

King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1967. "Where Do We Go From Here?" Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, August 16, Atlanta, GA. (Excerpts)

(The full speech, including the vocal responses from those in attendance, is available at: http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Where_do_we_go_from_here.html)

... Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change.

... Now a lot of us are preachers, and all of us have our moral convictions and concerns, and so often we have problems with power. But there is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.

You see, what happened is that some of our philosophers got off base. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites, polar opposites, so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. It was this misinterpretation that caused the philosopher Nietzsche, who was a philosopher of the will to power, to reject the Christian concept of love. It was this same misinterpretation which induced Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power in the name of the Christian idea of love.

Now, we got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. (Yes) Power at its best [applause], power at its best is love (Yes) implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (Speak) And this is what we must see as we move on.

Now what has happened is that we've had it wrong and mixed up in our country, and this has led Negro Americans in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power, and white Americans to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience. It is leading a few extremists today to advocate for Negroes the same destructive and conscienceless power that they have justly abhorred in whites. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times. (Yes)

... I'm concerned about a better world. I'm concerned about justice; I'm concerned about brotherhood; I'm concerned about truth. (That's right) And when one is concerned about that, he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer, but you can't murder murder. (Yes) Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. (That's right) Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate through violence. (All right, That's right) Darkness cannot put out darkness; only light can do that. [applause]

And I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. (Yes) And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. (No) And I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. (Yes) For I have seen too much hate. (Yes) I've seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. (Yeah) I've seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate, myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces

and their personalities, and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. (Yes, That's right) I have decided to love. [applause] If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love.

... And so I say to you today, my friends, that you may be able to speak with the tongues of men and angels (All right); you may have the eloquence of articulate speech; but if you have not love, it means nothing. (That's right) Yes, you may have the gift of prophecy; you may have the gift of scientific prediction (Yes sir) and understand the behavior of molecules (All right); you may break into the storehouse of nature (Yes sir) and bring forth many new insights; yes, you may ascend to the heights of academic achievement (Yes sir) so that you have all knowledge (Yes sir, Yes); and you may boast of your great institutions of learning and the boundless extent of your degrees; but if you have not love, all of these mean absolutely nothing. (Yes) You may even give your goods to feed the poor (Yes sir); you may bestow great gifts to charity (Speak); and you may tower high in philanthropy; but if you have not love, your charity means nothing. (Yes sir) You may even give your body to be burned and die the death of a martyr, and your spilt blood may be a symbol of honor for generations yet unborn, and thousands may praise you as one of history's greatest heroes; but if you have not love (Yes, All right), your blood was spilt in vain. What I'm trying to get you to see this morning is that a man may be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. His generosity may feed his ego, and his piety may feed his pride. (Speak) So without love, benevolence becomes egotism, and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.

... And I must confess, my friends (Yes sir), that the road ahead will not always be smooth. (Yes) There will still be rocky places of frustration (Yes) and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. (Yes) And there will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. (Well) Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. (Yes) We may again, with tear-drenched eyes, have to stand before the bier of some courageous civil rights worker whose life will be snuffed out by the dastardly acts of bloodthirsty mobs. (Well) But difficult and painful as it is (Well), we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. ...

Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. (Oh yeah) Whatsoever a man soweth (Yes), that (Yes) shall he also reap." This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! (Yes) We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I did believe (Yes) we would overcome." [applause]

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