

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Walker

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munity, Elisha encouraged the community to keep faith in their nation.

Horizon of hope

Elisha's example powered Walker's message. At Princeton, Walker encouraged the black seminarians not to countenance a nostalgia for the past. In moments of deep discouragement, Walker said, distressed people tend to retreat into a romanticized past.

"In the jargon of the street," Walker said, "it sounds like this: 'Child, don't you wish it was like

it was back in the good old days...'"

"And yet," he declared, "not by any wishing or hoping or praying or anything else can we find any day when things were better. There was no such day!"

Walker proceeded to caution his audience against maintaining the status quo. Walker proclaimed, "Whatever dream of life it is we envision for our children, ourselves, our community, our church, we will never bring it to our fingertips unless it begins first with some initial risk."

For Walker, challenging the status quo was a



Civil rights and Union leaders sing 'We Shall Overcome' at the conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery civil rights march on March 25, 1965 in Montgomery, Alabama. Stephen F. Somerstein/Getty Images



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fundamental aspect of existence.

"The elemental character of life is one that is

the status quo, Walker offered the seminarians at Princeton a new vision of a political community.



Wyatt Tee Walker in Montgomery, Alabama on April 3, 1962. Afro American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Images

moving and dynamic," he said.

Walker closed his sermon by urging the audience to embrace hope-filled struggle. But he did not deny the desperate reality.

Instead, in the face of despair, he urged the young seminarians to take a risk of faith and build a future that has not been. For Walker, that meant "doing, trying, moving toward things which have never been tried before."

Hope in democracy

The lasting testament of black public faith is its affirmation of new possibilities during moments of deep doubt. Rather than relying on a myth of the past or upholding

"What I'm saying to you," Walker declared, "is that I have the ultimate faith that we are going to find a tranquility with justice in this nation, in this world. We must! And it is conceivable it could happen in our time."

Many Americans are angry with the state of the political system. And acts of racial bigotry and religious intolerance have become far too ordinary.

In such times, Wyatt Tee Walker's words can remind people to muster hope and keep faith with the possibilities of American democracy while continuing the struggle for a just society.



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