**Did the Beloved Community Die? Renewing the Dream**
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# Table of Contents

**A dog in the fight: Why love matters.**
**Gary R. Gunderson, M. Div., D. Min.**

Congressman John Lewis first described Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the radio in 1955: “even more than his voice, it was his message that sat me bolt upright in amazement.... His message was one of love and the Gospel, but he was applying those principles to now, to today.... This was the first time I had ever heard something I would soon learn was called the social gospel.... This young preacher was giving voice to everything I’d been feeling and fighting to figure out for years.” (John Lewis, Walking with the Wind, 1998, p.56)

Lewis quickly learned that King was standing in a theological tradition that traced directly to Colgate-Rochester seminary where King studied, especially Walter Rauschenbusch and the circle of scholars around the turn of the century that created the theological and sociological framework for the social gospel movement. I owe a personal debt to those scholars and to Dr. King for introducing them to me. I was raised into a typical white suburban Baltimore Methodist family. My softly racist family did not mourn April 4th of my junior year in high school when King died in faraway Memphis. However, a few years later when I finally experienced my personal social awakening and was deciding that Jesus would have to go out the door along with my childhood politics, it was King’s writings placed in my hands by a wise chaplain that showed me a gospel I had never heard of. Like John Lewis, I immediately recognized the electrifying language that marked my path into all that mattered. I went to seminary and honed my ministry in the city where King lived and now have come to live in the city where King died. I know now just a bit of the intractable pattern of suffering and premature death that called King to Memphis. So it is not an easy question to ask about the usefulness of the social gospel and its tantalizing dream of the beloved community. We know how death lingers long, long years past the dying. Does the dream still have power, too? If so, where is it? And how does it illuminate our path?

We should take a step backward before we go onto the path. Looking through both King and Rauschenbusch we can see the writings of Shailer Mathews, the Biblical scholar who so firmly cemented the words “social” and “Gospel” at the close of the 19th century. Inspired by the linkage groups built hospitals (like the one I work in), vast urban ministries, organized unions, opposed wars and eventually faced fire hoses and even called out the assassins. The simple incendiary step was to notice “that the synoptic gospels disclose the gospel as first announced, a message of the approaching fulfillment of a religious-social hope—the establishment of God’s own kingdom, and that the kingdom could only be enjoyed by those who were like the King...revealed in Jesus himself, as a forgiving ministry of love to others, even though that ministry brings loss and death.” (Shailer Mathews, The Gospel and The Modern Man, 1910, p.9). As

Mathews found it, the supreme message of the gospel is that the Kingdom is inevitable. “That is the scepter of courage and hope the gospel stretches out to men who are striving to regenerate the social order. They are working together with the God of a process that has a goal, and in the midst of human nature which, with a Christ in it, is salvable. This age can really be made a better age, because God can work through institutions and lives devoted to spiritual good….It is here that we see the social significance of the prayer for the doing of God’s will on earth which Jesus taught his disciples.” (ibid, p. 320).

Any reflection on the relevance of the beloved community and the utility of the underlying social gospel must begin with an appreciation of the radically theological nature of its confidence. It is logical only if its understanding of “theo” is sound. In a time when “optimism” is evidence of delusion those claiming any relevance for the social gospel must recognize that the burden of proof is on us—especially those of us who work just down the street from where King died.

A hundred years later the original dream that Mathews and Rauschenbusch passed onto King sounds embarrassingly hopeful. But all that we have learned is not negative. When one considers the primitive state of medical technology and absence of public health infrastructure it may be that they would wonder at our curiously low expectations for the achievement of God’s social aspirations—especially in a city with such a superabundance of religious health assets open to Gospel influence. The social gospel was not born from a gentle time, but quite the opposite. Mathews first book (*The Social Teaching of Jesus*) was published only 19 years after the near death of the whole city of Memphis due to yellow fever in 1878—less than half the distance we are removed from King’s death.

We do know more about the social nature of the persistent causes of premature death even though “premature” now means before age 65 instead of 45 at the dawn of the social gospel age in 1900. Public health has largely conquered the relatively easy ills of infectious disease through the invention of modern sewers (born in Memphis as a public answer to yellow fever), food inspection, housing codes, and (later on) immunization. In most cities this public health mundane revolution was powered by local manifestations of social gospel activism. All of Memphis’ hospitals were religiously rooted as were, most likely, its public health systems. Today these systems employ one in seven Memphians; the city of disease having become the regional center for disease treatment. But still Memphis remains caught in patterns of poor health that lag far behind the national averages and mock the plethora of medical assets that mark the city skyline. Why, a century after the dream of the beloved community flourished, does a city so filled with gospel institutions remain so sick?

King, Lewis and the other leaders of the stream of the social gospel movement called the "civil rights" movement knew that most religion is about complicity with suffering, not change of any sort, especially a radical one. Even Marx knew that religion was more likely to comfort those in suffering than to change the cause of their suffering. Religion participates in durable patterns of poverty and even sometimes actively justifies the system. Religion in Memphis is deeply integrated in the poverty system structurally, politically, functionally, and symbolically. The distinctive pattern of wealth and poverty, wellness and disease sustains a pattern of religious practice for which it is well adapted.

But the pattern of complicity is only part of the story and not the most interesting part whether one is studying Memphis, Mombassa or Moscow. What is interesting is that religion is also subversive and transformational, a source of non-compliance and non-compliant people. It creates places of resistance, protest and carefully crafted structures for non-compliance. It creates surprises in institutional behavior that results in decisions that are quite against pure secular business logic (such as keeping hospitals in places where the market would not otherwise support them). The very same religious traditions that produce numbing acquiescence also create vessels of imagination, hope, expectation, action. And it is the most predictable source of those poorly adjusted to the poverty system.

The beloved community is not primarily a story of inexplicably heroic individuals, but of social webs and institutions. Mathews and the other social gospel writers were certainly naïve in underestimating the powers and principalities of 20th century America. But we should not overcompensate with superficial pessimism that discards the possibility of groups of committed people of faith making decisions at least partly aligned with gospel values. The beloved community causes us to doubt our doubt.

Sheenagh Pugh notices that:

> Sometimes things don't go, after all, from bad to worse. Some years, muscatel faces down frost; green thrives, the crops don't fail, sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.
>
> A people sometimes will step back from war; elect an honest man; decide they care enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor. Some men become what they were born for.
>
> Sometimes our best efforts do not go amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to. The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow that seemed hard frozen: may it happen for you.[1]

Love makes for surprising illogical behavior sometimes. Henry is my 14-year old dog of no value whatsoever other than that my little family loves him and he

[1] Quoted in Good Poems, Garrison Keillor, Editor. Penguin Books, 2002. p. 215

loves us back. Although arthritic, his one delight in life is to walk around the block a couple times a day. This winter we headed out the door and before I had even gotten his leash on to him, we turned the corner and literally bumped into a neighbor walking his two young and very, very large German shepherds. They took two sniffs of Henry and without hardly a growl attacked, one pulling this way while the other bit into his other leg and pulled the other as if they were making a wish. I had a beloved dog in the fight so without a second of hesitation, I jumped in kicking one away while grabbing the other's mouth to pry it off Henry's back leg. The dog had never encountered a human so obviously crazed with love for a worthless mutt, so it took mercy and eventually let Henry go. Only later in the night after tending to his wounds did I realize how foolish I had been. But he was my beloved and I never was able to envision myself acting otherwise. It was logical, once you take love into account.

How much more it is clear that once you take God's love into account, a different logic becomes possible, even for whole communities. There is a lot of Memphis history that serves as evidence that not just individuals, but institutions and whole communities will, under extreme circumstances, go way beyond logic and self-interest to care for the sick and marginalized. Martyr's Park, on our highest river bluff, honors the thousands of black and white citizens who stayed to give care during the catastrophic yellow fever epidemic of 1878. Although most of the city fled, many stayed, rooted in place by faith and their love for others. Similar, if less dramatic and risky, commitment created most of the institutions of healing as technology permitted. This is just to say that the beloved community is not only in the misty imagination; fragments of it are also to be found in our dimly remembered past.

In those moments when our curiosity is released from the normal captivity to despair, we can imagine asking academic questions relevant to Memphis such as:

- How and under what conditions does religion born of suffering turn from strategies of comfort to change?
- What beside the gospel texts shaped the vision of change and methods of change?
- What can we learn from our predecessors in this particular city that created the institutions, public and private that now serve us?
- How were they informed by science so that they were able to create the politics and group will for change?

**A Community Called Beloved**
**Barbara Holmes, M.Div., Ph.D., J.D.**

> I concluded that community is that place where the person you Least want to live with always lives.... When that person moves away, someone else arises immediately to take his or her place! So I think part of being in community is always having to face ourselves in the mirror of another, frequently our nemesis.
>
> Parker Palmer, "Spiritual Formation and Change"

Palmer is correct. Community, beloved or not, is a place of human contradictions. It is where we desire to be, but it is also the site of interaction with those who provoke, inspire, and challenge our efforts to be relational. Yet, we continue to seek this idyllic space. Like others, I wondered why the notion of the beloved community persists into the twenty-first century, when other ethereal and optimistic concepts and metaphors taken from the Civil Rights movement have fallen into disuse.

> I believe that we continue to muse about the possibility because of the beauty of the concepts and analogies that emerged from the prophetic speech of Martin Luther King Jr. He described the beloved community as a reconciling and safe space, where people of all nations and races could enter with the innocence of children and dwell in this place of peace. King's descriptions of the beloved community became an anthem of intent, a melody of purpose aimed toward "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen" (Heb. 11: 1). In this chapter, I am considering whether the idea of a beloved community, a reconciled collective of caring people, can be sustained. If this dream is also an attainable goal, how do we get there from here? The question needs to be asked and answered. If the community called beloved is nothing more than a rhetorical device used to consider the mutuality of a guilt-ridden, conflicted, and racially ambivalent nation, then the two-thirds world needs to find another symbol of their liberation. Either the beloved community was a dream for simpler times, or we need to expand the concept beyond social, religious, and theological limits to include a wider cosmological context.

## Can we dream together?

Fortunately or not, dreaming is a solitary endeavor. As Alfred Schutz notes, "We cannot dream together."[1] When we are dreaming, there is a complete relaxation of the attention to life. Dreaming is in essence a complete turning away. Although as Freud argued, dreams may he filled with volition and purpose and even historical artifacts that don't surface during the waking state, dreaming is not is social endeavor.

> However, we can share visions, which are the collective expressions of individual dreams, revelations, and insights. From a phenomenological standpoint, dreams may inspire and even inform us, but we can't build communities on dreams. And even if we could, they would remain just beyond our reach, as there are no road maps to utopia. However, Anthony Cook does not believe that King's dream was completely utopian.

> King's vision of a Beloved Community flowed out of his synthesis of pragmatic, individualist-centered and spiritually oriented understandings of African-American religious tradition, with the prophetic, community-centered and socially oriented dimensions of the same tradition.[2]

Martin Luther King had a dream, but he was not alone. Many visions of equality and justice merged during his famous speech. Upon hearing it, an entire nation was convinced that an egalitarian society could be possible. For the first time since the birth of the nation, racially divided segments of the society shared this vision of mutuality. It never occurred to us that several decades later we would be wide awake, ethically numb, and more acquainted with nightmares than dreams. Yet the warning signs were all there. Those who slay dragons in their sleep will wake up with rumpled beds and little else.

It is not that King failed us; he brought the vision to our attention as a good prophet should and then began to demonstrate the avenues of possible fulfillment. We were expecting a straight path to unity; instead, like the chaotic movements of subatomic particles, many options erupted out of nowhere. According to King, the beloved community presupposed empowerment of the poor, the cessation of wars, a more egalitarian economy, and an end to polite deceptions about systematic abuse.

On behalf of these goals, he spoke out about the war in Vietnam, planned the poor people's march, and spoke truth to power about the global economic machine that was grinding people to powder. When a bullet finally silenced him, we mourned but also relaxed, nodding off to a less intense version of the dream. This beloved community that we envisioned in the aftermath of the assassination differed from King's vision, as it was primarily rhetorical and utopian. But most importantly it did not require our muscle, resolve, or risk. During slavery those who dreamed and ran for freedom paid a high price.

Theologian and ethicist Riggins Earl discusses earlier cultural interpretations of dreams as a message matrix for social and theological enlightenment.

> Dream consciousness was believed by the slave community to be a metaphysical gift from God that had placed the one experiencing conversion outside of the temporal self for the purpose of turning the universe of oneself and one's fellow human beings into objects of contemplation.[3]

Although Earl discusses dream consciousness in the context of slave conversion, the key to this passage seems to be the act of reflexive analysis, which is still

important today. Individual dreams and shared visions also offered besieged people a location for freedom of thought. And so the idea of a beloved community lingers and tantalizes us in dreams, sermons, and kitchen table talk.

Such was the case in the pre-civil rights African American community. Foreclosed from meaningful interaction in the national community, African Americans shared the vision of a time when the playing field would be level. During this rime, the black church was not just a faith community, but was also a locus of social power. In the worst of times, houses of prayer and brush arbors offered a modicum of protection from dangerous public spaces. It was in those safe spaces and worship times that the potential for a beloved community began to crystallize into a landscape.

According to Anthony E. Cook, King's beloved community had specific spiritual, social, and strategic contours. The spiritual aspects addressed the dire state of African American interiority and the need for a "psychospiritual conversion...which would then serve as the catalyst for social conversion."[4] The social strata of the community would use justice and love as "normative guidance for critical intelligence and democratic process,[5] and the strategic dimension would be a modality for synthesizing integrationist and nationalistic perspectives. The process became as important as the goal.

Talk about the beloved community changed the national consciousness. It is not just a matter of timing that determines which discourse will shift the ideology of a nation. For years before the Civil Rights movement, spokespersons like Ida B. Wells decried the lynching and systematic abuse of the African American community. Her pleas for the most part fell on deaf ears. The nation would not peer into the mirror that she held up. For in her appeal, society heard accusations that challenged long-standing civic mantras of equality and goodness. In contrast, images of the "beloved community" did not challenge civic mythologies, but offered a liturgy of hope and potential as well as the unlikely alliances of friends and foes. However, I am concerned that civic and theological images of the cornmunity called beloved have become confused and conflated into models of reconciliation that bear no resemblance to our prior expectations. Civic religion in North America describes the beloved community as a gathering of healed, whole, and loving people who aspire to the highest good for all. But it also encodes assumptions about global supremacy and "the arrogant defense of our present way of life."[6]

This is not the description of community derived from Holy Scripture. The Judco-Christian version of God's reconciled community is one where all of the inhabitants are broken and oppressed by sin. Joseph Barndt contends that everyone is in need of liberation and redemption. He says that "the last thing that popular American civic religion will accept is the idea that white middle-class Americans are oppressed or enslaved, either by racism or by any other power."[7] The label "middle-class" also entices ethnic people to view themselves in similar ways. However, if the universe is as holistic and interconnected as we

now suppose, then all of us are enslaved and oppressed by hatred and by our myopic identification of enemies.

### Beloved enemies

When did the paradox of love and hate, good and evil collapse into the clear identification of enemies? I can understand the political manipulations of language to identify "evil ones" who will be the targets of military aggression. But in cultural contexts, how can we look in a mirror and still he certain about the face of the enemy? Is the exclusion of difference the premise upon which the community called beloved can be built?

> Membership in a community is based as much on exclusion of the "unlike" as it is on inclusion. In a situation of oppression, considering one's community to be chosen can be a valuable support; in a situation of dominance it can be dangerous. Actually, the view can be dangerous even when held by the oppressed; the Israelites were not a powerful people when they believed themselves called to eliminate the Canaanites."[8]

It has taken awhile to realize that we derive significant gains from the presence of enemies. According to theologian David Barash, "At the level of adult society, interaction, even hostile interaction often yields stability, so long as the patterns site crisscrossing and do not tend to repeatedly fracture at the same places.'[9] However, for conflict to be efficacious, it must be specific and defined. We can disagree about some things, but not all things. If we draw battle lines as to race and justice, we must still have issues of consensus in work, worship, or participation in the marker economy.

We are talking about constantly shifting alliances. "It may seem paradoxical, but society can thus be sewn together by its inner conflicts. Enemies and allies are the warp and woof of our social fabric as the shuttle spins and flashes through the diverse and shifting connections of modern life.''[10] Examples of this phenomenon abound. We deplore crime but are galvanized into communities by our sense of righteous indignation and the desire to provide protection against criminal assaults. Political rivalries and scandal evoke discomfort but focus the collective political consciousness on the task of government.

When enemies are apparent, we present a united front. Although unity is the primary benefit, it is usually a temporary and fragile benefit that cannot sustain a healthy community. Our battle readiness also takes a toll, leaving us with a sense of overwhelming confusion. One theorist describes the feeling in this way, "I felt both too powerful and not powerful enough. Like a rebel who woke up to find himself emperor of a realm he had spent his life trying to destroy.'[11] Fighting the good fight takes energy, bravery, and a critical acceptance of struggle as a way of life.

Because the act of defining and labeling enemies is so subjective, wise designees will turn the tables at the most unlikely times. Philosopher Michael Barber notes that an

> in-group interprets the out-group, but the in-group also interprets the out-group's interpretation of the in-group. This... looking glass affect between races... manifests an in-group so intent upon preserving its status that it anticipates objections from the out-group, and attributes those objections to the out-group's defensiveness, thereby immunizing itself against any possibility of critique from the out-group.[12]

Barber has described a situation that would defy even the most serious attempt to reconcile a national community. God's basilea is just as problematic. Eden contains snakes and temptations, as well as a disobedient and deceptive couple. As it turns out, the community called beloved has its discomforts and foibles. Community is not just a love fest; it is also a site of dialectical tension.

We peer into mirrors that bear our own reflection. When asked, the sage in the mirror may tell us that we are the future of the world, a multicultural and beloved community. Is it true, or are we deluded by our own presuppositions? How will we know if we can't find words to describe the community that we so earnestly seek?

## Words of power

Theologian Edward Farley describes words of power as deep and enduring symbols that help to shape our vision of society and our relationships with one another. Farley says that words of power are imperatives that "arise within and express the historical determinacy of a community."[13] He goes on to say that "deep symbols have the following four features: normativity, enchantment, fallibility (relativity and corruptibility) and location in a master narrative."[14]

These commands carry meaning and power and are primarily depicted as positive and transcendent signals, covenants, and values. Yet there are reasons to believe that Farley's words of power have opposite imperatives that emerge out of negative or destructive energies addressed by the "thou shalt nots." These shadow symbols influence, skew, and shape our consciousness in the same way as their positive twins. There is precedent for this assumption in the new cosmology. Cosmologists have determined that our universe is full of unseen dimensions and objects. We measure and "see" the galaxies and its components by emitted light. Those objects that dwell in the shadow must be measured by other means, or their existence is inferred by the impact that they have on other objects. Dark matter is a such a substance.

Dark matter can be concisely described as the unseen glue of the universe that holds together rapidly spinning galaxies. It controls the rate at which the universe expands and its future. Yet we can detect its presence only because of the gravitational pull on other systems. Scientists Marc David, Richard Muller,

and Pict Hut also discuss shadow realms and substances. They have suggested that our sun may have a shadow sun, an invisible twin they have named "nemesis."[15] Whether one accepts this theory or not, one thing is certain: the universe holds more secrets than we could have imagined and contains elements that can be discerned only by effect.

I am suggesting that words of power (deep symbols) have parallel words of power (shadow symbols), unseen opposites that can be detected only by the effects they have on our utopian imperatives. The discourses of racism constitute a powerful shadow discourse. Farley attributes the loss of positive words of power with alienation from communities of human intimacy.[16] I am also suggesting that some of the losses can be attributed to shadow words of power, that is, racism and xenophobia that are affecting the relevance, primacy, and effectiveness of Farley's positive discursive formulation.

Positive words of power have a "normative character" because "they summon the community out of its corrupted present.'[17] Although Farley acknowledges negative opposites, the "thou shall nots," they are depicted as the opposite of the vision for betterment and as inclinations that can he overcome. My suggestion is that shadow words of power are normative to the extent that they embody and project the unexpressed but deeply historical responses to difference that have become normative in dominant cultures. While expressions of summoning to betterment prevail, actions that express the continuing and powerful hatred of difference continue to beset us.

The discussion of enchantment relates words of power to faith-based origins. "Enchantment refers to the way finite reality participates in sacred power."[18] These words have a history tied to mystery and the ineffable realities of Holy Scripture and discernment. Yet shadow words of power are everywhere in the media and in our sermons. The shadow opposite of enchantment is radical individualism and autonomy. Their power to warp and distort human perceptions of relationship with divine origins has been the story of the twentieth century.

Words of power are also associated with a master narrative. One of postmodernity's gifts was the shattering of master narratives to expose the stories and specific pen-cultural locations of silenced people, including homosexuals. women, and inhabitants of the two-thirds world. Because master narratives have played a role in the suppression and violation of human rights, I am suspicious of them. I am also reluctant to embrace grand narratives that synthesize and summarize, because the languages of the new physics tell us that the universe is chaotic and increasingly unpredictable. We continue to learn about its properties but can't fit what we are learning into any rhetorical formula.

The question that should be asked about master narratives is whether African Americans and other marginalized communities are reshaping and participating

in the master's/master narrative or whether they have a narrative of their own that may be symbiotic but also conflictual and shadowy. To explicate these shadowy discourses, I return to the example of the O. J. Simpson trial as a tale of two deeply felt, deeply believed, and very historical. and powerful narratives. The African American narratives and shadowy words of power did not collide with dominant assumptions until the verdict was rendered.

The news media called it a tale of two Americas (leaving out Native American, Hispanic, Asian, and other interests), but it may have been the emergence of a shadow discourse as powerful and as transcendent as the normative view. Shadow words of power speak of many narratives, many languages, a cacophony of dissonant and energetic voices.

The turn toward self-understanding is communal rather than narcissistic. Knowing implies a responsibility to the larger social collective. But responsibility is not just a local or global concept. It is also cosmic. Cosmologists are now aware that if the ratio of one element to another were different, life could not be sustained on this planet. How can we shirk our responsibilities to one another when the universe provides such a balanced system of care for us? Even if one considers this "care" in the most scientific sense, it only makes sense that as constituent human parts of this interrelated and sustaining whole, we are called to act in a similar manner.

But how shall we bring the community called beloved into being if we don't know what it is really like! We can hold on to the idea of children of different racial backgrounds playing together as we did in the 1960s, or we can revise our analogy to include mutual obligations. Obligation is the awareness of our intrinsic connectedness to one another. This is Farley's proposition: "If there is to he any obligation at all, there must be transcendent others in the world that do not mirror or duplicate the self: others, whose life orientations, aims, needs, and agendas do not coincide with our own." [19]

The choice is ours: We can use strangers to demarcate lines of separation, or we can seek the growing edges toward which difference prods us. Unfortunately, litigious Western societies often allow the interhuman aspects of obligation and responsibility to be co-opted by legal interpretations. These interpretations can divorce duty from "the vulnerable face of the other" and skew benefits toward privileged sectors of society.[20]

Farley proposes that the concept of obligation can be "re-embodied" if we situate it in communal, face-to-face contexts. Doing so reconnects us to the participatory holism in the universe. Our senses tell us that we are solitary beings traversing a placid life space. Scientists offer another view. They contend that there is an "unceasing buzz of energy, operative at time scales and space dimensions that our minds ...cannot grasp."[21] This energy permeates the subatomic world and the life space. There is enough energy to sustain galaxies, solar systems, self, and community. Biophysicists have identified energy in the

form of photon radiation, which is present in living cells and may regulate their coherent operation.[22] We are bombarded by unseen elements that carry energy, and we are generating it from within our own bodies. In this interdependent and dynamic cosmos, there should be enough "energy" to focus on issues of diversity and reconciliation.

We have always seen social disorder and conflict as problems of the public sphere. However, science is revealing that our antagonisms have physical as well as social consequences. "People who are in conflict---and this is most of in to some degree-have much less energy available to the main personality (their higher unity) than people who are more integrated.[23] It seems that the struggles for and against justice may unsettle our biological balances.

Moreover, the new physics speaks of connections that are not limited to the social world but are intrinsic elements of the universe. When we try to distance ourselves from this reality, we reap distortions of guilt and alienation. Even more sobering is the thought that the universe encodes within its unspoken mandates prophetic elements that hint at our demise if we refuse the mantle of self and communal governance. And by governance, I refer to the necessity of defining and nurturing the common good, not just for humankind, but also for the earth and its varied life forms. Responsibility and obligation are not merely ethical paradigms and philosophical constructs; they are also learned behaviors and actual states of becoming and fulfillment.

If we truly want to be responsible, we must first he aware that we do not emerge from the womb as socially sophisticated human microcosms. To the contrary, the process of "growing up" in Western cultures includes learning to accomplish along the lines that society affirms. Despite these cultural habituations, we can revise our suppositions about the life journey. Sometimes it takes a sweaty metaphysical wrestling match with malaise, nihilism, self-absorption, and egoism to reach the desired balance of ambition, altruism, and responsibility.

### A scientific reclamation of wholeness and community

Any community that we construct on earth will be only a small model of a universe whose community includes billions of stars and planetary systems. Are we alone? We don't know, but if we don't know how to become a community with our own species, how shall we find harmony in the cosmos? Our ideas of community begin with fragmentation, difference, and disparity seeking wholeness. Our beloved community is an attempt to hot glue disparate cultures, languages, and ethnic origins into one mutually committed whole. The universe tells a completely different story - that everything is enfolded into everything.[24]

Physicist David Bohm urges a reconsidering of our committments to fragmentation. Even though the languages of physics and cosmology bombard us with views that discard mechanistic understandings of the universe in favor of

potential, we love order. We see it where it doesn't exist. and impose it through our narratives. Yet, fragmentation seems inevitable as we distinguish self from others and the environment. Everything that we do conceals the unity that seems to be intrinsic to our life space. We take pictures of objects that seem to be outside of self, we demarcate national boundaries, we align with friends and break with enemies, we give and receive in what seems to be sequential and discrete packets of life and experience.

By contrast, Bohm argues for a view that we can't fully appreciate with our limited senses and dimensional perspectives. He describes the universe as a whole or implicate order that is "our primary reality... this is the subtle and universal reservoir of all life, the wellspring of all possibility, and the source of all meaning.[25] The life space, Bohm says, is the explicate order that unfolds as a visible and discernible aspect of this unseen wholeness. As Diarmuid O'Murchu notes, "What we perceive, therefore, is not a landscape of facts or objects, but one of events, of processes, movement and energy. In this creative flow, past, present, and future are indistinguishable." [26]

The notion is intriguing and strange. Somehow concepts of time merge and recede into a continuum of energy and possibility. The concept gets even more captivating when Bohm says that the universe is a hologram. To understand what he means, one must understand the science of holography. The mathematician Dennis Gabor introduced the idea in 1947.[27] A hologram is a dimensional projection of an object that encodes the whole image in its parts. For example, the projection of some part of the body enlarged may project the whole person.

Perhaps in ways that we don't yet understand, the struggle for justice on many fronts is an enfolding image of the whole ---- the embodiment of a holistic and unfragmented community. This community viewed from a holographic perspective would not be the logical outcome of progressive movements toward an ascertainable external goal, but would be the sum of past, present, and future expectations and disappointments. Then the community called beloved becomes all that we can and cannot conceive, all that lies beyond the horizon of our apprehension but is available to us as part of the matrix of wholeness.

This description seems particularly esoteric because the desire for concrete goals and accomplishments lingers. However, if we are not bound by the myth of inexorable progress, we won't be discouraged when events seem to enfold into one another in ways that are not attentive to the concepts of past/present/future. Thanks to Einstein, we know that time is relative and progress is perspectival. Given this scenario, we don't have to wait for the event of liberation to dawn; moreover, our initiatives toward justice and reconciliation are no longer Herculean leaps of faith or miraculous feats of social engineering. We are one, and our wars and racial divisions cannot defeat

the wholeness that lies just below the horizon of human awareness. But there are other scientific affirmations of human connections.

The diversity that we strive for in the community called beloved may be the matrix of the universe.

> If the universe really is structured to organize itself spontaneously through time, drinking energy from its environment and bursting out in new and novel creations, we should perhaps be less monolithic and idealistic in our view of what faith might draw from us. God not only seems to tolerate diversity, but to require it.[28]

Diversity may not be a function of human effort or justice. It may just be the sea in which we swim. To enact a just order in human communities is to reclaim a sense of unity with divine and cosmological aspects of the life space. As Old Testament scholar Terence Freitheim suggests, the "Let us" discourse in Genesis is a statement of the community of God. God is creating and ordering the universe but does not do it alone. The rhetoric is pluralistic; the reasonable assumption is that God is in relationship not only with humankind, but also with a divine community. Some Christians explain this divine collectivity in terms of the Trinity. Others ponder the sources of relationality that emerge from scientific realms.

### Bell's theorem of interconnectedness

The paradox of non-locality and interconnectedness of quantum elements was initiated by Albert Einstein. Einstein disliked intensely the random aspect of quantum theory and the presumption that observers may affect outcomes. "I can't believe that a mouse could drastically change the universe by merely looking at it," he said.[29] In an effort to emphasize the incompleteness of quantum theory, Einstein and his colleagues Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen devised an experiment in 1935 that used two "momentum-correlated electrons." Bell used a simpler version in the form of "two polarization-correlated photons."[30] Both experiments came to the same verifiable conclusion.

When two particles that have been paired are emitted to travel in opposite directions, measurements indicate a correlation of characteristics that arc indicative of the pair rather than a single element. This occurs even though there has been no direct contact between the two. The distances are so great that no force or energy could cause the effect. The experiment brings us to the conclusion that we are connected. "At a deep and fundamental level, the separate parts of the universe are connected in an intimate and immediate way."[31] The best way to describe this phenomenon of quantum theory is simply to state the incredible. "Once two quantum entities have interacted with each other, they retain a power to influence each other, no matter how widely they subsequently might separate."[32]

> Scientists don't know how this occurs. If it is is matter of communication between the particles, then those impulses and informational transfers are superluminal or occurring faster than the speed of light. Our current scientific knowledge does not allow for such speeds. For years, physicists were stumped, and then John Bell, an Irish theoretical physicist, began to explore the issue of quantum reality. His theories suggest that "reality" in quantum events is non-local. This means that particles or elements separated by vast distances react as if they are still connected.
>
> The measurement of one affects the other even though they are no longer in direct contact. Bell's findings are based on the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox. Physicist Nick Herbert offers a succinct summary of non-local influences. His way of describing these unusual effects is to say that "non-local interaction is... unmediated, unmitigated and immediate."[33] His conclusion alerts us to connections that are instantaneous over great distances. These cannot he seen but speak of a relationality that is informative for our discussion of community.

For those of us who have been in connection because our histories have intertwined, disconnection may not be an option. Moreover, our influences on the flourishing and well-being of others may not require direct contact. There are certainly cultural examples of non-locality. The most obvious is the assertion of vodou practitioners that harm can be inflicted from a distance. Experts in human mental processes make similar assertions that thinking may not be located in the physical processes of the brain.

Even more interesting is the idea that our desires for community may not have a completely theological or social origin, hut may instead be a reflection of our own physical and quantum connections to a relational cosmos. Theologian O'Murchu puts it well when he says that "the search for community is not merely a pursuit of security and intimacy to obviate our loneliness in an anonymous and impersonal world. It is much more than that. It is the expression ... of a yearning from deep within the created order itself."[34] He continues, "Our broken, fragmented world yearns to be whole again. We humans imbibe this longing and, on behalf of creation, we give it conscious express, particularly in our desire and efforts to recreate a sense of the earthly and cosmic community.[35] It is encouraging to think that our missteps and failures in the effort to create community are not the final story.

However, we are limited by our senses to incomplete views of a holistic cosmos. That which seems empty is full; that which seems disconnected is linked. As physicist David Bohm suggests, everything is enfolded into everything at the same time that holographic projections of the whole are unfolding from fragmentary pieces. Ultimately, the universe will not sanction our divisions; instead, the cosmos groans for the restorative acts of humankind. But before we

can bring the community to fruition, we midst have a clearer vision of the community called beloved.

## Beloved apparitions

The movie Beloved, based on the novel of the same name written by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison, met with mixed reviews despite the star power of Oprah Winfrey. Most reviewers recoiled from a story of slavery that seemed to have no happy ending. A runaway slave woman named Sethe kills a child and intends to kill the others to keep them from returning to slavery. The dead child who becomes a woman in the spirit world is called "Beloved." She haunts and seduces the main characters throughout the remainder of the film until the women of the community come together in a collective act of exorcism to reclaim the family.

The child "Beloved" seems to be a symbol of the haunting legacies that slavery bequeathed. In an interview with Charlie Rose, Morrison said, "The question in this novel was, 'Who is the beloved?"[36] She speaks of the need to be connected to an interiority that can be relied on during exigent social circumstances. The question that Morrison posed, among others, needs to be considered in a cultural context. Can we identity the beloved in the community that we yearn for? What elements are beloved, and why are we haunted by the vision? What can be restored and reclaimed, and what must be mourned? How are we to exorcise the demonic presences of past offenses and conflicts?

Perhaps public theology offers the best option to rid our hopes of these invasive spiritual weights. The rhetoric of pain precedes the dialogue of opponents, yet our current liturgical discourses tend to avoid reminders of oppression and abuse. Public theology can move difficult discussions into multicultural and interfaith spheres. The contributions of a conflicted society can help to realign our utopian mantras of reconciliation with the pragmatic opportunities available to this generation.

## Summary

If the beloved community is a dream, it is situated in quantum realms that evince potential as a past, present, and future reality accessible to us in a multidimensional universe. Einstein taught us that time is relative and the future and past are malleable concepts. Give up the progressive and

linear view of attainment, and we begin to approach the community called beloved. Unfortunately, we have conceived this community according to racism's rhetorical constraints.

Having reached the limits of protest, and after decades of struggle, activists paused to reflect, mourn, and seek personal fulfillment. It is time again to assess the future of a reconciled community and to develop new rhetorical options to describe and sustain our vision. Perhaps the community called beloved is the universe in all of its expanding, relational, and quixotic beauty.

Physicist Bohm believed that the universe is in conversation with us as it expands. To accept this premise means that nothing is as it seems. Our lives may be manifesting as a dialogue between creation, created, and Creator.

The community called beloved is personal, theological, and scientific. It is here and not here, for there is no here or there. We breathe and excrete and sing the beloved community; we discuss and imprison it. Sometimes we give it as lethal injection concocted from the pomposity and determination that we are right about the ways of the world. Even then it does not die. Thanks be to God.

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**Spiritual Dynamics and the Beloved Community**
**Gale Kennebrew, M.Div., D. Min.**

## Objective

"In what way are the spiritual dynamics amid disparities resources for building the Beloved Community? Or do they enable complicity that undermines the dynamics of change needed to "bend the curve."

## Introduction

How powerful is love? How much power does love really have? Does love cause anything to happen? We have heard it said over and over that love really matters. I remember going into the hospital room of an elderly European American woman – the room was bright from the sunshine, the bathroom door slightly opened, her husband standing by the bedside and another person was standing in front of the mirror in the room. The woman lying in the bed was experiencing labored breathing – it was only a matter of hours that she had left in this world. I remember entering into the room thinking to myself, what can I provide to this man at this time? Did I have anything of value to offer him? Will he receive it? He was visibly and understandably shaken and appropriately grief stricken and here I stood in front of him. Strangely, without a hint of hesitation our conversation flowed. We found ourselves having lively dialogue. I was riveted by his stories about him and his wife. He told me that they were married for nearly 67 years. He shared they were pen pals when he was in the war and after he made it back, he courted her. He knew he loved her, and she found out she loved him also. He told me the best way to stay married was to answer your wife, "Yes ma'am". And their love started them on a lifetime of shared experiences with each other. I learned about love that day. We talked for a time, so much so the other person in the room left us alone. I learned a lot about him and his wife as she lay between us with that slow, labored breathing. Reluctantly, I stepped out of the room to handle some other responsibilities and on my way back I was told, the gentleman's wife has transitioned from this life to the next. When I entered the room the 2nd time that day, the older white gentleman stood standing and crying at the foot of his wife's bed. He reached out to me, hugged me, and said, "you are my pastor. You have been here with me. I thank you for spending the time with me, I just couldn't go this alone. I will never forget you for the rest of my life".

Let me ask my question to you again, "How powerful is love? How much power does love really have? Does love cause anything to happen?" I submit that love is the greatest tool, most powerful weapon and the most endless, constructive source at a human being's disposal.

## Spiritual Dynamics

The governing energy of spiritual dynamics is love[2]. Plainly, spirituality is whatever an individual's perception of God in each person's own construct. Dynamics is defined as full of energy, enthusiasm, and a sense of purpose and able both to get things going and to get things done. For the purpose of conversation, spiritual dynamics includes concepts that possess explosive power to start in motion a series of events and have the built in energy to overcome challenges. In spite of anything and despite of everything, God's idea of love must transcend any and all barriers humanity faces.

We have cultural patterns that have taught us to take care of our bodies, minds and emotions[3]. We can seek enhance ourselves of personal instruction for exercise, nutrition, navigating relationships and learning anything from basic math to complex chemistry. We are learning that the same attention and self-care is important for our spiritual health. Our spirit is the engine of our life. It integrates and empowers all that we are. It forms and shapes our character. It deserves more than a passing, clandestine glance.

We must come to the life-giving self-awareness about our own spiritual dynamics; identify and follow God' s inner voice; make the connections between the spiritual and the practical; be as intentional about the nurture and development of our Eternal self; Listen when the inner material feels jumbled and unclear[4].

Essentially, Spiritual Dynamics is exhibited in the daily walk of a person's life. The study of Spiritual Dynamics includes experiential *personal growth acknowledgments*, *faith perception*, and *faith application*. From the Christian perspective, the believer is commanded to *walk by faith* (2 Corinthians 5:7), *walk in love* (Ephesians 5:2), *walk in the light* (1 John 1:7), to have *hope* (Romans 15:13; Hebrews 6:18). These are all commands given to the believer to explain how to execute the Christian life. They sound simple, i.e., "*walk by faith*." But closer scrutiny reveals that they are not so simple at all and the typical Christian falls short in *application* beyond their own myopic situations. This failed application is the disconnection to building the Beloved Community. The driving force behind Spiritual Dynamics is our capacity to love and love played out in services needs to be translated into the construction King's idea of the Beloved Community.

So how do one's own spiritual dynamics affect King's vision of an International Neighborhood? The thrust of the matter is who are we as Believers and as full

[2] Spiritual Dynamics Manual: Spiritual Law and Principles, Sauzier, Greg

[3] Spiritual Direction, Jan Wood Ministries

[4] et. al, Jan Wood

human beings, how do we live out what we claim we are? How can we truly grow the way we are supposed to grow without caring those who cannot care for themselves? How can we as human beings have and thrive and others in our view have not and suffer?

**Beloved Community**

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a haughty utopian goal to be confused with the euphoric image of the Peaceable Kingdom nor was it a take off from the American Dream. The Beloved Community was for King a realistic, achievable goal, attained by people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.[5] King says, "Today there is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence". Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth would provide for all persons one of the basics needs of human life in modern times, health. Somewhere in the annals of American history is the belief in the pursuit of happiness. Somewhere we must be reminded that in order to pursue anything –one must be able to walk first.

For the privilege, walking is taken often for granted – for those who want to help build a community where all persons have a place --- walking is more treasured. They must remind themselves to *walk by faith* (2 Corinthians 5:7), *walk in love* (Ephesians 5:2), *walk in the light* (1 John 1:7).

In King's Beloved Community poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency, the standards of quality, practical care will not allow it.[6] King's beloved community hinges upon the growth of the person, to express their love by recognizing the value for every human being despite of their station in life. I want to suggest that this is the greatest barrier to the Beloved Community – the inability to express love in forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the process of reframing one's anger and/or hurt from the past, with the goal of recovering one's own peace in the present and revitalizing one's purpose and hopes for the future[7]. King understood that despite of the circumstances and positions of others, forgiveness is ultimately a major benefit for one's own self. And once you tap into that idea of forgiveness, forgiveness becomes a tool for to build bridges to persons you normally would not deal have a relationship.

King is quoted in 1957 saying "Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight with fire'

[5] The *Beloved Community* Website Reference
[6] Beloved Community, website reference
[7] Forgive to Live, Tibbits, page 5

method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem".

What greater resource do we have in building the Beloved Community than learning how to grow as people into persons who are able to love in spite of what others have done, can do or will do? This growth can cause us to figure out how help those outside of society, on the bottom of society or sitting by the roadside – if we internally figure out way God loves us? What does God expects from us based upon all that He has provided us? What are we doing for those without?

**Summary**

Remember, the elderly white gentleman from the beginning of this paper? I started off in my introduction speaking about an experience I had in his wife's hospital room while in a caregiver role. What did both of us have to let go of in order for us, for those three hours of shared space and time, for us to build a Beloved Community in the that room? Remember, King's beloved community hinges upon the growth of the person, to express their love by recognizing the value for every human being despite of their station in life. What did I have to let go of as a middle aged, black man? What did he have to let go of as an elderly white man? Whatever our personal challenges were – the love ethic expressed through the forgiveness lenses – allowed that which was fractured to become whole.

Lastly, I offer this very principle is the spiritual dynamics that can assist us to build the Beloved Community and just may also be, when misunderstood, the ethic that is delaying its construction.

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**The Beloved Community: A Transformative Ecclesiology**
**Fred Smith Ph.D., M.Div.**

The Beloved Community was the motivating force behind all Martin Luther King Jr said and did during the Civil Rights movement. It mobilized and galvanized people and institutions that differed in many respects behind a compelling vision into one movement for social transformation. The Beloved Community as social vision did not begin with Martin Luther King Jr. but has a rich intellectual history. Utopian Social Visions such as the American Dream, Communist Manifesto, Kingdom of God and Beloved Community have been responsible for social movements that have transformed nations and the world. Brady Tyson ,a historian emeritus American (now passed away), taught his class's concept of Utopian Social Visions and their power to transform social systems. One example of the use of the Beloved Community as a Utopian Social Vision is the United Methodist Council of Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty. The Initiative had the goal of reshaping the United Methodist Church, a worldwide denomination of some 9 million members, in regard of the "least of these." The Beloved Community as a Utopian Social vision can be an instrument of reformation in the church. Toward the end of King's life he began apply the Beloved Community to what he called the "The World House" as a Global Vision. In these day of globalization, Brady Tyson and Abdul Aziz Said (a Moslem scholar and professor of international and interreligious peace studies at American University), have attempted to apply the Beloved Community to Globalization, the global community and interfaith dialogue. My argument is therefore a functional one that will seek an articulation of the Beloved Community as an Utopian Social Vision for the Twenty-First Century. It will introduce the concept of efficacy of a Utopian Social Vision for social transformation.

One of the first books to explore use of the Beloved Community as a utopian social metaphor or vision of Martin Luther King Jr's was Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp in their book "Search for the Beloved Community." In this book Kenneth Smith (King's dissertation director) and Ira Zepp, like Brady Tyson, explored and examined the theological roots and social-political functioning of the Beloved Community in King's participation in the Civil Rights movement. I will argue that the Beloved Community is capable functioning in today's social movement today as it did in King's day.

The origins of the idea of the Beloved Community were rooted in pragmatic idealism of early twentieth century pragmatism. It was introduced and has roots in pragmatic idealism of Josiah Royce at the turn of the twentieth Century as he struggled with the modernity in his "The Problem with Christianity." The Beloved Community as a functional metaphor or vision which grew out of his philosophical concept of Love as loyalty which derived from the letters of Paul. More specifically, he defines love as loyalty to a cause greater than oneself. Loyalty to the cause of Christ as an ecclesial mandate of Christianity in as it faces the challenges of modernity. He borrowed from William James pluralism "the one and many" and Charles Pierce "community of interpretation" to fashion a universal love ethic in the face the skepticism of the

enlightenment's challenge of modernity to Christianity. The Beloved Community was the resultant metaphor or vision of the church and its mission in the Twentieth Century.

In the thirties, with the rise of Franco in Spain, Mussolini in Italy, Adolph Hitler in Germany and other totalitarian dictatorships around the world, little was known of Roger Lloyd, the Canon Winchester, on the verge of World War Two, as he struggled with tension of the Beloved Community and the Immemorial Dilemma in a book in titled "The Beloved Community." In this the Beloved Community functions to bring Freedom as an act of Love. He states, "The Beloved Community asserts the freedom of its members here and now and when it moves constantly toward an ever increasing compass of freedom, until in the end it offers the glorious freedom of the children of the God which knows neither stint nor limit. "

Walter Rauschenbusch did not often refer to the Beloved Community but he was in conversation with Josiah Royce about the concept. He used the term "The Kingdom of God" as a social utopian vision or metaphor for the social gospel movement. Love for him was a progressive notion that would transform the world by meeting the needs of the victims of the industrial revolution. Love was acts of compassion and mercy for the "least of the these." The Beloved Community was the reign of love that guaranteed all persons their freest and highest development. It affirmed the divine worth of the human personality of even the "least of these." He believed in the progressive unity of humanity while allowing for individual freedom and particularity.

Then finally, Martin Luther King Jr. might have discovered the term Beloved Community while studying at Colegate Rochester Divinity School where Rauschenbusch was emeritus. Maybe he learned it at Boston University across the Charles River from where Josiah Royce once taught. In any case, King inherited a rich tradition which is the Beloved Community as he faced the challenges of racial hatred and segregation. Brady Tyson traveled with King during the Civil Rights Movement. He taught on the Beloved Community at American University. He posited that the Beloved Community was a Utopian Social Vision that had the power to energize social movements. The question I want to ask is how the Beloved Community Utopian Social Visions functions to play a part in social transformation.

Each time The Beloved Community or some other version of a Utopian Social Vision functioned to bring about or promote social change it was aligned with specific and complimentary strategy or concept. For Josiah Royce it was the concept of Loyalty to a Cause; for Roger Lloyd it was a Radical Freedom; for Walter Rauschenbusch it was the Social Gospel and for Martin Luther King Jr. it was Nonviolence. I will posit that each of these strategies is an act of Love as expressed in the New Testament for a particular social condition. Therefore, the Beloved Community is timeless and it awaits our own contribution to its rich history.

As Royce's "Problem with Christianity" faced the challenge of Twentieth Century modernity, we face the challenge of Twenty-First Century Post-Modern realities of the Church. The United Methodist Church has revisited the First Century Church's biblical witness and it's Wesleyan Heritage as it has sought to answer questions about it own

relevancy for the Twenty-First Century. So, too, has the Task Force on the Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty, as it sought a transformative ecclesiology in its epistle 'Our Shared Dream: The Beloved Community' as an Utopian Social Vision for the Reshaping of the United Methodist Church. Our generation's challenge is Extreme Poverty.

Toward the end of Martin Luther Kings Jr. 's life he wrote a book "Chaos or Community" and in the final chapter he attempted to extend the concept of the Beloved Community to encompass the globe to include a "World House." Late in his career Brady Tyson (Emeritus in History American University) combined forces with his dissertation director and friend Abdul Aziz Said (Professor of International Peace and Conflict Resolution School of International Service, American University) to build on the Beloved Community for a global community. The issue facing us in the Twenty-First Century is globalization and the conflict of world religions, so the question we must ask is, "Where is the Beloved Community to be found today?" Since we can not find the Beloved Community anywhere—Go out and create it!

## From Memphis Blues to a New Sweet Song: To Be Called Beloved
**Teresa Cutts, Ph.D.**

Memphis, TN is a unique, yet paradoxical city. It is a city in which despicable disparities thrive amidst abundant assets. It is unique as the socio-political-cultural conduit and hub of four states, in the heart of the Delta of the Mississippi River. Memphis boasts the fourth largest medical center in the US, serves as the primary high tech healthcare delivery system for a huge catchment area of several million people, hosts over 3,000 faith communities, claims the best bar-b-que in the world and is the urban Home of Blues music (truly born in the fields). But Memphis has a history of being the seamy underbelly of racism, home to key Klu Klux Klan leaders at the turn of the century. Of course, Memphis was the ground upon which Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave up his life in the civil rights struggle. As such, many will not even travel to Memphis, in protests of sort that stand in solidarity against a land where such a sacrifice was made.

### A Spiritual Inferno

Memphians, as a people, still hold the negative valence of the assassination. Like so many, I was touched when Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. As a child of eight, living a small Mississippi Delta town 110 miles south of Memphis, I absorbed the deeply embedded racism and elitism that barely transcended formal slavery or plantation life. Given that my family lived in poverty "on the wrong side of the tracks", our rental home (the third oldest house in town) backed up to the African-American business section. The property in that part of town was owned by tyrannical European-Americans. After the murder in Memphis, rage erupted deep in the Delta and manifested as a purging blaze. I awoke from sleep the night of the assassination to see a world outside my bedroom window lit up as bright as day. I raced to the backyard where my parents were standing silent, as that side of town literally and metaphysically blazed with the rage of years of oppressed spirits, minds and bodies. I grabbed my mother's hand and said, "Mama, Mama, what is it?" And my beautiful, feisty Mother, oppressed in her own way, with poverty, meager opportunities and an unhappy marriage, said, "The Black Man has been down too long and He's not going to be down anymore." The spirit of that African-American fiery rage struck something deep within me—in it I could feel hundreds of years of collective consciousness of suffering and humiliation and sorrow. At eight, I made up my mind then that I was not going to be a part of anything contributing to that oppression. I remember thinking that maybe the decimating fire which cleared four city blocks would clear out the souls of those who were wounded, had been mistreated and things would get better. That was absolutely not true in my small Southern town. Business as usual resumed, with talk of being glad that that uppity civil rights preacher was out of the picture (often offered up by folks calling themselves fine Christians). But integration of schools of a sort ensued in Mississippi and flagrant racism drifted off the frontlines, while its fallout seeped like toxic groundwater into all pockets of our world. On April 4, 1968, that collective spiritual inferno sparked my yearning for a Beloved Community, although it would be years before I first heard the phrase. That blaze started for me what would be a lifetime of

yearning for the healing of our land, grounded in social justice and directing my career path toward community scale health, with a broad view of health and healing.

The legacy of the assassination and continued toxicity of racism still rolls across the South, especially Memphis, the poignant magnet of suffering. I contend that Memphis as a community experiences post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that offers a fertile platform for poverty, violence and disparity. Research on the stress-inducing impact of the perception of disparity and poverty will be reviewed, along with peripheral findings about human needs for connectedness. Recommendations for activating an assets-based model to overcome the community stress of this tragedy, eliminate disparities and share the abundance will follow. Memphis' "To Be" Beloved Community must be reclaimed by its people together. The time is now….

## A Toxic Gap

Memphis is embarrassing in it's gap between the Haves and the Have Nots and the media and public health voices bombard us with our deficits. Memphis has a high Robin Hood Index (measure of economic disparity). We boast more millionaires per capita (ranks 39 of all 280 metropolitan areas) than most cities of our size, yet more than 17% of our citizens live below the poverty level. This is not simply disparity, but a sacrilege. Shelby County in Memphis, TN has roughly the same incidence of infant mortality as that of Zimbabwe, despite the rich healthcare resources available but not always accessible to all. The fact that an African-American male between the ages of 18-44 has thirteen times the likelihood of dying of homocide and/or suicide compared to his European-American peers is simply unjust, and offers a strident call to eliminate suffering.

In light of these disparities, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others' view of a Beloved Community in Memphis seems farther than ever away from our reality. In fact, the notion of shared abundance and community well-being evoked by that vision seems so elusive that it evokes hopelessness and fatality in huge segments of our population. How is that we still live in this sad space, nearly 40 years after the sacrifice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

## Memphis' Unresolved Grief

Let's start by "Naming the Beast." Transposing the diagnostic taxonomy of individual psychiatric disorders upon our fair city, I'd propose that Memphis has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD—a stress-mediated disorder that represents the dregs of experiencing an event that falls outside of normal human experience. In the individual lexicon, PTSD occurs when a person has certain symptoms six months or longer, past the time that the traumatic event occurred. Symptoms include hypervigilance (scanning of the environment as a protective measure), exaggerated startle response (over-responsivity to a word, touch, sound, other stimulus), flashbacks of the event (akin to bad daydreams during which you re-experience the trauma) and impaired functioning in all settings. How does Memphis manifest these symptoms at a community level?

Memphians certainly demonstrate hypervigilance as evidenced in their self-imposed segregation and protective stances. Citizens here live in fear and close their ranks by flight to the suburbs or out of the county, with high fences and psychological separation of the concept of the Other. "Those people in that neighborhood over there are the ones who have the high infant mortality—they all must be on drugs." "Those people are obese and don't take their medicine and run up our taxes and healthcare costs"... or "Those people can't be trusted and don't care about those of us poor folks." The litany runs on ad nauseum. We are constantly scanning our environment to protect ourselves, psychologically and otherwise, to the detriment of all, and our increasingly myopic lives and worldviews show it. Dr. Greg Fricchione of Harvard's Mind Body Institute speculates that as humans we yearn for attachment that is primordially programmed into the emotional seats of our brains. As a city, Memphians must move toward attachment versus separation and altruistic love of our neighbors to save ourselves as a whole.

Memphis as a community also has an exaggerated startle response—any issue in the city prompts a knee-jerk reaction and instant reframing of the problem as a race issue. After Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death, every pinpointed problem became a race issue as blatant interpersonal racism was disowned and displaced in some systems, but became more toxic as it went underground and migrated to institutionalized and internalized levels (Jones, 2002). Finger pointing, blaming and other immature and unhealthy coping strategies are galvanized in milliseconds, in a pseudo-racism stance that keeps us from doing the real work of truth-telling, reconciliation, forgiveness and rebuilding that Memphis so desperately needs. Until we stop replaying this surface issue of racism and dig deeper to the underlying root causes of racism, disparity and violence, the wound will never heal. Rev. T. O'Neal Crivens says that the scar is where the pain has been. If there is no scar, there is still a wound. Memphis is one big gaping wound—still so raw that we can't even suture it together. We must debreed this wound with truth-telling and honest dialogue, as painful as it will be, for community healing to begin.

Memphis experiences flashbacks or re-enactments of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s blood shed on the ground of Memphis every day. In the past nine months, we have lost over 125 lives to homicide and violence, not to mention the line-of-fire, passive suicides of our AA youth to police shooting and slower suicides of drug abuse, alcoholism as well as simple sorrow and helplessness. The collective unconsciousness of rage in response to oppression still stings and blazes on our streets. Every life lost echoes the shots that rang out on April 4, 1968 and continue to resound more and more in our city. Lastly, our Beloved Memphis is not functioning optimally, by any community resilience metrics. We have high levels of bankruptcy, poor educational quality in essentially segregated school systems, incredible crime rates, sacrilegious health disparities and people dying for lack of prevention knowledge, screening and treatment within a stone's throw of our abundant, world-renowned medical centers. All is NOT WELL in the Soul of Memphis, as it shudders with pain and sorrow and a sense of being stuck in its past trauma and current inferiority complex.

A great deal of the bleak stress disorder of Memphis can be explained through new research plumbing the depths of the impact of unremitting stress on our organ systems, particularly how such findings translate to the landscape of those living in poverty. Here I borrow heavily from a brilliant piece by Dr. Robert Sapolsky (Scientific American, 2005). The research literature on the stressful impact of the perception of feeling poor or "less than" others has highlighted why a city like Memphis is ripe for violence, suffering, continued stress and despair. For decades, robust research paradigms supported that people with lower socio-economic status or SES, a composite measure that includes income, occupation, education and housing conditions, tend to manifest poorer health status. Earlier research theories posited that lack of access to health care or healthier environments and unhealthy lifestyles were the variables that accounted for this health disparity between Haves and Have Nots. But these theories have not been supported fully. For tantalizing alternatives, Sapolsky's review of the psychosocial consequences of SES explains health disparities: psychosocial stress, perception of poverty (feeling poor), and being made to feel poor, especially in comparison to those that live with more resources.

### Stress Responses

Our bodies resolve acute stress well: the mad dash across the street when a car is bearing down on you releases tension, discharges stress chemicals and gets you moving out of the way to boot. However, our systems are not designed to deal optimally with chronic and anticipatory stress. Allostatic load refers to a phenomenon manifested in the autonomic nervous system when human beings are subjected to unremitting stress: their sympathetic nervous system either goes in to hypo (under) or hyper (over) arousal mode, which impacts all organ systems (McEwen, 1998). Such constant mobilization of our bodies' response to stress increases the incidence of stress-related diseases in the gastrointestinal system and results in impaired cognitive, immune system, sexual and reproductive functioning. Additionally, this response increases the risk and/or severity of symptoms of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity (pandemics in Memphis).

### Stress and the Memphis Blues

In depth studies of chronic unremitting stress responses suggest than individuals are more at risk for stress-sensitive disease if the following variables are true. 1) they feel as if they cannot predict the duration and intensity of the stressor, 2) have limited control over the stress, 3) have few outlets for the frustration caused by the stressor, 4) interpret the stressor as evidence of worsening circumstances and 5) lack social support to cope with the stressor. These parameters sing the life of Memphians living in poverty, a new version of the Memphis Blues. Our prototypical single mother of three living in poverty manifests a disportionate share of both physical (chronic sleep deprivation, exposed to foul chemicals in environmental services work) and psychosocial stressors (child walks to school on a street where shootings occur every day, juggles two low-paying jobs with unkind supervisors who perceive her as dispensable). Our poor mother also has minimal resources to relieve stress and frustration (no spa

budget), virtually no control over external stressful circumstances, can't predict when the next stressor will occur (will my old car break down again today) and may be isolated from a social support system due to lack of resources.

The subjective perception of stress adds a "double whammy" within the context of poverty. Adler's research shows that people's perceptions of being a "have not" in a "haves" world is as much of a stressor as the objective reality of poverty. Our poor mother sees her neighbors driving big Suburbans, living with less struggles, seemingly oblivious to her everyday suffering. This subjective perception of feeling poor predicts as well as objective levels of SES the incidences of obesity and stress hormone levels, as well as patterns of cardiovascular function and measures of metabolism. [Could this account for much of our obesity and diabetes pandemics in Memphis?] Wilkinson's research suggests that the more unequal the income in a community, the more psychosocial stress exists for the poor. Higher income inequality escalates a community hierarchy and decreases the availability of social support. But, this lack of connectedness is true for both those living in poverty and abundance in our country. Americans have decreased their network of confidantes from three to two, comparing surveys done in 1985 and 2005 (McPherson, 2006). Again, these research findings sing the "Memphis Blues."

## Writing a New Song

But let's shift toward hope, assets and renewal, not the Blues. What can we do to debreed the wound and develop Criven's healing scar? How can we leverage the energy of the PTSD community symptoms to heal our Land (using the language of Rev. Dr. Kenneth Robinson)? How can we translate the research findings about stress and poverty and health to reclaim the Beloved Community?

Firstly, we can transform hypervigilance and fear/separation from the Other into hypervigilance to address the sacrilege of disparity in our Land and argue for an abundance model that benefits all. As people of Faith, justice demands that we tend to the suffering of our brothers and sisters. And, the science supports that tending to the whole helps us all as a corporate body. Community development and health economy research shows us that decreasing disparity in a community can decrease violence and crime. Let's re-write the language of the marginalized and under-served and offer that, when our community members suffer, we are all (rich and poor and in-betweens) marginalized more and more. Dr. Barbara Holmes writes, "..if the universe is as holistic and interconnected as we now suppose, then all of us are enslaved and oppressed by hatred and by our myopic identification of enemies." Memphis in 2007 embodies this. I may live in that big mansion on the hill, but as violence and poverty increases in Memphis, I become more and more closed off from the human beings around me. I see more of my brothers and sisters as those who will hurt or take from me and I clamp down on my resources. Wilkinson's research shows that decreased income inequality predicts better health for both the poor and the wealthy. Jesus knew that Universal Law of Abundance—we share our five fishes and loaves and we all eat. Conversely, if we hoard our 5 or 5 million dollars, nobody lives in Peace and Abundance.

The solution is not just a hand out to the poor—it's living in community, building trust and relationships. Rev. Dr. Gary Gunderson says it's not about access, it's about relationships. If we live in community and relationships, we co-exist and are connected/supported in networks of abundance in which we all eat and drink and have well being. Science supports this need for connection and trust. Social capital (broad levels of trust and efficacy in a community) is measured by whether people trust one another and help one another out as well as whether people think they will be taken advantage of by their neighbors/peers. Kawachi and colleagues have shown that high degrees of income inequality coupled with low levels of trust and support, increase community-scale stress and harms health. Marmot's recent research (JAMA, 2007) on differences in health status of Americans and British citizens suggest that even rich Americans suffer poorer health due to working long hours and obsession with money, as well as lack of social interconnectedness. So, let's flip these research findings to community health by building relationships, trust and connections. Building those connections and focusing on something other than money may be the salvation of both poor and rich Memphians. When you see the European-American millionaire grandmas of Memphis commiserating over how their back hurts with the African-American impoverished grandmas at Hope & Healing's heated pool, you get a glorious flash of what the Beloved Community looks like.

A second strategy for debreeding our wounds in Memphis is to leverage that exaggerated startle response energy to allow no smokescreen, pseudo-racism talk to divert us from promoting integrity among our leaders. No more blaming/talk along the lines of race allowed: if you are a corrupt leader, be you purple or white or brown, you are responsible for your behavior. We need to become colorblind to ethnicity and hold our leaders accountable for their behavior by promoting INTEGRITY. What a concept! Walk the walk and talk the talk.

Additionally, we need to divert that hypervigilance energy to open a dialogue about the real issues around racism and disparity in our city that involves all of us. Memphis has a core of social justice leaders who show up at every reconciliation, mediation, peacewalk, eliminating racism and disparity event, but this is preaching to the choir. We have to get the screamers and the shooters and the blamers and the churched and the unchurched of our community to the table to debreed this wound and "dialogue" it out, so the scar can form. Bleeding heart European-American folks are welcome, but we want the militants, from both sides of the fence. We want the men with their rags. We want the complacent "I've got mine" middle and upper-class folks. That's where the energy for transformation and constructive use of tension lies. We are terrified of that energy, for we all (idealistic, racist, liberal, conservative, Baptist, African or European American, Hispanic, Laotian...) know its power. We are afraid and guilty to begin to open that dialogue and fear the ensuing shame and rage that will flash up like the flames I experienced as a child in my backyard in April 1968. We must gather our courage to start societal change by intentional dialogue and work, which can be mediated through the faith structures.

This sweet (and possibly safer) spot for starting this dialogue may well be the faith communities. Starting with the faith communities and building trusted relationships with intermediaries who can "contain the flames" of these dialectical discussions may be the crossroads at which we can make true changes in Memphis. Methodist Healthcare and Congregational Health Network partnerships, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Gary Gunderson and Pastor Bobby Baker, may represent a vehicle for beginning and continuing such a potentially fruitful but frightening dialogue. Lest we be naïve about this, though, we know this is a 30 year job that won't be accomplished by a few community summits and happy talk. As Dr. Holmes writes, "Community is not just a love fest; it is also a site of dialectical tension." Real collaboration requires time, respect, energy, listening, negotiation and exchange of resources to build an "emotional bank account" of trust between groups.

What else can we do to heal our stress in Memphis? We can remember and make visible those whom we have lost in the collective rage and violence of our flashbacking landscape. Our **Not Even One** initiative with the faith communities aims to do just that—a community team post-mortem will be conducted on every life lost with an eye to prevention and intervention and healing. We can offer de-stigmatized, prevention-oriented help for dealing with grief and loss and stress through our faith communities, with pastors like Bishop William Young of The Healing Center and others, blending the best of pastoral, psychological and health promotion counseling principles.

Additionally, at a most fundamental level, we must lift up those who refuse to give in to injustice and oppression and simply keep on doing the work, for love and not money. The grandmothers of Memphis have saved countless lives and promoted integrity and God-Like behavior, even when it was not warranted in response to their experiences of unkindness/injustice/racism/elitism/unfairness. Let's make these unsung leaders visible with religious health assets mapping (ARHAP website) and empower the work that they have done and will continue to do, without applause and with minimal resources. Let's find ways to "seed" that love economy work. Along with the grandmothers, let's map the other religious health assets of the city (of which we have a lot…) using the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) model, which has focused on HIV/AIDS work in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The ARHAP group finds that the process of mapping gives those working in the trenches "fresh eyes" to see, become energized and feel appreciated for their labors—a glorious starting point for leadership engagement at its best. Prof. Steve DeGruchy writes that religion offers an integration of health promoting factors of both a tangible (compassionate care, material support, curative interventions) and intangible nature (spiritual encouragement, knowledge giving and moral formation). Memphis is loaded with those intangible assets, or what we (Morris & Cutts) have termed "spiritual capital." When I worked at Church Health Center (health organization that provides care to the under-served), I noticed how so many of these so-called "downtrodden" and poor patients seemed to have a lot more grace and faith than most. Many of these patients (usually older African American women) had been through tough times and experienced chronic pain daily, yet when you asked them how they were, they'd beam

and reply, “Well, I am fine and blessed.” These beautiful spirits often had seen children shot dead on the street, had experienced poverty and racism and abuse, but had transcended those problems. Harold Koenig contends that people living in poverty often do not have access to what we view as traditional sources of assets (e.g., power, money and status), but find their assets or riches in their faith by transcending their difficult circumstances. I offer that such deeply faithful people of Memphis (and we are rich with them) are the true assets of our city. So, let’s honor our faith-filled Memphians, so they can see what they have and shift their perception of being poor (in the traditional economic sense), but being rich in spirit. Remembering the research that says that the subjective perception of being poor is as tough on the body and mind as the objective reality, this represents a ripe intersect where we can change the corporate consciousness of the under-served to see their gifts and assets vs. deficits.

In summary, let’s make visible these assets in our “To Be” Beloved Community of Memphis, as envisioned by the leadership of Rev. Dr. Gary Gunderson and his team at MLH in Memphis. Let’s map and activate the positive networks and relationships found in faith communities in Memphis, to put back together faith and health, build on trust to create community well-being and leverage the intermediary roles in healing our city. Let’s build a spiritually-based blend of pastoral and psychological counseling with a preventive focus that can live in congregations and communities and be truly accessible via relationships and trust. Let’s use religion as an interpretive framework that moves Memphis toward the touchstone of the “common good,” while operating with cultural sensitivity and honoring indigenous intelligence. Let’s bring the affluent and poor Memphians together to heal our sense of disconnectedness, decrease income inequality and improve the overall corporate health. Let’s change the perception of the under-served to see their “spiritual capital” and other assets versus problems and lose that inferiority complex.

### Sing A Sweet Song

I propose that Greg Fricchione’s model of altruistic love and need for reattachment after separation due to wounding, injury or illness, programmed deep in our brains, functions both at individual and community levels and can be used to energize us to reclaim the Beloved Community. If you are afraid of the Other, reconnect: go serve them, get to know them, be with them, dialogue with them. If you think the Other is oppressing you and yours, reconnect: go serve them, get to know them, be with them, dialogue with them. You’ll discover that, as in the American Indian tradition, “We Walk as One.” The other delicious surprise is that science supports that connecting--serving, forgiving, loving and getting to know your neighbor-- is good for your health. And, too, faiths of all ilk dictate this as a path to God.

The Beloved Community may be nothing more than Jung’s archetypal artifact of what we humans can conceptualize only concretely and long for deep in our bone marrow…**reattachment with God or the Divine in Others**, at a cellular level. My sweet wounded Memphis and I ache for that, to change Memphis from the Home of the Blues to a new sweet song, **To Be Called Beloved**.

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**AWARENESS KEY TO REDUCING RACIAL DISPARITIES**
**Manoj Jain, M.D., M.P.H.**

**[Note: This is a pre-publication work. Please do not disseminate without explicit permission from Dr. Jain.]**

At our hospital in Tennessee, I saw my picture on the hallway message board, alongside those of other doctors, thanking us for our service. My Asian-Indian complexion set me apart from the rest - it's something that I am rarely conscious about in everyday life. It got me thinking: When I walk into the room - do my patients see me as a foreigner?

As I rounded the corner, it occurred to me that the answer was simple. When I walk into a room, I thought, how do I see my patients?

For the next few days I observed myself whenever I entered a hospital room to see a new patient. To my surprise, I realized that in the initial glance I viewed patients as an "elderly black man" or a "young white female" or a "Hispanic worker" - and all the baggage that comes with their race, gender and ethnicity. My prejudices had kicked in.

Unfortunately, the entire health system sees patients by race, gender and ethnicity, and it has a profound effect on how care is delivered.

The Institute of Medicine in its 2002 report "Unequal Treatment" cited some provocative statistics. Black patients, for example, tend to receive lower-quality health care for cancer, heart disease, HIV, diabetes and other illnesses. For example, black males are 40 percent more likely to die of cancer than white males. Black diabetics are 50 percent to 150 percent more likely than other races to receive a less desirable treatment such as amputation of their legs. These differences often persist even after accounting for age, severity of illness and delayed time of presentation among different groups.

How can this happen in America in 2007? It's simple. Social psychology shows that stereotyping is a universal human mental function. We use social groups (race, sex and ethnicity) to understand people - to gather or recall information about people from our minds.

The mental processing goes something like this: When I enter the room in which a patient is waiting for me, I do four things.

First, in the seconds before our initial greeting, I automatically and often unconsciously activate my stereotype. Thus a young Hispanic man is likely to be an uninsured construction worker.

Second, even though I believe that I do not judge people based on stereotypes, the data results show it is very likely that I do. When I see an elderly black woman I am more likely to ask her as compared to a white male about church as a support structure because I assume she is church-going.

Third, after the encounter, stereotyping affects how I recall and process information. A white man complaining of pain receives more attention than a Hispanic woman with the same complaint because I stereotype white males as being more stoic. We must remember that stereotyping is different from medical profiling based on disease epidemiology. A young black women with anemia is likely to have sickle cell disease compared with an elderly white male based on biology and racial background.

Fourth, my stereotypes probably guide my expectations and handling of the patient, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. An elderly black man is unlikely to understand the details of a diagnosis, I assume, so I spend less time explaining his disease and its consequences. Ultimately, such a patient is less informed about his illness.

The most provoking outcome of the black-white inequality was in a study presented by our former Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher. He estimated that closing the black-white mortality gap would eliminate more than 83,000 excess deaths per year among African-Americans.

It is painful to write these things. As health-care workers, I and many physicians I know try to be unbiased in our delivery of care, but the data show otherwise. As doctors and health-care workers, we need to work actively to recognize and overcome our biases.

Once I became aware of how I thought when I encountered patients, I was able to start changing. Though I initially saw a patient as an elderly black female, my forced reflection helped reduce the stereotype. As our conversation developed, the stereotype melted away. I began to see my patient rather than his or her social group.

I hoped that patients have done the same for me. I hope that they did not see me only as a brown foreigner but recognized me as a doctor keen to partner in their health care.

As a society the first thing we can do to overcome our prejudices in health care is to openly face our tendency to stereotype. Medicare and its contractors, quality improvement organizations (QIOs), are training doctors through a "cultural competency" program in which doctors receive free educational credits to become aware of biases in health-care delivery and cultural perception of illness. (I am taking the course.)

As for patients, I have another suggestion. The next time you see a worker at a fast-restaurant, ask yourself: What stereotypes did your mind automatically activate?

Awareness is the first step to change.

**The Beloved Community of Memphis, TN**
**G. Scott Morris, M.D., M.Div.**

Until recently, I was not aware that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about the Beloved Community, but I find it to be an idea very similar to the Kingdom of God. For many Christians, the Kingdom of God is a future event. But when I read the gospels, I find it hard to believe that Jesus meant it to be so. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was a mustard seed growing in our presence. For us, each person who chooses to walk the path of love and justice that Jesus blazed can experience God now as well as in the future. I must believe that Dr. King saw the Beloved Community the same way.

Therefore, I am confident that I have lived moments of the Beloved Community while working at the Church Health Center for the past 20 years. The challenge for people of faith is to grow the Beloved Community into a daily experience of joy.

I'll offer some examples of how I have seen the Beloved Community in action. The Church Health Center was born out of nothing. A Jewish Family Foundation gave a young Methodist minister $100,000 for start-up costs. A large, suburban, evangelical congregation gave another $100,000 to renovate a building owned by a liberal, inner-city United Methodist Church. From the beginning, either the Kingdom of God was breaking forth or a Beloved Community was being formed at the Church Health Center.

A similar experience has occurred as the medical community has stepped forward to volunteer its services to over 50,000 uninsured people. Primary care physicians have donated time onsite at our clinic every weeknight and Saturday morning for 20 years. Specialists have done thousands of free surgeries, simply because they believe it is the right thing to do. Physicians, who are thought by their peers to be mostly interested in financial reimbursement, continue to give their time and expertise, fully aware that they will not get paid.

Over the last 20 years, faith communities that can't agree on the price of a cup of coffee have found ways to be engaged in the ministry of the Church Health Center. Large southern churches have often wanted a more evangelical focus on the care of patients in the clinic but have been willing to continue their support despite uneasiness with having Muslims and non-Christians volunteer as healthcare providers. Temple Israel has embraced an openly Christian mission by seeing that the care of the poor is at the heart of Jewish faith, and the differences in theology with partner congregations has mattered little.

The most compelling evidence of the Beloved Community's presence can be found at Hope & Healing, the Church Health Center's wellness facility. When Hope & Healing was being constructed, Baptist Hospital donated the use of the building for one dollar a year, and Methodist Hospital gave $1 million for the renovation of that building. Just think, because two competitors decided to work together, not only do our patients have a continuum of care, but everyone in the city has access to learning how to live a healthier life so they can *stay* healthy and lead lives filled with joy.

Indeed, the programs at Hope & Healing are open to all citizens of Memphis – not just to the poor. All types of people have stepped into the waters of the therapeutic pool, wearing little to cover their bodies and nothing to show their status. They have embraced each other solely on the grounds of what binds them together as people – their physical ailments, the love of their families and their hope for the future. I am confident that this is what Dr. King hoped for when he envisioned the Beloved Community.

The question for Memphis is, “How can we make these glimpses of the Beloved Community the norm?” How can these lines that reach across social status and occur in the therapeutic pool be taken into the city? How can the generosity of donors and physicians move beyond the charity of giving to the Church Health Center and into commitment of building a community based on justice?

As a Christian, I am confident that the Kingdom of God is already evident if not yet fully realized. I also believe that the Beloved Community can be the city we wake up to everyday and not just a hope for the future. If only people of faith will embrace the vision, it is possible to live as Dr. King dreamed.

## Health and the Beloved Community
## Robin Womeodu, M.D.

As we pause to reflect on the life, legacy, and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I wonder what he would say about our city today. Dr. King was called to Memphis in his last days to confront the in-human treatment of the city's sanitation workers. The attack on their dignity, spiritual and mental health, and most certainly physical health was a stark contradiction to his ideals of a beloved community. Dr. King dreamed of communities where all citizens shared in the wealth of this United States.

Beloved Communities where poverty, hunger, homelessness, conditions that compromise health, lack of access to health care and stark disparities in educating our children are not tolerated. In addition, racism and other forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice are replaced by a willing spirit of brotherhood. That spirit he hoped would bind us together so that we see our neighbors as equally deserving, and where common human needs and desires are acknowledged. We all need decent shelter, adequate nutrition, basic health care, and hope for a better future. In the mist of blight and all that is wrong with urban American, what steps must we take today to build the foundation for beloved communities in Memphis and the Mid-South? It is important to acknowledge that one of the factors that inhibits the flowering of the beloved community is the notion that "we" will help "them." How much more effective could it be for all members of the community regardless of race, class, gender to be viewed for their gifts and resources? Hope flourishes best in an environment where dignity is preserved.

When I look at the current state of our at-risk communities the goal of realizing King's version of a beloved community seems daunting. We must overcome poverty, ravaged neighborhoods where a high- school graduate is an anomaly, where purchasing crack cocaine is easier than buying fresh fruit, where crime and gangs is a daily reality, where children learn to recognize and react to gun fire, and where single parent homes are the norm. We must also overcome communities where 30 years of age is accepted as old, and where truly being healthy is a foreign concept. Where males are at-risk for dying in their teens and 20's secondary to senseless violence, and where the number one reason for grade school absenteeism is asthma. Communities where everyone knows someone with AIDS or on dialysis after their kidneys have failed because of uncontrolled hypertension. Where having a limb removed secondary to the side effects of sugar or diabetes is eventually accepted with the complacency of a tooth extraction.

The beloved community envisioned by Dr. King must have the principles and concepts of health woven into its foundation. Dr. King's holistic view of social justice included an equally holistic understanding of health as a prominent domain. He noted that "of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and most inhumane". I believe if Dr. King was with us today he would enthusiastically endorse a comprehensive view of health, such as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) that says "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Some speak of “health as the economic engine” of a community, because without health one can not obtain education, and other necessary knowledge and skills to perform the required work to build and maintain a community. To supply continuous fuel for the engine we must address the health of all citizens – Those of us that have, and those of us that do not. We must pay particular attention to the health of the children and promote preventive health measures for citizens across the age spectrum.

Empowering citizens to practice healthy lifestyles and making provision for culturally appropriate healthcare services are minimum pre- requisites to foster improved health. We know that the top three actual causes of death are: 1) tobacco which is related to cancers, lung diseases, heart disease, and infant mortality; 2) poor diet and exercise which is related to cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, stroke, and other forms of vascular disease; and 3) abuse of alcohol which is related to liver disease, motor vehicle accidents, home injuries, drownings, fire fatalities, and cancer. In addition, HIV is devastating our communities, perhaps not as quickly as we feared in the early days of the epidemic, but it continues to spread especially among the young. That there are new medications to treat the symptoms of HIV has perhaps made us lax in developing prevention efforts that are effective in the context of teaching healthy, mutually respectful sexuality.

So this leads to the conclusion that the preponderance of health disparities which are differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific populations in the United States is not a given. This fact gives us hope that here in Memphis, and in communities across the United States we can reduce and eventually eliminate these significant disparities in the health of our neighbors.

The journey to addressing and eliminating health disparities will not be an easy one. We will have to deal with some difficult and ugly truths. We will have to accept the fact that individuals can only practice preventive health behaviors within the reality of their everyday lives. The reality is that social determinants such as family income, employment status, education, housing, environmental risks, geographic region, race, ethnicity, and culture are powerful predictors of health status. Poverty and the day-to-day struggle to secure the basic necessities of life, often preclude individuals from consistently practicing healthy behaviors. Lack of information is also a significant barrier. In my clinical practice, I have seen numerous patients who truly believe that they are adhering to the practices of a healthy lifestyle - Mrs. B who had a very nutritious diet, but who’s drink of choice was two two-liter bottles of Minute Maid Lemon-aid per day. As health care personnel, as media we are obligated to present consistent health messages that are comprehensible to those who most need to hear them.

Education is one of the most powerful social determinants and predictors of health status, and when large portions of the community have not graduated from high school and can not read a newspaper or simple job application you can not lay the foundation for a stable healthy beloved community. And you can not provide adequate fuel for the

economic engine that will allow all citizens to obtain basic human needs and to truly believe in hope for a better future.

What concrete steps should we take now? We must first raise awareness amongst all citizens, including our neighbors, educational leaders, corporate leaders, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations that health disparities exist in our communities. Many of us understand the depth and significant impact of these disparities, but many more members of our community either do not know because of share ignorance or apathy. We must pull this tragic story together so that all begin to understand the depth and breadth of these issues. Understand for example that in many of our communities up to 50% of the citizens live below the poverty level, and infant mortality rates can rival third world statistics. When you have not encountered and heard the stories of these citizens they become the invisible and we can come to peace with it by convincing ourselves that this is a rare story. Some of us feel it to be so rare, that we satisfy our need to serve by participating in missionary trips to far away lands when a 20 to 30 minute drive across town would reveal similar devastation.

Everyone must be at the table to effectively address health disparities. The communities' root causes of health disparities must be sorted and carefully weighed. Those entangled roots include the varied social determinants of health and individual/community preventable health behaviors. For the Mid-south and Memphis poverty, education, and poor diet and exercise top the list. But it is not enough to tell an individual/community that they must change behaviors since knowledge does not equal behavior change. The individuals/communities must be active participants in the evaluation of the root causes and crafting the solutions. Only then will the health disparity elimination roadmap be steeped in reality. This reality roadmap will get us started on the awesome journey to laying a foundation for a beloved community. As we deal with the root causes of health disparities we must address in concert the broken medical system. Our current medical system has issues related to high cost, low quality, lack of access, and disparity related issues. The disparities in individual/community health are separate from the disparities related to the quality of health care one receives when they become a patient. The real faces of health disparities are patients in our community who are stricken with life-changing strokes in their 30's or 40's, or having a heart attack which results in congestive heart failure in their 40's. And the many women, men, and teenagers diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Many times these individuals are the working poor who are uninsured, so the illness results in devastation for their entire family when they can not return to work. Now financially devastated they can not easily obtain necessary healthcare, especially post-acute care such as rehabilitation services after being discharged from the hospital. All these health disparities are preventable and we must have the will to find ways to reallocate more of our health care dollars to implement proven prevention strategies for all.

We can not attack every issue at once, so where do we start? As a nation and a community we have begun to address smoking cessation and we should continue these efforts with a special focus on preventing teenagers from initiating this addictive habit, since most serious smokers begin at this age. We must also address healthy eating

habits and lack of exercise by promoting behavior change strategies that meet people where they are. If you are drinking no water today, 2 to 3 glasses is a great start. And if you are totally sedentary, walking 10 minutes a day is batting a 100%. The obesity problem in Memphis and the mid-south affects all ages and ethnic groups. These basic health issues are pervasive and non-threatening to discuss.

Addressing other pressing issues such as risky sexual behaviors in young people has meet with resistance by some in Memphis, affectionately refereed to by many as the buckle of the Bible belt. So why not start at a place where we can agree in partnership with community organizations such as schools and faith-based organizations. There are significant efforts in place already around diet and exercise, but we must press on to continue to develop effective partnerships especially with our churches and schools. Since education is one of the most significant and potentially amenable causes of health disparities. We must scream from the rafters that Education is a Health Disparity Issue! The cyclic and destructive nature of not providing quality education to all of our children is a tragedy that we must thoroughly address on the journey to a beloved community. We must have the will and dedication to finding creative ways to educate all, not only the children that are receptive. We must also find creative ways to educate the child who did not have dinner nor breakfast, the one who can not focus after listening to gun fire all night, and the one who does not trust because they have been victims of constant verbal or physical abuse. Dr. King would probably agree that the true beloved community is a dream, but a dream worth reaching for. If not now, then when. We know what the problems are, but as Goethe said “knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.” We must do so that the children of our communities have hope for a better tomorrow.

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# To Dream the Impossible Dream: On the Contemporary Calling of the Beloved Community in Africa

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"What happens in the search for beloved community when the dream of a just society becomes abstracted from the lives and struggles of real people in real communities? ... The search for authenticity and freedom deracinated from concrete engagement spirals finally into chaos."

- Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community*[8]

Weaving together a series of reflections on hope in the midst of despair, hope that sees clearly the horrors of our world without finally succumbing to them, hope that calls us to go beyond what is broken in active anticipation of what shall be whole, hope that is about embodying the spirit of life in the face of death, this essay is addressed to those who bear responsibility for the Beloved Community, to which, when read against the grain of its failures, the history of Christianity points. We shall travel first by way of two great figures of history, one a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and the other an icon of fiction, and then by way of the path of the child, in order to ask what the Beloved Community may mean for the contemporary calling of the Church in Africa.

It has been my privilege as a young adult, as part and parcel of the thinking and practice of a wider circle of significant others who have given flesh to the notion of the Beloved Community in South Africa, to learn about Martin Luther King. He was mediated to me through people of similar spirit: committed Christian leaders in the anti-Apartheid struggle of the time; and leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa, who understood King's mission and significance to be global, and thus part of the solidarity of human beings against oppression and for freedom everywhere.

On this day, which commemorates his death in Memphis, when the hopes of a movement were shattered in the killing of this man and the shame of the moment took hold to further weaken that hope, it seems to me entirely worthy, in the face of the far greater contemporary shame that should take hold of the current leaders of polity and

[8] Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 130.

economy in the USA and in the global commons, to once again raise the possibility of dreaming what looks like an impossible dream. And so I link King to the man of La Mancha.

*The Man of La Mancha* is one of those stage musicals that builds upon great literary traditions, in this case Miguel de Cervantes' classic foundational novel, *Don Quixote*. The musical is perhaps best known for its widely performed song, "To Dream the Impossible Dream", from which I take my title. It echoes another foundational moment, the ringing "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King in Washington DC given on a summer's day of August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, to hundreds of thousands of people gathered below who represented or supported the Civil Rights Movement of which King is an icon.

In the case of King, there are many who would say that his dream has proven as impossible as Don Quixote's attacks on windmills proved futile; that the grand anticipations of a struggle that would lead to a truly free people for King or the recapitulation of the heroic acts of the legendary knights in the case of Quixote, are stuff and nonsense; that they are finally too abstracted in their idealism from the constraints of power and oppression (King), from the effects of humiliation and mockery (Quixote), from that which appears to leave things much as they are rather than as we would wish them to be.

And yet, to arrive at such conclusions would be to miss something fundamental and enduring, something of great theological and practical power through the ages, the call to transcend what is actually the case in order to concretely embody a vision of what is possible, indeed to anticipate the impossible as the ultimate drive of all that might be possible. It is a call to the "Nevertheless", to fearing no evil even though one walks through the valley of death, to refuse any final authority for those who erect crosses, to expect Life despite the Cross.

In the case of Martin Luther King, Charles Marsh shows that his vision never doubted the presence of that which, if we allowed it, would and could destroy that selfsame vision through lies, hatred, inauthenticity, fear, greed and self-satisfaction of those who were comfortable, of those who wielded the powerful institutions of society and organs of economy.[9] Perhaps less obvious in the powerful repetitive rhetoric of his famous speech, King offers a subtle but telling reminder of how things actually are: "With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope." Faith, not certainty, lies behind the call. Despair is a mountain, millions of tons of stone, against which stands the one stone of hope. Seemingly overwhelmed, hope here stands as the "nevertheless" against that which would crush all hope.

We should not be surprised at this, of course, King being a classic theologian of hope in many ways, in the sense of Jürgen Moltmann, who has insisted that his milestone work on the *Theology of Hope* is misunderstood if not read as intimately, dialectically, connected to the realization that the one who carries this hope, is *The Crucified God*. Here is no triumphalism, no cheap optimism. This hope is marked above all by the

[9] Ibid.

capacity, hard for human beings without an appropriate faith, to stare into the abyss and not be overcome. That should remind us, or at least it reminds me, having been old enough to live through the time that King spoke to, of the anthem of that time, the song “We Shall Overcome”.

Marsh recalls that this song of the civil rights movement, spread around the world by artists such as Pete Seeger and adopted by many who entered into the anti-apartheid movement at the time I was growing up, was not just about overpowering a particular form of oppression, but “about a coming over from the old to the new—a closing of distance between human beings ....”[10] Moreover, to sing this song was not simply to mouth a platitude. It was to enjoin and engender action; it was a call to embody the hope it expressed, to enter into a way of life that was counter to one that embodied death, hurt, pain and oppression. In theological terms, it is a song of the proleptic anticipation, in action, of the justice and peace of God on earth, as a matter of spirit and faith.

Perhaps, using Bonhoeffer’s language, we may say that it represents a call to costly discipleship. There is no cheap grace here. But there is grace. To return to Don Quixote, let us note what Harold Bloom has to say in his introduction to Edith Grossman’s acclaimed and magisterial translation of Cervantes’ work. The mad knight is at war with what Bloom calls “Freud’s reality principle”, the reality of death and of dying. “But,” says Bloom, “he is neither a fool nor madman, and his vision always is at least double: he sees what we see, yet he sees something else also, a possible glory that he desires to appropriate or at least share.”[11]

From one point of view, Cervantes depicts Don Quixote less as a madman than as a child, as one whose perspective on reality is not (yet) tainted by disillusionment, cynicism or despair, one who sees through the hypocrisies, manipulations and deceits of what we take as normal in the way things actually are. This gives me occasion to consider the child, and a child’s way of seeing. In a way, I would consider this the core to everything else I have to say here.

Children are surely what Gabriel Marcel called the biological basis of our hope,[12] a thought echoed by Marcia Y. Riggs, writing on the views of Mary Church Terrel, the first President of the National Association for Colored Women (NAC.W) founded in 1896 as part of the civil rights struggle of that era in the USA: “Children are gifts to the community who represent that community’s physical existence into the future as well as its theological raison d’etre, its hope ....”[13] But here we also go beyond the biological to the theological. In this striking formulation, we have a claim that children represent the

[10] Ibid., 98.
[11] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), xxiii.
[12] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Martha Crauford (New York: Harper and Row <imprint: Harper Torchbooks/Cathedral Library>, 1962).
[13] Marcia Y. Riggs, "African American Children, "the Hope of the Race": Mary Church Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women's Club Movement," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 379.

theological raison d'etre of the community. What on earth could that mean? Certainly not merely that children are important and must be properly cared for.

Perhaps we must then turn to a particular biblical image, one that probably lies behind Mary Church Terrel's view. People were bringing children to Jesus, and for whatever reasons, the disciples were reprimanding them, to which Jesus responds in indignation.[14] Let the children come to me, he says, to them belongs the kingdom of God; only those who receive the kingdom as a child will enter it. The double connotation here is telling: children will inherit the promise of God; children are our model for what it means to receive that promise. To be as a child is not a question of status but a statement about a kind of quality.[15]

We might say that this quality, following Karl Rahner, has to do with the mystery of childhood: that besides being the origin of the adult individual, childhood is also the beginning of an openness to God, in the specific sense of "the future which comes to meet one."[16] To enter into this mystery is to place a question mark before all that marks so much of adult life – the pursuit of material goods, the assertion of authority, the claim to know or possess the truth, the search for security, the defense of one's position, the cynicism that cages hope. As Dawn DeVries puts it, reflecting on the seriousness with which the "father of modern theology," Friedrich Schleiermacher, took children and childhood, "To be converted and become as little children is a hard saying for most adults."[17]

I would like to take this thought in another direction, to ask what it is about the young child as person that matters or, better, what it is that matters to the child? This is the clue that will add substance to the question: To what shall I be converted?

The best answer I know comes from my own teachers at Chicago Theological Seminary, whose book *The Young Child as Person*,[18] based on years of work with children from three to six years old – many from traumatized, damaged or impoverished homes – speaks of a way of being with children that tells us a great deal about what it means to imagine, to anticipate, to give flesh to, the reign of God in the world.

One fundamental way of being with children, of seeing as a child, is understanding. Understanding, in the sense meant here, affirms the child, prevents the child from experiencing alienation or rejection, draws the child into relationship, develops feelings, and processes them into meanings that engender a fullness of life. With increased

[14] The relevant pericopes are Mk 10: 13-16, Matt 19: 13-15, and Lk 18: 15-17.
[15] Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 37-39 passim.
[16] Mary Ann Hinsdale, ""Infinite Openness to the Infinite": Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 425, citing Rahner.
[17] Dawn DeVries, ""Be Converted and Become as Little Children": Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Religious Significance of Childhood," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 349.
[18] Martha Snyder, Ross Snyder, and Ross Snyder Jr, *The Young Child as Person: Toward the Development of Healthy Conscience* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1985).

power of understanding, the child becomes an agent of her own becoming, able to take into account the inner world of others (understands them), and thus able to establish a culture.

This is not any culture, in the ethnographic sense, but a particular kind of culture, one in which healthy conscience is grown, in a world often devoid of conscience. This is conscience that centrally includes

> "... the experience of appreciative caring, the understanding mode of conversation, participation in the formation of a justice culture, and integrity or 'truth work,' as well as encountering a personal presence and becoming aware of the highest and best."[19]

Conscience, in this way, is both about an accurate picture of the world, in respect of the limits and struggles of the way it actually is, and about "the call of possibility" (Heidegger).[20] Yet it is a conscience of integrity that respects 'truth work' only when it is embedded in a process of giving birth to a culture of justice. This is the key point; and it is well known to any parent who hears a child say "it isn't fair", and who understands that the child knows what is fair and what is not. To be fair to the child is to be fair without remainder, to act justly, at the same time that it affirms justice as a way of being. Properly developed in children, a justice culture means that children "experience the freedom to make decisions, to defend their integrity and meet other persons' integrities, to stand up for justice for someone else, and to experience themselves as a power with people."[21]

This is not idealistic speculation about what is possible with and for the child. I have seen it at work in the day care center within which these principles were embodied, with dramatic impact upon even the most seemingly troubled or alienated child. Were we to see this ourselves, among the children in our own families, or in the families of our neighbours, or even more radically, in the children of the "other" whom we fear or would make our enemy, things would not stay as they are. We would recognize the child, and through the child we would recognize the kingdom of God, and we would then know what it means to inherit it. This, the meaning of the personhood of the child, we might say, is what it means to embody a Beloved Community.[22]

It is important to recognize the eschatological character of what is being said here. The Beloved Community is not the worshipping community we call the Church. The Church, to be sure, Charles Marsh reminds us, "has an obligation to nurture and fortify the beloved community, even though it often fails in this task", but the Beloved Community as such "moves from its historical origins into new and unexpected shapes of communion and solidarity."[23] It has to do with all that is life-giving and life-affirming,

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[19] Ibid., 15.
[20] Ibid., 16.
[21] Ibid., 62.
[22] A similar teleological foundation to the notion of justice ("people living well together in just institutions") is given in the works of Paul Ricoeur, *The Just* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and, Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
[23] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 208.

something that "can be recognized in everything which ministers to life and resists its destruction."[24]

In this regard, it goes beyond the community of the Church as such, which is its placeholder and not its substitute. The arrogant view that the Church has a monopoly on the Beloved Community has no place in such a vision. All such arrogances, whether springing from misplaced certainties or reductionist claims for faith, are ironically a danger to the Beloved Community, for they will and do issue in hurt and pain inflicted on the other who stands outside of one's own community, and in doing so, they undermine precisely the inclusive justice for which the Beloved Community is a sign. Thus Theodore Jennings, in revisiting the thinking of Paul via a reading of Derrida, ends his investigation by citing Derrida's own penetrating formulation in *The Gift of Death* of the eschatological vision that Christians claim to know: "Something has not yet arrived, neither at Christianity or by means of Christianity. What has not yet arrived at or happened to Christianity is Christianity. Christianity has not yet come to Christianity."[25]

I would say that this is the perspective of the child, of those of whom Jesus spoke when the disciples asked who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven might be, and about whom he said, "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt 18: 1-5).

Until now, I have said nothing particular about the Beloved Community in Africa, my home continent and the place from which I write. There is no contextualization of what this might mean in what I have been claiming to this point, or at least, so it seems. In fact, however, everything is aimed at the same Church, the same kinds of responsibilities, wherever they are proclaimed.

Martin Luther King could speak to his Ebenezer congregation in Montgomery of life being a continual story of shattered dreams, and on the eve of his assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968, he would say that "The world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around."[26] Many in Africa would echo his sentiments in their own contexts some 40 years later.

My concern here, however, is not Afro-pessimism, a view that magnifies the horrors of Africa as if they are unique to the world while assuming, for example, that the horrors of Iraq and Afghanistan, of Bosnia and the Nazis, even of Montgomery or Memphis in King's time, are of a different order. My concern is the leadership of the Church, of those in whose hands the responsibility for holding true to the Beloved Community is given.

There are enough challenges in Africa. Its colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial states struggle with massive issues of governance, finance, and delivery in the context

[24] Ibid., 210. Marsh here is citing Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneaopolis: Fortress, 2003).
[25] Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul: On Justice,* ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 175.
[26] Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 50.

of equally massive asymmetries of power and wealth on the part of the global leaders of the dominant political economy of our time. We might echo here the words of Bob Moses, philosopher and leader of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee during the civil rights movement, who noted that "We were learning ... that we weren't just up against the Klan, or a mob of ignorant whites, but political arrangements and expediencies that went all the way to Washington, D.C."

But the arrangements that shape the global political economy are not simply external to African leaders, for many are part and parcel of the same ethos. We in Africa are no less ready to do things with another view on reality than that of the child, with another vision than that of the Beloved Community, one that does not serve the task of understanding the other, of defending the freedom of all to make decisions with a healthy conscience, of defending the integrity of 'truth work', of meeting other persons' integrities, of standing up for justice for someone else, of caring for the other who is not the same as oneself.

Too many leaders of the Christian faith miss this point entirely, perhaps even themselves acting in ways that undermine the possibility of the Beloved Community in their own search for power, authority, and goods, exercised just as cynically or self-servingly over others as anyone else with such ambitions who stands outside of the Church. I do not mean to accuse particular people, here, while I have no doubt all of us might be able to name examples of such leadership. Rather, I mean to call myself, once again, and whoever hears or reads this, once more, to the task for which we name ourselves, if we do, if we dare, Christian.

In the face of excruciating poverty and of growing inequality – the one sure mark of globalization as we currently know it – the call is profound. In the face of rampant disease and ill-health and of the psychological, emotional, and social ravages of HIV – through which we see that disease and illness also takes a preferential option for the poor[27] – the call is urgent. In the face of the commodification of all of life, including anything we might call sacred or 'set apart', the call is extensive. In the face of loss of the preserve of the common good and the sphere of the genuinely public,[28] the call is intensive.

The call to new possibilities seems like madness in the face of the actual. And with this sense of madness, we return to our intrepid knight, Don Quixote, of whom Cervantes finally wrote:

> "He did not esteem the world;
> he was the frightening threat
> to the world, in this respect,
> for it was his great good fortune
> to live a madman, and die sane."[29]

[27] Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 140.
[28] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001).
[29] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Second Part, Chapter LXXIV, 939.

The Beloved Community is not based on optimism. It takes the actual seriously, even as it seeks new possibility. To live like a madman or –woman in the face of war and the people who make fortunes from war, is to refuse these absurdities. To tilt at an economic system that views human beings as isolated anthropologically vacuous entities acting to maximize their own benefits, rather than as spirited existences in relationship with others seeking just institutions, is to deny these impertinences. To charge at those who exercise demeaning, oppressive power and authority over others, is to resist these arrogances. It is to hold onto a kind of sanity that is affirmed at the end. The end is not really and end, however. It is a kind of beginning that we are called to participate in proleptically, in advance, giving flesh to the spirit now, in the world, practically, concretely, incarnationally. It has to do with embodying the Word become Flesh, the Love that animates Life – but above all, with looking, in faith, at what is possible in full awareness of what is actual.[30]

If we follow the words of the gospel of John, this is a special kind of perception: When Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, the grave of all hope, crying that her Lord has been taken away, and that she does not know where they have put him, he encapsulates the fundamental truth of possibility in the midst of actuality: "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (John 20:15a). Followed by the moment of recognition.

In that moment of recognition, the responsibility is placed before us. What responsibility? A responsibility for the world, for our neighbour, for the earth, for the Messianic embodiment of Life abundant in the face of the forces of death, a Christian responsibility. One we would rather not have, one that in John D. Caputo's words, "we would, if we could, it could go unnoticed, forgo, omit, duck, dodge."[31] That is why the Beloved Community is not the Church, or any other institution of whatever faith, religious or secular, even though the Church, for one, is called to testify to the possibility of the Beloved Community, and its people are called to live towards the Beloved Community.

For the Beloved Community goes beyond our actual communities, chastening our tendency to confuse faith with knowledge,[32] our tendency to believe we possess the truth in our dogmatic formulations and institutional decrees when all we can claim is that the Truth must possess us, with no certainty about what we do than the certainty of faith, a not-knowing, a wager, a wager on justice, always within the horizon of possibility that transcends where we actually are. This is a justice that founds but

[30] On a particularly perceptive and valuable understanding of the relationship between the actual and the possible for Christian faith, see Douglas R. McGaughey, *Christianity for the Third Millennium: Faith in an Age of Fundamentalism and Skepticism* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998), 160ff.
[31] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 180.
[32] Ibid., 159.

transcends the law, that judges the law that is unjust, that holds law accountable, a justice that, in the sense of Jacques Derrida, is a "justice still to come".[33]

Yet this justice, like the Messiah, lies not in the distant future, but on our doorstep. Always on our doorstep and never as a possession in our home, our sanctuary. Calling us to wager our lives on the Nevertheless, to become the Beloved Community – which is to hold on to the impossible dream, to act where the way is blocked, to act in the midst of paralysis, to push against paralyzing limits,[34] to care about the causes of life,[35] to refuse even in dying to be overcome by death. It is to make theology practical, to understand what practical theology really is, a theology that "insists that the promise of possibilities is tied to concrete historical circumstances that empower the seeking out of liberating and healing opportunities in the midst of even the most devastating destruction, despair, and exploitation. ... [that] helps orient us by identifying our limits, illuminating our capacities, and insisting upon our responsibilities to seek justice and to walk humbly with our God."[36]

Theologically speaking, this is the truly human condition, this is what it means to say that God has become incarnate in human being, this is what makes us human.[37]

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[33] Ibid., 154. It is important to note here that Derrida has other terms that my be seen as practically synonomous to justice, filling out its content, specifically identified as gift, hospitality, and the 'wholly other'. Each calls for a transcendence, never emptied into actuality, of possibilities that we still have to realize.
[34] Ibid., 134.
[35] On this concept, see Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray, *Leading Causes of Life* (Memphis, TN: The Center of Excellence in Faith and Health, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, 2006).
[36] Douglas R. McGaughey, *Religion before Dogma: Groundwork in Practical Theology* (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2006), 13.
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