did read Whitehead’s works closely, and they may have been one of the influences on King’s writings. See ‘Whitehead, Alfred North, The King Center (website), [www.thekingcenter.org/archive/theme/4465](http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/theme/4465). King even quotes Whitehead directly” (Henning 2015: 152, note 14) in his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize lecture given the day after his acceptance speech. And the King Center website shows 20 references to Whitehead, including an image of a Harvard University transcript showing that in 1953 King received a grade of A- in Philosophy 134—The Philosophy of Whitehead.]

### **King’s Vision of a Civilized World House and Chinese Visions of Ecological Civilization: Similarities and Differences**

In some important respects, King’s vision of a genuinely civilized world house is consistent with some Chinese visions of an ecological civilization. King’s (and Greene’s) view—that sheer growth is *not* indicative of progress—is consistent with Pan Yue’s “Growth vs. Ecological Calamity in China” (June 2006). King’s emphasis upon enlarging “the prosperity of all” (2010 [June 1967]: 190) is consistent with emphasis upon achieving the “sustainable prosperity of all” in Jia Zhibang’s “Creating Harmony between People and Nature” (28 May 2009), and consistent with emphasis upon “sustainable all-round prosperity” in Pan Yue’s “Looking Forward to an Ecological Civilization” (November 2008).

One very significant difference is King’s emphasis upon abolishing militarism and war. King’s vision requires sustained attention to military affairs. The U.S. military, the Chinese military, and other militaries are important parts of local and global environments. Like King’s vision of a civilized world house, adequate visions (adequate to reality) of an ecological civilization must include attention to various police and military influences (Devenish 5 December 2014).

The most profound difference is that King recognized and strongly emphasizes theological and religious reasons (faith-based reasons) for believing that we can and should advance toward a civilized world house/ecological civilization.

### **V. King’s Audacious Faith in the Future of Civilization**

During his 1964 acceptance address in Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize, King spoke of “an audacious faith” in the future of humanity. He said:

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and *an audacious faith in the future of mankind*. I refuse to accept despair as the final response the ambiguities of history.

I refuse to accept the idea that the ‘is-ness’ of man’s present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal ‘ought-ness’ that forever confronts him.

I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him.

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of nuclear annihilation.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.

...

*I still believe we shall overcome.*

This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that *we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born.*

...

(King 10 December 1964: 106-108) [italics added]

Prophetically, in 1964 King perceived that “we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born” (10 December 1964: 108), and he encouraged “audacious faith” that we can give birth to a genuine global civilization.

Similarly, in a 1967 speech—“Where Do We Go from Here?”—King spoke of “an audacious faith in the future.” King said:

But difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with *an audacious faith in the future.* (Well [listeners responding]) And as we continue our charted course, we may gain consolation from the words so nobly left by that great black bard, who was also a great freedom fighter of yesterday, James Weldon Johnson (Yes): Stony the road we trod (Yes), Bitter the chastening rod ... Yet with a steady beat, Have not our weary feet Come to the place For which our fathers sighed? ... Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. [Theodore Parker] Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: ‘Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again.’ ...

(King 16 August 1967: 197)

Audacious faith is not a blind faith. Audacious faith is reality-based.

## Reality-based Optimism

The Christian ethical imperative—that we should love our neighbors and our enemies as we should love ourselves (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:34-40) is founded upon ultimate reality, upon the reality of God. God is “the one all-inclusive whole of reality” (Ogden 1984: 21, also Hartshorne 1973 [1967]: 7, 12, 16). Conformity to reality (not missing the mark [reality] = not sinning) requires recognizing that, in reality, neighbors, enemies, and selves are all parts of the all-inclusive divine whole of reality. We should love our neighbors and our enemies as we should love ourselves because they really are as we are: parts among parts of the divine whole of reality.

[See “Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness” (Spring 1984) by Schubert M. Ogden; reprinted in *Thy Nature and Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* (2001) edited by Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord; and see *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (1973 [1967]) by Charles Hartshorne. Also, see *Extremist for Love: Martin Luther King Jr., Man of Ideas and Nonviolent Social Action* (2014) by Rufus Burrow Jr. And notice that King’s reality-based optimism is expressed in the title of *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Communal-Political Spirituality* [foreword by Peter J. Paris] (2006) by Hak Joon Lee.]

## Optimism about Abolishing Poverty

There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it.  
(King 2010 [June 1967]: 187)

King’s optimism—about the possibility of abolishing poverty—now has support from economic analyses. This is an important new development. For half a century, King’s 1963-1967 prescriptions for abolishing economic poverty have been largely ignored. Fortunately, this is starting to change.

Consider the King-inspired work of social innovator Bishop Rodney Sampson, and the King-inspired work of economist Michael Greene.

[Similarly optimistic about possibilities, Walter Mosley says: “All that we need in the way of food and shelter is available and possible for everyone. Not only is there the possibility for enough for all, but there is also the hope for exponential advancement” (2009 [2000]: 23). Mosley defines “the great enemy” (2009 [2000]: 77) of liberty and widely shared wellbeing in terms of capitalist refusal to share—from huge profits—more than the minimum needed to keep workers “Workin’ on the Chain Gang” (book title). The worker is paid “*just enough for her to survive and slave*” as a “neoslave” (Mosley 2009 [2000]: 50). “Profit is made on a grand scale in America, but most of us don’t share in it” (Mosley 2009 [2000]: 82). “The lion’s share of the profit is fed back into the process of capital” (Mosley 2009 [2000]: 88). Also, hope for advancement is discovered in *The Wealth of the Poor: How Valuing Every Neighbor Restores Hope in Our Cities* (2013) by Larry M. James.]

*In Kingonomics: Twelve Innovative Currencies for Transforming Your Business and Life Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* (2013) Rodney Sampson argues for a new business model that values collaboration, community, and collective wellbeing over competition (xix). Sampson says:



In King's day, he looked to religion and politics as vehicles for creating unity. Today, religion and politics have become more of a catalyst for division and individualism than collaboration and community. Yet, through *entrepreneurship*, I believe there is hope. Today, we must use the business arena to foster the collaboration required for the creation of a sustainable society. ... I firmly believe that as more people collaborate to build mutual wealth, our differences will cease to divide us. Instead those very differences will provide creative marketing opportunities and exciting new solutions to problems.

Toward that end, it is my hope that the intangible currencies outlined in *Kingonomics* [service, connectivity, reciprocity, positivity, personal responsibility, self-image, diversity, character and dignity, dreaming, openness and transparency, creativity and innovation, courage] will eventually lead to *tangible* currencies that produce new companies, joint ventures, partnerships, jobs, revenue, and wealth.

Let's join hands and begin this adventure together.  
(Sampson 2013: xxi)

Here is a King-inspired call for new collaborative-community-oriented business practices trading intangible currencies and leading to widely shared tangible currencies.

In *A Way Out of No Way: The Economic Prerequisites of the Beloved Community* (2014) Michael Greene identifies the economic prerequisites of King's beloved community by bringing King's economic prescriptions into conversation with economic analyses by William A. Darity, Jr., by Philip Harvey, and by other economists. Greene concludes that USA financial resources are sufficient to begin implementing King's economic programs; and he identifies his King-inspired economic account of what is required to achieve community (contrasted with the greater cost of increasing chaos) as a challenge to pessimism (2014: 95).

Also, in recent years, we have seen optimistic economic prescriptions for a "universal basic income." For instance, see *Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World* (2017) by Rutger Bregman.

### **Realism without Chronic Pessimism: King on Reinhold Niebuhr**

Our national habit of identifying pessimism with realism was greatly strengthened by our misappropriation of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (1932). Here Niebuhr drew a sharp distinction between ethics and politics. According to Niebuhr, the ethical ideal of love (loving neighbors and enemies as we love our selves, including sacrificial love) is possible for individuals and small groups (moral man), but not possible for large social-political groups such as states and nations (immoral society). Thus, it is unrealistic to apply Christian ethics to the immoral social realm of politics. Instead of advocating unrealistic

“religious idealism,” we should accept a “frank dualism” (Niebuhr 1932: 270-71). This way of sharply distinguishing Christian ethics from politics is sometimes called “Christian realism” (Niebuhr 1953 [also McCann 1981, Lovin 1995, and Lovin 2008]).

King wrestled with Niebuhr’s critique of pacifism. In chapter VI—“Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”—of *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (1958; 2010 reprint) King concluded that Niebuhr was wrong in judging nonviolence/pacifism to be unrealistic. King wrote:

True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power, as Niebuhr contends. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflicter of it ...  
(King 2010 [1958]: 86).

After reading Niebuhr, I tried to arrive at a realistic pacifism.  
(King 2010 [1958]: 87).

Some of us believe Niebuhr’s frank dualism was based upon an overly pessimistic estimate of human social possibilities [overly pessimistic and perhaps cynical, despite Niebuhr’s *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (1929)]. Contrary to any pessimistic or cynical realism, King advanced an optimistic Christian realism and a “realistic pacifism” (2010 [1958]: 87).

King’s optimism was not a naïvely idealistic optimism that whistles past graveyards and denies the reality of crucifixion and death. Instead, as demonstrated in his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” sermon (delivered by King at Bishop Charles Mason Temple, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 April 1968, the night before he was assassinated), King appreciated the full cost of discipleship while nonetheless affirming that the long arc of the moral universe “bends toward justice” (16 August 1967: 198-99 [also, Hak Joon Lee 2011: 59]). With audacious faith rooted in ultimate reality, King refused to identify realism with chronic pessimism about possible ethical achievements in political, economic, national, international, and global relations.

### **King on Niebuhr and Mohandas K. Gandhi**

King’s optimism about applying Christian ethics to international politics and global relations was strongly influenced by studying the life and works of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Prior to studying Gandhi, King had almost accepted Niebuhr’s dualistic distinction between Christian ethics (for individuals) and realistic politics (for large social groups and nations). In chapter six—“Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”—of *Stride toward Freedom* (1958), King wrote:

... *Prior to reading Gandhi*, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships. The ‘turn the other cheek’ philosophy and the ‘love your enemies’ philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in

conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. *But after reading Gandhi*, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.

*Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.* Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking ...

(King 2010 [1958]: 84-85) [italics added]

And in his 10 December 1964 “Acceptance Address for the Nobel Peace Prize” King said, “Negroes in the United States, *following the people of India*, have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation” (106 [italics added]).

### **Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama on Gandhi and King**

In *A Call to Conscience* (2001), the text of King’s 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance address is introduced by the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner—Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Here, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama says:

Despite their quite different backgrounds, Dr. King has joined Mahatma Gandhi as a continuing beacon of inspiration to further peaceful revolutions in recent years that, in turn, offer future generations a wonderful example of successful, nonviolent change.  
(2001: 101-02)

Gandhi, followed by King, demonstrated that nonviolence resistance to oppression can yield liberation, even in national and international affairs (Burrow Jr. 2009; Grim 2014: 16). Rather than being restricted to individuals and small congregations, religious social ethics can be global (Hak Joon Lee 2011).

[And see chapter 7—“The Ecumenical Spirituality of King and the Dalai Lama”—in *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Communal-Political Spirituality*, foreword by Peter J. Paris (2006) by Hak Joon Lee.]

## **VI. MLK Jr. Day and Earth Day: Abolishing Poverty and Protecting Nature**

King-inspired visions of a civilized “world house,” and Pope Francis-inspired visions of our “common home,” can help us advance toward the widely shared prosperity characteristic of an “ecological civilization.”

Appreciating King’s global ethics (including his prescriptions for the global abolition of racism, materialism, militarism, war, and poverty) can be especially helpful during MLK Jr. Day celebrations when the wrongly restrictive “civil rights” label is most strongly applied (Walker 6 June 2015).

MLK Jr. Day celebrations are ideal occasions for advancing King’s neglected prescriptions for abolishing poverty (locally and globally), for advancing King’s neglected call to amend the U.S. Constitution by adding a social and economic Bill of Rights, and for emphasizing that, throughout any genuinely civilized world house, human rights include economic rights.

Moreover, both MLK Jr. Day celebrations and Earth Day celebrations are ideal occasions for recognizing that struggles to abolish poverty among human creatures and struggles to protect nonhuman creatures and creations (all loved by the universal Creator) are mutually supportive struggles. Abolishing poverty and protecting the Earth go together.

[Attending to this mutuality of struggles suggests the need for mutually reinforcing laws and legal systems. In addition to a “Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged” (King 2010 [1964/c1963]: 163) and a “social and economic Bill of Rights, to supplement the Constitution’s political Bill of Rights” (King 2010 [June 1967]: 211); we may also need an environmental and *ecological* Bill of Rights, plus new legal systems that protect the natural environments of disadvantaged nonhuman creatures and creations (such as, for example, pando populous). See *Should Trees Have Standing? And Other Essays on Law, Morals and the Environment* (1996) by Christopher D. Stone; and see *The Ecology of Law: Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community* (2015) by Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei.]

### **Julian Bond and Bill McKibben: One Complex Struggle says Pope Francis**

When National Public Radio reported the death of Julian Bond (born 14 January 1940, died 15 August 2015); the report referred to Bill McKibben’s thrill with being handcuffed in the same paddy wagon with Julian Bond.

[See McKibben’s account in his book *Oil and Honey* (2013: 252-53).]

Like King, Julian Bond did not restrict himself to civil rights. To be sure, Bond was among the first to oppose US military activity in Vietnam.

The image of Bond and McKibben handcuffed in the same paddy wagon witnesses to the truth of Pope Francis’s claim that “combating poverty” and “protecting nature” are not two separate struggles, but rather one complex struggle (Francis 2015: paragraph 139; also 175).

□□□□

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[In accordance with the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, there are three pillars: economic development, social progress, environmental protection.]

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... Taoism ... Buddhism ... An ecological civilization proposes to build an environmentally friendly and sustainable society, reducing the burden on nature. As well as being beneficial to the environment, this is the most sound form of long-term economic and social development. An ecological civilization is based on thrift, consuming to meet basic needs, and the pursuit of more spiritual and cultural satisfactions.” (p. 30)]

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