



# The Portland Observer

# MARTIN

# LUTHER

# KING JR.

Special Edition

In celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 68th birthday, and in remembrance of his achievements

SECTION  
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## The measure of a man

### What Is Man?

The question "What is man?" is one of the most important questions confronting any generation. The whole political, social, and economic structure of a society is largely determined by its answer to this pressing question. Indeed, the conflict which we witness in the world today between totalitarianism and democracy is at bottom a conflict over the question "What is man?"

In our generation the asking of this question has risen to extensive proportions. But although there is widespread agreement in asking the question, there is fantastic disagreement in answering it. For instance, there are those who look upon man as little more than an animal. They would say that man is a cosmic accident, that his whole life can be explained by matter in motion, then there are those who would lift man almost to the position of a god. They would probably agree with Shakespeare's Hamlet, "What a piece of work is man! how noble in faculty! How infinite in reason; in form and moving how express and admirable; in apprehension how like a God; in action how like an angel! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals."

There are still others who would seek to be a little more realistic about man. They would avoid the extremes of a pessimistic naturalism and an optimistic humanism and seek to combine the truths of both. They see within man a strange dualism, something of a dichotomy. So they would cry out with Carlyle, "There are depths in man that go down to the lowest hell, and heights that reach the highest heaven, for are not both heaven and hell made out of him--everlasting miracle and mystery that he is?"

One day the psalmist looked up and noticed the vastness of the cosmic order. He noticed the infinite expanse of the solar system; he noticed the beautiful stars; he gazed at the moon with all its scintillating beauty, and he said in the midst of all of this, "What is man?" He comes forth with an answer: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor." Goodspeed, Moffatt, and the Revised Standard Version would say, "thou has made him a little less than divine, a little less than God, and crowned him with glory and honor." It is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis of our thinking together and our meditation on the question "What is man?"

Now let us notice first that man is a biological being with a physical body, this is why the psalmist says, "thou hast made him less than God." We don't think of God as a being with a body. God is a being of pure spirit, lifted above the categories of time and space;

but man, being less than God, is in time. He is in nature, and he can never disown his kinship with animate nature.

The psalmist goes on to say that God made man that way. Since God made him that way there is nothing wrong with it. We read in the book of Genesis that everything God makes is good; therefore there is nothing wrong with it. We read in the book of Genesis that everything God makes is good; therefore there is nothing wrong with having a body. This is one of the things that distinguish the Christian doctrine of man from the Greek doctrine. The Greeks, under the impetus of Plato, felt that the body was evil, almost inherently depraved, and the soul could never reach its full maturity until it broke loose from the prison of the body. This is not Christian doctrine, for Christianity does not see the body as the principle of evil; it says the will is the principle of evil.

So the body in Christianity is sacred and significant. That means in any doctrine of man that we must be concerned with man's physical well-being. It may be true that man cannot live by bread alone, but the "alone" means that man cannot live without bread.

Religion must never overlook this, and any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the economic conditions that damn the soul, the social conditions that corrupt men, and the city governments that cripple them, is a dry, dead, do-nothing religion in need of new blood. For it overlooks the basic fact that man is a biological being with a physical body, this must stand as a principle in any doctrine of man.

But this isn't the only part, and we must never stop here if our doctrine of man is to be realistic and thoroughly Christian. Some people stop here. They are the naturalists or the materialists; they are the Marxists; and they would see man merely as an animal.

Some years ago a group of chemists who had a flair for statistics decided to work out the worth of man's body in terms of the market values of that day. They got together and did a lot of work, and finally they came to this conclusion: the average man has enough fat in him to make about seven bars of soap, enough iron to make a medium-sized nail, enough sugar to fill a shaker, enough lime to whitewash a chicken coop, enough phosphorus for about 2,220 match tips, and enough magnesium for a dose of magnesia. When all of this was added up in terms of the market values of that day it came to about ninety-eight cents. Now, I guess, since the standards of living are a little higher today, you could get about a dollar ninety-eight for the average man.

This is interesting. Think about it. Man's significant, that means in any doctrine of man



The intensity of Martin Luther King Jr.'s many public speeches, have had a profound and lasting effect on African-Americans and Americans in general.

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