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Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: Martin Luther King, Jr.

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1/23/2008--On Martin Luther King day this week, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran a story asking a number of people, some famous, what they thought Martin Luther King Jr., would be doing today. I thought I would give that question a try. People forget two things about Martin Luther King, Jr. First, he was always a surprise. Second, he was, foremost, a Christian martyr. In terms of surprise, King always went where people told him not to go. In the early sixties, people said just preach the Gospel. Don't do civil rights. Especially, don't break the law and don't get arrested. Then, after 1963, they said, just do civil rights. Don't oppose the Vietnam War. Don't speak out for social and economic justice. But of course King did both. He died in Memphis, supporting sanitation workers in their struggle for a better life. So, today, he would be surprising people. In terms of religion, King died for the Gospel even more than for his people. I mean I think he saw things that way. So, today, King would be on a religious forefront. It is easy—and cheap—to say that King would have opposed the Iraq War. He would have been more sympathetic to people forced to live under tyranny than is the left today. He would, I think, oppose our tendency to refuse to talk with our adversaries. He would want us to engage Iran, rather than threaten. On the religious front, King would certainly be drawn to engage the killings in Darfur and other forms of violence in the world. But, I think he would be opposed to our demonization of Islam. We can be sure of one thing. King would be making us uncomfortable. He always did.