



Richard Rohr

# Envisioning a New World

One of the most prominent prophets in recent American history is Martin Luther King Jr. Like the prophets of Israel, he saw not just what was wrong with his nation, but how it might be restored to the promise upon which it was founded. The Reverend Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas writes about King's prophetic vision for racial justice, suggesting that it was made possible by the "moral imagination" he learned through the Black church and faith. She writes,

*A moral imagination is grounded in the absolute belief that the world can be better. A moral imagination envisions Isaiah's "new heaven and new earth," where the "wolf and the lamb shall feed together," and trusts that it will be made real (Isaiah 65). What is certain, a moral imagination disrupts the notion that the world as it is reflects God's intentions. . . [It] is nothing other than the hope of black faith. Such hope trusts that the arc of God's universe does in fact bend toward justice.<sup>1</sup>*

In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, King's prophetic, moral imagination is on full display:

*Even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . .*

*I have a dream my 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.*

*I have a dream today!*

*I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!*

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. . .*

*With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.*

*With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.<sup>2</sup> □*

## References

1. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Orbis Books: 2015), 225, 226.
2. Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (HarperCollins: 1991), 219.

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