

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Martin Luther King, Jr.

Becoming Maladjusted for the Beloved Community

by Dr. Alex Mikulich

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I am struck every Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday by the contrast between the way American society treated the living Dr. King and the icon the nation venerates today.

As society venerates an icon, I wonder if we lose the heart and soul of Dr. King's message to become "courageously maladjusted" and transform the "midnight" of militarism, consumerism, and racism into the light of racial and economic justice.

One need not venture too far into the archives of Civil Rights history to find how numerous "foot soldiers" gave their lives for civil rights and how many leaders, including Dr. King, knew they were risking their lives. Nor do we need to venture too far to learn that too many white Americans, north and south, felt threatened by the Civil Rights movement and Dr. King's critique of American society. As a child, I recall how conversations among family and friends either dismissed him as a pariah or feared him as a "radical."



Too often the media or speakers take a narrow focus on Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech as if he never wrote or said anything else. Too frequently King's dream that his "four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" is cited without reference to the speech's opening indictment: "we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition." Indeed, Dr. King did call for individuals to be judged by their character in the context of calling the nation to transform structures of economic and racial injustice into the Beloved Community.

Dr. King communicated his pride in becoming "maladjusted." While he always recognized that people need a balanced life to avoid becoming neurotic or schizophrenic, he invited Americans to become maladjusted to injustice. Passive acceptance of an unjust system, King wrote in *The Strength to Love* and said repeatedly, is to "cooperate with that system and thereby to become a participant in its evil."

To paraphrase Dr. King, we must never "adjust to the evils of segregation and discrimination" or "to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few," or "to the madness of militarism." These evils endure as the "midnight" we live today.

There seems to be no enlightened path forward when so many seem well adjusted to the "midnight" of injustice. In his essay and speech "A Knock at Midnight," King called people of faith to be the light of the Gospel in this midnight. It was only by embracing the "darkest hour of struggle," where faith "adjoins the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism."

Dr. King's voice and witness still rings out to us: only by becoming a community of faith maladjusted in Jesus may we be the light of truth that shines in a new morning of peace rooted in justice and love. How will we take up this communal task?

New Staffer

JSRI is happy to welcome Jennifer (Jen) Price as our new administrative assistant. Jen comes to us from Saint Joseph's University, the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and Healthcare for the Homeless in Mobile, AL.

JSRI Upcoming Events

January 25

Fr. Kammer will keynote a parish conference at Sacred Heart parish in Hattiesburg, MS.

February 7-8

JSRI will sponsor an Anti-Racism Workshop for Loyola faculty, staff, and students.

February 19

Fr. Kammer will address the Catholic Day at the Capitol in Jackson, MS on Medicaid expansion.

JSRI Recent Activities

December 19

Dr. Mikulich, Dr. Weishar, and Fr. Kammer addressed visiting students from Santa Clara University on the social realities of post-Katrina New Orleans.

December 20

JSRI staff volunteered at the Harry Tompson homeless service center in downtown New Orleans.

January 14

Dr. Weishar participated in a panel on prison reform at the Langeloth Foundation in NYC.

January 15-18

Fr. Kammer led a social justice retreat for Jesuit volunteers of the southern region in Texas.

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