

Back to document



Two prophets, one soul

Schulweis, Harold M. Catholic New Times 26.2 (Jan 27, 2002): 4.

Abstract (summary)

[Abraham Joshua Heschel]--Polish immigrant, scion of a long line of Chasidic rabbis, professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and King--American descendant of slaves, compassionate protector of the oppressed,... Show all

Full Text

More than a coincidence of the calendar couples the birthdays of Rev. Martin Luther King on Jan. 15 and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jan. 11. Two men of different geographies, colours, creeds and theological backgrounds were joined in a spiritual kinship whose legacy addresses our own times.

Heschel--Polish immigrant, scion of a long line of Chasidic rabbis, professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and King--American descendant of slaves, compassionate protector of the oppressed, charismatic orator, writer and theologian--marched side-by-side from Selma to Montgomery to protest the pernicious racism that poisoned America and humiliated its African-American citizens. A host of white citizens, filled with venomous hate, surrounded the marchers, jeered and spat upon them. But as Heschel declared later: "When I marched in Selma, my feet were praying." It is important not only to protest against evil, but to be seen protesting. Faith in the goodness and oneness of God is powerfully expressed through the language of feet, hands, and spine.

Heschel and King, these two contemporary prophets, remind us to eschew the invidious "one downmanship" that compares one people's sufferings against another. Comparative victimizing is a divisive exercise that diminishes the anguish of our pain and replaces empathy with insensitivity. King and Heschel were united in the kinship of suffering and the shared vision of great dreams. Strengthened by the tradition of both biblical testaments, they defied the killers of the dreams.

Describing Heschel as "one of the great men of our age, a truly great prophet," King declared: "He has been with us in many struggles. I remember marching from Selma to Montgomery, how he stood at my side. ... I remember very well when we were in Chicago for the Conference on Religion and Race ... to a great extent his speech inspired clergymen of all faiths to do something they had not done before."

At that conference, Heschel reminded the assembly that the first Conference on Religion and Race took place in Egypt, where the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. Moses' words were: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'Let my people go.'" The Pharaoh retorted, "Who is the Lord that I should heed this voice and let Israel go?"

That summit meeting in Egypt has not come to an end. Pharaoh is still not ready to capitulate. The Exodus began, but we are still stranded in the desert. It was easier for the Israelites to cross the Red Sea than for men and women of different colour to enter our institutions, our colleges, our universities, our neighbourhoods.

"How can we love our neighbour," Heschel asks rhetorically, when we flee from him and leave him abandoned, congested in the neglected ghettos of the inner city?

After the assassination of King, Heschel said that he was "a sign that God has not forsaken the United States of America. God has sent him to us ... his mission is sacred. ... I call upon every Jew to hearken to his voice, to share his vision, to follow in his way. The whole future of America will depend upon the influence of Dr. King."

King and Heschel speak to our community in the diction of the ancient prophets. They dare remind us that while "some are guilty, all are responsible." That moral responsibility transcends class, creed and race. Heschel and King taught us that the opposite of good is not evil but indifference, and that silence in the presence of evil amounts to consent. They charged us to transcend the cleavages that distract us from the solidarity of our goal, and to publicly stand together against the twin evils of racism and anti-Semitism.

The calendrical coincidence of their birthdays calls upon us to resurrect the moral passion and wisdom that infused their lives. Our celebration of them offers testimony to the immortality of their influence. Their creeds, dogmas, and pigmentation--like ours--were different. But our tears are the same.

Indexing (details)

Subjects	King, Martin L, Heschel, Abraham J
People	King, Martin L, Heschel, Abraham J
Classification	9172: Canada
Title	Two prophets, one soul
Authors	Schulweis, Harold M
Publication title	Catholic New Times
Volume	26
Issue	2
Pages	4
Number of pages	0
Publication year	2002
Publication Date	Jan 27, 2002
Year	2002
Publisher	New Catholic Times
Country of publication	Canada
Journal Subjects	Religions And Theology--Roman Catholic
ISSN	07010788
Source type	Magazines
Language of Publication	English
Document Type	PERIODICAL
ProQuest Document ID	222791478
Document URL	http://proxy.ajula.edu/docview/222791478?accountid=40947
Copyright	Copyright New Catholic Times Jan 27, 2002
Last Updated	2010-06-09
Database	ProQuest Central

Copyright © 2011 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. - Terms and Conditions