

MLK's Address: The Quest for Peace and Justice

By Don Sutherland

On this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the world is awash with a need for peace and justice. In Moscow, a brutal genocidal leader directs Russia's armed forces to target Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure in defiance of international law and in contradiction to long-established tenets of humanitarian conduct. Globally, even as additional evidence reveals decades of understanding concerning the harmful impact of a burning of fossil fuels on the global climate, major oil and gas companies continue to push greenhouse gas emissions higher. In the United States, there is an ongoing political war on truth where one side seeks to subvert information for naked political and ideological purposes at the expense of truth.

There is a seeming need for the rediscovery of principles that define what it means to be a good person—principles based on the idea of doing no harm, advancing human well-being, and promoting peace. Within that context, Martin Luther King's [1964 Nobel Lecture](#) is highly relevant.

Excerpts:

This evening I would like to use this lofty and historic platform to discuss what appears to me to be the most pressing problem confronting mankind today. Modern man has brought this whole world to an awe-inspiring threshold of the future. He has reached new and astonishing peaks of scientific success. He has produced machines that think and instruments that peer into the unfathomable ranges of interstellar space. He has built gigantic bridges to span the seas and gargantuan buildings to kiss the skies. His airplanes and spaceships have dwarfed distance, placed time in chains, and carved highways through the stratosphere. This is a dazzling picture of modern man's scientific and technological progress.

Yet, in spite of these spectacular strides in science and technology, and still unlimited ones to come, something basic is missing. There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers...

All that I have said boils down to the point of affirming that mankind's survival is dependent upon man's ability to solve the problems of racial injustice, poverty, and war; the solution of these problems is in turn dependent upon man squaring his moral progress with his scientific progress, and learning the practical art of living in harmony. Some years ago a famous novelist died. Among his papers was found a list of suggested story plots for future stories, the most prominently underscored being this one: "A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together." This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a big house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other.

This means that more and more our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. We must now give an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in our 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 men...