

The Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama: Interpretation and Application

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In this essay, I ask what a theological analysis of the civil rights movement what look like and how it might open up an interpretive framework in which theologians, pastors, scholars and activists are offered new lessons from the period. A good place to begin is with a basic question. I raise the question--which may appear crudely simplistic in its formulation--as a way of clarifying the two contrasting fields of discourse available to us. Did the church people in the movement believe what they said about God or did they use religion as an instrument of social reform?

More specific questions follow: Did Martin Luther King, Jr. believe that the universe came into being through the gracious decision of a divine Creator (as he said), that human dignity and the "sacredness of all human life" would be forever grounded in an ontological fact, and that this divine Creator had revealed himself in Jesus Christ, reconciling to himself a fallen humanity. "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. In Christ there is neither male nor female. In Christ there is neither Communist nor capitalist. In Christ, somehow there is neither bound nor free. We are all one in Christ Jesus."¹ Or did King seize upon Pauline language because he liked the way it subverted the claims of white supremacy? Did King believe that agape love had become incarnate in this same Jesus, such love that transforms the intent of human desire and community? Did he care about faith's integrity, its truthfulness and coherence? Or were his gestures to the church and Christian tradition always performed with a free-wheeling sense of irony? Did King believe that the "Word of God" fell upon him when he preached and when he spoke--"like a fire shut up in my bones," he said, that "when God gets upon me, I've got to say it?" Or did he indulge in a little "Pythian madness" as a clever means of revving up the troops?²

One could ask similar questions to King's fellow travelers. Did Andrew Young believe "God had changed the world through the shedding of innocent blood", that the unshackling of humanity's bondage to sin in the Easter event enabled the movement's own liberating energies?³ Or did the black struggle's idea of freedom emerge from essentially human aspirations, from

notions of history's inner drive toward cosmic beneficence? Did Victoria Gray really believe what she said about the movement being "the journey toward the establishment of the kingdom of God"? Or did she use eschatological language as a way of dramatizing the urgency of change? Was John Lewis's civil rights life a testament to radical discipleship? "I had to learn to turn myself over and follow," he once explained, "to be consistent and follow, and somehow believe that it's all going to be taken care of; it's all going to work out."⁴ Or was he simply giving voice to the presumption that time was on his side?

The questions are important not only because they raise issues critical to the role of ideas in the civil rights movements and its historiography, but even more for the fact that they force one's hand on theological matters great and small. What I mean is that the questions require us to make up our minds about the way theological ideas "functioned" in the civil rights movement. Was Fred Shuttleworth's life embraced "by the everlasting arms of Jesus", as he always believed, or was his sense of the divine "Yes" something like a psychic defense against feelings of worthlessness? Were Fannie Lou Hamer's prayers answered in the summer of 1964, as were those of her friends and family, when hundreds of student volunteers came south to work alongside local Americans in voter registration and civil rights organizing? Or was her piety a quaint though heartwarming expression of her desperation and desire? Similarly, when Mrs. Hamer emerged from a night of torture from a jailhouse in Winona, Mississippi, and said, astonishingly--"It wouldn't solve any problem for me to hate whites just because they hate me. Oh, there's so much hate, only God has kept the Negro sane."--was she bearing witness to the complex Christian tradition of cruciform forgiveness, or using the language of "costly grace" as a cover for her crushing humiliation?

These questions force our hand on theological matters. How has it come to pass that a social movement so thoroughly saturated with theological conviction has been so frequently deracinated by its interpreters from the living energies of its confessing communities? What has led well-meaning and politically-committed scholars of history to redescribe "the beloved community"--an idea that King would in some measure come to use interchangeably with the "Kingdom of God"--as a liberal, multicultural coalition of citizens committed to various strategies of social transformation for the sake of some universal notion of the Good?⁵ Can we show

appropriate respect for the women and men of the civil rights movement without reckoning with the substance of their beliefs?⁶ Does it not matter greatly whether King and others believed what they said about God, and if so, must not the question also be asked whether these beliefs about God have credibility as theological claims? And if we agree that the people of faith who filled the movement ranks believed what they said about God, do we not also have to reckon with the unsettling question of whether their beliefs are true or false, whether these beliefs are credible as theological claims, and whether a causal relation exists between those beliefs and the course of events that followed. Are we willing to say that the African American women and men who believed that God was working through his church and his children were deceived or mistaken, however well-intentioned or useful in social utility these delusions may have been?

So to rephrase the questions: If Dr. King believed what he said about God--again that, "God is love, because Christ is love...that God is just because Jesus Christ is just. And...that God is a merciful God, full of grace and glory, because Jesus Christ is merciful."--then does not intellectual honesty, if not decency, require us to accept these beliefs as essential to his life in the movement, if not to the existence of the movement itself?⁷ For if King believed that (one more time) "standing up to the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world", the "end of life" no less, then it seems undeniable that these beliefs and passions were in every way related to his civil rights life, and that, as King wrote of the prophet Jeremiah in a 1948 essay at Crozer Theological Seminary, "it was this trust in the unerring righteousness of God that was the basis of his personal religion."⁸ Apart from these beliefs, King would have acted quite differently.⁹

In other words, there is no such thing as a civil rights religion, no monolithic spiritual energy available to all who joined the struggle, emerging outside of particular traditions of belief and practice, no free-floating piety, no cosmic interconnectedness of undelineated or perhaps of loosely liberal Protestant origin. Rather, particular ways of thinking about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church framed the basic purposes and goals of the movement, to be sure, purposes and goals shifting in emphasis and meaning at different historical moments and in different political and social contexts, and purposes and goals no doubt supplemented and often nurtured by other philosophical and religious traditions. But the spiritual energies of the movement were born of particular forms of theological expression.

Consider Martin Luther King, Jr.'s first public address, when the twenty-six year old southern Baptist preacher cast the events of the burgeoning Montgomery bus boycott in a Biblical framework of meaning that proved decisive for the movement.

King: The Almighty God himself is...not the God just standing out saying through Hosea, "I love you, Israel." He's also the God that stands up before the nations and said: "Be still and know that I'm God."

Congregation: Yeah.

King: "That if you don't obey me I will break the backbone of your power."

Congregation: Yeah.

King: "And slap you out of the orbits of your international and national relationships."

Congregation: That's right....

King: If we are wrong, God almighty is wrong.

Congregation: That's right. [Applause]

King: If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth.

Congregation: Yes. [Applause]

King: If we are wrong, justice is a lie.

Congregation: Yes.

King: Love has no meaning. [Applause]

King: And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water.

Congregation: Yes. [Applause]

King: And righteousness like a might stream.

Congregation: Keep talking. [Applause]¹⁰

We do not find King speaking here of God by speaking of the boycott in a loud voice, as you might expect of a Protestant clergyman educated in a liberal seminary in mid-twentieth America: the social movement as the mode in which the divine idea comes to expression. Rather, we find King speaking of the boycott by speaking of God. "Standing up to the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world", he said, the veritable "end of life". Jesus was not merely a utopian dreamer--unless "we are wrong"!--but the incarnate truth of God enabling the church and its people "to work and fight" and to "keep talking". The movement appears in this sermon as a field of struggle between an already completed divine event--the promise of deliverance signed and sealed on the Cross--and the promise's fulfillment in history--the divine event crashing onto the streets of Montgomery. The movement appears as theological drama. King has yet to grasp all that will be expected of him in Montgomery or how much will be demanded in his remaining

thirteen years. Yet in the address at the Holt Street Baptist Church, a basic theological conviction can be discerned in these awakening days of the civil rights movement: "We are guiding and channeling our emotions to the extent that we feel that God shall give us the victory."¹¹ The beautiful chaos that America would daily see on the streets of Montgomery, the tens of thousands of African Americans walking to and from work in the gray winter light, the empty buses rolling through the capitol city, the mass meetings overflowing the black churches-- bears evidence of God's spirit taking shape in history, and in Montgomery, Alabama, of all places. "Be still and know that I am God."¹² The "strange new world within the Bible", to borrow the Karl Barth's phrase (whose influence on King we will examine later), gave the civil rights movement its inner sense as well as its ultimate point of reference. Indeed in one sentence alone--"We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity."--a host of rich biblical images is evoked--the disinherited of the land, the long night of captivity, the glimmering hopes of deliverance--each image as alive with meaning for the struggles and hopes of African Americans as it had been for Israel in the years of exile. King offers us a vista on his singular perception of the historical moment. Much more than "rhetorical strategy", "performative subversion," or an ideal of the reformist left, King rendered the civil rights movement as theological drama. "From that night forward," wrote Richard Lischer in his groundbreaking book, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*, "King and the black church community forged an interpretative partnership in which they read the Bible, recited it, sang it, performed it, Amen-ed it, and otherwise celebrated the birth of Freedom by its sacred light."¹³

Although such organizations as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Conference on Racial Equality (CORE) have often been described as the secularizing wave of the movement, a particular theological self-understanding had been articulated in one of SNCC's founding documents. In the staff meeting of April 29, 1962, members of the organization had resolved their firm commitment to the creation of "a social order permeated by love and to the spirituality of nonviolence as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition."¹⁴ To be sure, there were plenty of SNCC activists whose moral energies were sustained by other religious sources other than Christian or by humanistic ideals. SNCC brought to the civil rights

movement youthful energy and a bold, restless vision of social change, more impatient and edgy than King's, but still shaped by the Biblical narrative and the story of the new kingdom of peace inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Love was "the central motif of nonviolence," the "force by which God binds man to himself and man to man", that goes to the "extremes" in radical acts of compassion and forgiveness--"even in the midst of hostility." "Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt," read the statement, "[the] redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality."¹⁵ In the 1962 document, staff members further resolved their firm commitment to the creation of "a social order permeated by love and to the spirituality of nonviolence as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition." Such love as this would forge new social spaces and habitations, create an "atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities."

A theological analysis of the civil rights movement that brings to clarity the complex array of confessions, commitments and convictions is obviously far too ambitious a task for this essay, or any single study. In addition to a theological analysis of the civil rights movement, there is also another level of theological engagement--a more theologically constructive level perhaps--that seeks to clarify or explicate theological ideas by observing them in their concrete social settings. That is to say, the questions raised above also press the issue of how we interpret lived theological experience, the relation between religious appropriations of life and life's dense textures as it relates to the claims and beliefs of the movement community.

In any case, if we grant that these above questions should be answered on the side of faith's integrity, we are compelled to further recognize that the interpretation of "religion and civil rights" is not a matter of tracing moral sources of social action to various regions of civic piety or to representations of human goodness. Rather, what awaits us is the distinctively theological task of understanding the confessional details of the movement's convictions, confessions and commitments as observed in its language and actions, for the very specificity of these convictions, confessions and commitments have been largely overlooked by scholars, even among those sympathetic to the black church and the Christian tradition. This level of analysis, which may be called "lived" or "embodied" theology, would not be primarily concerned with analyzing the specific theological sources of particular social movements or of persons and people in

historical narrative; rather, it would ask how certain theological themes or doctrines may reach an intensification of meaning in social existence. Of course, this might also be another way of saying that in order to explain who "God the Lord is", we sometimes have to be willing to honestly tell the stories of what people have actually experienced.¹⁶ Interpreting the movement as theological drama presents us with a plotline that far exceeds the movement's significant political or economic achievements.

There is much exciting work ahead. In the present essay, I wish to focus on two dimensions of a theological analysis of the civil rights movement: the theological commitments and convictions of Martin Luther King Jr. (with an extended note on his relation to Karl Barth) and the appropriation of the movement as historical context for theological inquiry. I consider this essay a sketch of the work ahead, which I hope to develop more fully in the future in conversation with theologians, activists, scholars, and activists.

Martin Luther King, Jr. often described the civil rights movement's mission as the pursuit of the beloved community. "A boycott is just a means to an end," he said of the Montgomery bus boycott in his 1956 address, "The Birth of a New Age", delivered near the end of the 381-day protest. "A boycott is merely a means to say, 'I don't like it.' It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is reconciliation. The end is the creation of a beloved community...[and] the creation of a society where men will live together as brothers...not retaliation but redemption. That is the end we are trying to reach...The old order is dying and the new order is being born."¹⁷ In King's mind, the goal of political action informed by agape love involves nothing less than the creation of a new kind of social relation--a new social space.¹⁸

Of course, King and his fellow travelers in the Montgomery Improvement Association also wanted--and not only wanted, but intended and demanded--more immediately visible goals as well. But the strategic goals and the complex negotiations, demonstrations and confrontations required to achieve them--in this time of transition "from the old order into the new"--were constituent parts of a larger theological vision, parts of what King called "the great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom."¹⁹

Most scholars agree that King's use of term "beloved community" borrows from a

discourse fashionable in American philosophical and theological circles during throughout the early and middle twentieth century.²⁰ Still, King always kept a guarded distance between his own use of the term and its philosophical and cultural formulations. The American philosopher, Josiah Royce, who had taken the term from Hegel's philosophy of religion and revised it, talked about the historical realization of "a perfectly lived unity of individual men joined in one divine chorus".²¹ The dichotomy between divine and human would be fully overcome in the beloved community, so that the consciousness of God could be seen to be residing in the shape of community. According to Hegel, the consciousness of God in community would be a realized apprehension of the present time in its essence--the "Kingdom of reconciliation," he said in his 1831 lectures on the philosophy of religion.²² Hegel considered it philosophy's ultimate task to illuminate the shape and scope of this reconciliation and to realize fully it in thought. "[Philosophy] presents the reconciliation of God with himself and us with nature, showing that nature, otherness, is implicitly divine, and that the raising of itself to reconciliation is on the one hand what finite spirit implicitly is, while on the other hand it arrives at this reconciliation, or brings it forth, in world history."²³ And since this reconciliation is an expression of the "peace of God", "[p]hilosophy is to this extent theology," Hegel said. All opposition, as in the spirit's march toward a final reconciliation, reach its most developed social expression in concrete religious community. "In the Kingdom you, and your enemy, and yonder stranger, are one," wrote Royce in *The Christian Doctrine of Life*, "For the Kingdom is the community of God's beloved."²⁴

Not only Hegel's self-positing spirit but the whole tradition of nineteenth century historical optimism echoes throughout Royce's formulations. Kant's ethical rationality, for example, shapes Royce's own moral admonitions, albeit with a robustly American spin. Kant's imperative--"Act in conformity with that maxim and that maxim only which you can at the same time will to be a universal maxim"--is recast in language suitable for social reform in America--"So act as to help, however you can, and whenever you can, towards making mankind one loving brotherhood, whose love is not a mere affection for morally detached individuals, but a love of the unity of its own life upon its own divine level, and a love of individuals in so far as they can be raised to communion with this spiritual community itself."²⁵ The result captures the essence

of liberal Protestant ethical religion, the location of the divine-human relation in some pleasing modulation of human experience, in this case in a certain moral affection for universal community. Framed against its philosophical antecedents, the term beloved community shimmers with liberal hopes of human progress and perfectibility.

In more systematic theological form, as in Royce's book, *The Real World and the Christian Ideas*, the catalog of Christian doctrine is reconceptualized according to the basic axiom, "making mankind one loving brotherhood."²⁶ The doctrine of Jesus Christ becomes something called "the practical acknowledgement of the Spirit of the Universal and Beloved Community." Beloved community *is* the inevitable conclusion of the evolutionary and synthetic energies of the Cross and Resurrection. "Love this faith," Royce says, "use this faith, teach this faith, preach this faith, in whatever words, through whatever symbols, by means of whatever forms of creeds, in accordance with whatever practices best you find to enable you with a sincere intent and a whole heart to symbolize and to realize the presence of the Spirit in the Community. All else about your religion is the accident of your special race or nation or form of worship or training or accidental personal opinion, or devout private mystical experience,--illuminating but capricious."²⁷ All we need to know of God is discovered in ethical religion, the Kantian imperative slightly adjusted for church-goers in capitalist economies.

Historian Casey Nelson Blake, in his study of the period from 1915-1930, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford*, described the early twentieth century concern with beloved community as an intellectual attempt to rebuild "communities that engaged the self in the language and civic association of a democratic culture" in an era of corporate expansion and economic marginalization.²⁸ Philosophers and cultural critics such as Bourne, Brooks, Frank and Mumford spoke of "beloved community" as a regenerated American society in which all people could take part in the creation of social goals.²⁹ The present shape of things--however fragmented or frustrating--could then be judged from the perspective of the emerging new sociality, which itself would take the form of a common culture of lived experience--"the only possible source for genuine self-realization," as Blake said.³⁰ The beloved community would constitute an "American spiritual and cultural renaissance, grounded in a full understanding of human

experience," and likewise prepare the way for a thrillingly new democratic politics.³¹ A politics in which the individual reaches his or her full potential as part of a collective venture toward social harmony--here we find beloved community.

King's vision of "the camp meeting" trades on this philosophical discourse, and it also nicely illustrates the synthetic ingenuity of his theological imagination, his ability to bring into a unified perspective the two dimensions of his civil rights vision: everyday people gathered in fellowship in the free space of divine love. But unlike Hegel's famous synthesis and Royce's version, King preserves the fundamental difference between God and community, as one sees in his sermons and speeches. And how could he not? The Jim Crow South--like the history of the African diaspora--hardly yielded a theodicy, a cool assimilation of the being of God with the way of the world. Still, a unity exists between God and the world, but a unity sustained asymmetrically from the side of God's majesty--the great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom has been prepared by God. And for this reason, even the most forlorn southern towns and backwater hamlets could "become the theater of operations for God's righteousness."³² One might say, too, that the great camp meeting gives imaginative life and power to King's repair of the Christian tradition's Gnostic dislocations, the segregation of spirit and flesh, God and world, the life hereafter and the here-and-now. Herein, King stands in the good company of theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who waged war against the idols of race and blood in a different historical context, and who offered similar testimony to an integrated conception of God and the world. Christian faith and practice "puts us into many different dimensions of life at the same time," Bonhoeffer had written in *Ethics*, but without segregating the individual from the world, or the world from God.³³ "There are not two realities, but only one reality," Bonhoeffer wrote, "and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. Sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world....A Christianity which withdraws from the world falls victim to the unnatural and the irrational, to presumption and self-will."³⁴ The "forces of darkness", to switch back to King, "the iron feet of oppression", "the dark chambers of pessimism", "the tranquilizing drug of gradualism", "the dark and desolate valleys of despair", "the sagging walls of bus segregation"--have been defeated once and for all. The God who has spoken the decisive "Yes" on the Cross and defeated the "forces of

darkness" is the same God who fires the spirits of the "fifty thousand Negroes in Montgomery".³⁵

As I said above, King's use of beloved community was always permeated with the raw material of his own formative experiences in the southern black church. Richard Lischer says that the Beloved Community that King would "later discover in the writings of the philosophical idealists preexisted in the earthly community at the crossroads of Sweet Auburn."³⁶ King could never use the philosophical discourse without revision, for the philosophical discourse finally gave rise to a defense of democratic capitalism and its diverse modes of authority and operations. This is a point Eugene McCarragher makes in his recent book, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought*. "[P]rogressive religiosity--a mutation of liberal Protestant religion--ratified the cultural power of the professional and managerial elite," McCarragher writes. "Under this Protestant aegis of religion," McCarragher writes, "the 'intellectual gospel' baptized by liberal theology slowly degraded the authority of the Protestant intelligentsia and promoted a secular mode of legitimacy for the professional-managerial class."³⁷ Such naive legitimization of the prevailing economic and cultural powers could not have been more unfamiliar to the sensibilities and daily experiences of African Americans in the Jim Crow South--hence King's final ambivalence about the philosophical formulations.

Rather, in King's hands, an increasingly banal liberal abstraction was invested with theological vitality and prophetic urgency, so that the prospects of social change came to look less like a bland and bourgeois cozzying-up of the divine and the human and more like God's crashing into the human--a sudden and new social reality appearing quite paradoxically on the streets of Montgomery and Birmingham and Jackson. The theological defines the social, it would seem, at least if we take King's 1956 address, "The Montgomery Story", as any indication. King calls the civil rights movement a "spiritual movement". "We have the strange feeling down in Montgomery," he said, "that in our struggle we have cosmic companionship. We feel that the universe is on the side of right and righteousness. That is what keeps us going."³⁸ He would elsewhere refer to the Montgomery protest as a "spiritual struggle": "[We] are depending on moral and spiritual forces. That is the only weapon we have."³⁹ The protest was also called a "spiritual war", and this war--beyond the season of the boycott and whatever strategic gains it

would bring--must be have to be fought with the armor of God. In fact, King even called the Montgomery protest "a Christian movement", though his intention was not to exclude non-Christians from participation (even though there were no multi-cultural coalitions at work in Montgomery as would happen later in the civil rights movement), but simply to name it in reference to its specific sources: the church and its faith. King believed--and he shared this belief and this hope with the Holt Street congregation--that God was accomplishing a special purpose in Montgomery. "God is using Montgomery as his proving ground."⁴⁰ And King's belief and hope would become more pronounced over the time. "I feel that there will be a victory and it will be greater than any particular race," he said to *Montgomery Advertiser* reporter, Joe Azbel. "It will be for the improvement of the whole of Montgomery, and I think that is so because this is a spiritual movement depending on moral and spiritual forces."⁴¹

While King's use of "cosmic companion" and the morally-attuned universe in "The Montgomery Story" hardly amount to meaningful identifications of the God of Israel and Jesus Christ and seem to lack the theological specificity I am claiming, he proceeded in his 1956 speeches to situate these general religious descriptions in a distinctively Christian framework. In "The Montgomery Story", he does this with a slight deferral on the specificity, "Oh, I would admit that, yes, it comes down to us from the long tradition of our Christian faith."⁴² The cosmic companion of the Montgomery struggle is the divine "something", and this something may go by the name of Jesus, at least on Alabama soil, or remain an unnamed mystery--"there is something in the universe that justifies Carlyle in saying, 'No lies can live forever'"⁴³. Yet, even in this formulation, the Cross of Jesus remains central to the movement's vision, as well as to Christianity's integrity. "Good Friday may occupy the palace and Christ the cross. But one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B.C. so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name." The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus injects the Montgomery movement with inner meaning and power. "That is why we can walk and never get weary because we know that there is a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and equality."

However, when King gave the same speech at the American Baptist Assembly and American Home Mission Agencies Conference, in July of 1956, the slight hesitation, "Oh, I

would admit", is gone. The "something" is identified without qualification as the "great epic" of Good Friday and Easter.⁴⁴ He says, "There is something that stands at the center of our faith. There is a great epic. There is a great *event* that stands at the center of our faith which *reveals* to us that God is on the side of truth and love and justice."⁴⁵ I do not mean to say that the difference in emphasis between the speeches of June 27 and the July 23, 1956, indicates any change of mind on King's part, not in this short span of time at least. My purpose is rather to show that King understands the fading of the "old order" and the emergence of a "new age" as a pervasively theological, if not ecclesiological, *event*. "God is working in history to bring about this new age," he says. Thus, the stumbling block to our partaking in the great epic of resurrection and reconciliation is not racial division in America as such, but division in the Church. "[The] church is the Body of Christ. So when the church is true to its nature it knows neither division nor disunity. I am disturbed about what you are doing to the Body of Christ."⁴⁶ The new age will be a time when "men will live together as brothers; a world in which men will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks."⁴⁷ But the new age is not inevitability, built into the evolutionary code of human history. The brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, if realized historically at all, will radiate out from the fellowship of the camp meeting; this is the "broad universalism" discerned at "the center of the gospel".⁴⁸

In the July 23, 1956 speech, King cites the lines by James Russell Lowell, as he had in "The Montgomery Story", though now with direct reference to the movement and its strategies:

Truth forever on the scaffold
Wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways a future,
And behind the dim unknown stands God
Within the shadow keeping watch above his own.

King describes the "great epic" of the Cross as "the event" that *interprets* the non-violent direct action--"this is what the method of nonviolent resistance says to the individual engaged in the struggle."⁴⁹ And he describes the Cross as the event that *enables* resistance--"this is why the nonviolent resister can suffer and not retaliate." And he describes the Cross as the "great epic" that *activates* the mission of the church--its comprehensive retelling of the human story. No longer is the church solely in the business of saving individual souls from damnation (as in white

Southern Christendom) *or* of civil rights organizing, but it represents (one might even say embodies) the great event of the Cross by making free space for the worldly enactment of reconciliation with God and others. If "[s]egregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Jesus Christ," as King says, then reconciliation demonstrates to the world that "it is still true that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Negro nor white) and that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth."⁵⁰

Where then does the non-violent teaching of Mahatma Gandhi fit into King's christological account? As I see it, King describes Gandhi's astonishing sacrifices as gifts to the Montgomery movement, parables of justice, if you will, that stand beside and compliment the Christian tradition's own resources. "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation," King wrote in "Experiment in Love," "while Gandhi furnished the method."⁵¹ Gandhi's witness supplied the "Christian doctrine of love" with a strategy of social protest, just as Negro spirituals had at times nourished the soul of the Indian peace movement.⁵² In his "Six Talks in Outline," written for his 1949 Crozer Theological Seminary Course, "Christian Theology for Today," King, in his earliest written reference, mentions Gandhi in his sketches on pneumatology entitled, "How God Works Through His Spirit." Gandhi is counted among David Livingstone and Albert Schweitzer (and Jesus Christ) as individuals who "reveal the working of the Spirit of God."⁵³ "AS the circle is narrowed from the world to the Church and from the Church to the individual, the work of the Holy Spirit becomes more specific and intense," the young Baptist minister writes.⁵⁴ Later, in his 1958 essay, "An Experiment in Love," King made clear that although it was the Sermon on the Mount that initially inspired the Montgomery protests, the witness of the "little brown saint of India" and his "doctrine of passive resistance" helped sharpen the work and strategic focus of local black churches as the movement unfolded.⁵⁵ But King's commitment to nonviolence, while complimented by Gandhi's thought and life, stemmed from a different source. "I went to Gandhi through Jesus," he said. The "business of passive resistance and nonviolence is the Gospel of Jesus."⁵⁶

To speak of Gandhi's sacrifices as "parables of justice", as I have, invokes the unlikely ally of Karl Barth, who *a propos* of this description, in the late volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*, talked about certain "parables of the Kingdom," words and actions not directly

associated with the Christian proclamation but which in their particular coming-into-being become genuine forms of Christian expression. These parables have to do with "true words which are not spoken in the Bible of the Church" but which have to be heard as true in relation to the Word of God--true because they bear witness to the reach and majesty of the Incarnation--"in the lowest depths He has triumphed, in the supreme heights He rules at the right hand of the Father"⁵⁷. Parables of the Kingdom are possible because God rules supreme in the "depths" and in the "heights", and the majesty of God's reign overflows the church onto regions of existence otherwise unbaptized. The "sphere of His dominion and Word is in any case greater than that of their prophecy and apostolate, and greater than that of the *kerygma*, dogma, cultus, mission and whole life of the community which gathers and edifies itself and speaks and acts in their school."⁵⁸ Barth's formulation breaks with liberal Protestant notions of the essential divinity of the human by insisting that humanity derives its dignity precisely from the one divinity, the God of Israel and Jesus Christ, who invites sinful humanity into its saving love through grace. Barth says, "If we recognize and confess Him as the One who was and is and will be, then we recognize and confess that not we alone, nor the community which, following the prophets and apostles, believes in Him and loves Him and hopes in Him, but *de iure* all men and all creation derive from His cross, from the reconciliation accomplished in Him, and are ordained to be the theater of His glory and therefore the recipients and bearers of His Word."⁵⁹ Gandhi's words register the same kind of power in King's theology (as perhaps they do in Barth's as well), for the words of the little brown saint from India "lead the community more truly and profoundly than ever before to Scripture".⁶⁰

Therefore, in King's theology, the beloved community is the new social space of the Church wherein the "triumph and beat of the drums of Easter" invade the highways and byways of the Jim Crow South. This new social space is not shaped by a "religion of loyalty" (Royce) or by "the good life of personality lived in the Beloved Community" (Bourne) or even by the "social egalitarianism" of Jesus Christ (Rauschenbusch)⁶¹; the beloved community is established by the "*great event* on Calvary", as King exclaimed again in his sermon at Dexter Avenue, "Paul's Letter to American Christians".⁶² Although it is a regrettable, but undeniable, fact that this great event has been performed by white American Christendom as a "meaningless drama", still the love that

God is pouring out on the Montgomery movement--a costly but embracing love--is now revealing itself through the movement like a summons of grace. Mixing his metaphors, King also calls the great event "a telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time."⁶³

We must no doubt proceed with caution in comparing King and Barth, because Barth's crisis, or dialectical, theology was sometimes vilified and caricatured by King's mentors and sometimes written off as the austere piety of a fideist. In his Boston University studies, King also indulged in the fashionable stereotyping of Barth, and one should probably not expect anything less. King was a graduate student working in a faculty suspicious of the new European scene, and his academic language reflects mid-twentieth century Protestant American thought. Boston University retained many of the original convictions of the Protestant liberal tradition in its approach to theological studies. The Boston Personalist School considered itself to be a "species of Personal Idealism" that valued the human person as the "ontological ultimate" and personality as "the fundamental explanatory principle."⁶⁴ In this manner, a doctrine such as the Incarnation was understood not as the miraculous event of the Word made flesh but as a symbol offering humanity lessons about consummate personhood, will and devotion; that "only a person of holy love could do what God has done in Christ. As the Boston religious philosopher, John Lavelly, explained, "When Jesus says, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father,' it is doubtful that he is asserting that he is ontologically identical with God. He is rather saying something like: I cannot tell you anything more about God than by being my (best) self. That is, there is no other analogy for God than a person at his or her best and the best analogy is the best person."⁶⁵ This kind of blurring of the difference between the divine and human--and at the same time unraveling of the trinitarian nature of God--represents the very tradition against which Barth makes his famous protest, and against which Barth directs his idea of the event-character of revelation, revelation as the self-disclosure of the trinitarian God in time.

Hence, the question of Barth's influence on King's thought--or least Barthian resonances in his thought--is appropriate. Like many young theological minds, King was taken by Barth's shattering critique of liberalism. King had already begun to discern theologically the naiveté of liberalism's hopes, lessons personally evidenced in his childhood in the Jim Crow South, even in

the childhood of a protected middle-class boy. Just as the philosophical formulation of the beloved community seemed offensively optimistic, the notion of essential human goodness did not fit the facts of black experience. "Liberalism is ignorant--even innocent--of matters African-American children understand before their seventh birthday," Richard Lischer says.⁶⁶ And so, in his essay, "Contemporary Continental Theology," King praises Barth's radical project and "the almost complete collapse of liberal Protestantism" left in its wake, and this point--however guarded--is made all the more striking for the fact that King was writing the essay in Harold DeWolf's seminar in Systematic Theology.* Karl Barth and the "theologians of crisis", said King,

* Harold DeWolf was part of the formidable Personalist School, though not as well known as Edgar Brightman (who died during King's first year in Boston), nor as deeply invested in personalism. Still, DeWolf was influential in King's theological formation. His theological sympathies lay unequivocally on the side of the great German liberals, Ritschl, Harnack, and Schleiermacher, as seen in his definition of religion as "devotion to supreme ideals". [Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 58] Although DeWolf tempered his criticisms of Barth with charity--one does not encounter the kind of hostility running through the criticisms of American Reformed and evangelical theologians such as Cornelius van Til and Carl F. H. Henry--DeWolf made it clear that he parted company with any theology that diminished the importance of natural knowledge of God in the divine-human relation. Barth's theology, DeWolf claimed, issued in a confusing social ethic--"arbitrary", "unpredictable" and "historically irresponsible"--precisely because it belittled the natural. Having no stake in human experience as a theologically significant category leaves Barth with "no principles by which to guide decisions in regard to social problems, and what we do has no direct and significant connection with the reign of God which, in any event, God will bring to full manifestation in his own good time." [L. Harold DeWolf, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 168.] Barth's radical testimony to the prevenience of grace over all worldly reality finally diminished the integrity of the world, DeWolf charged, and encouraged sectarian withdrawal and political quietism along the way. DeWolf would have no share in this. "A healthy, vigorous faith, firm in its conviction of truth and aggressive in its God-given mission to the world, accepts without fear the hazards of maximum involvement in the world's travail, thought, and toil." [L. Harold DeWolf, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 189] Barth's praise of democratic socialism fell on deaf-ears among cold-war American Protestants. And Martin Luther King, Jr. was no exception. Anthony Dunbar's book, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959*, introduces us to an earlier generation of radical theologians in America who made a direct connection between Barth's God of crisis breaking into time and history and the form of the socialist movement. Dunbar laments the civil rights movement's unwillingness to consider racial inequality in the larger historical context of the southern radical campaigns against oppressive labor practices and social inequities endemic to market economies. Dunbar writes, "Martin Luther King, Jr. made the point in an address he gave to the final large gathering of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen just as he was beginning to rise to national prominence. 'I never intend to adjust myself,' he said, 'to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few.' Yet rarely did

were "calling us back to the depths of the Christian faith," warning us "that we too easily capitulated to modern culture."⁶⁷

To put the essay in clearer perspective, it should be pointed out that King's survey of the European theological scene in his "Continental Christian Theology" was less influenced by DeWolf's views than those of Harvard theologian, Walter Marshall Horton, particularly his 1938 book, *Contemporary Continental Theology: An Interpretation for Anglo-Saxons*. For this reason, King's survey leans toward a more slightly sympathetic treatment than would be found on the east side of the Charles River. Horton was one of the few north American proponents of Barthian theology and in 1928 had published his powerful translation of Barth's *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*. At the time a Congregational minister in Brookline, Massachusetts, Horton had run across *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (as the book would be titled in English) while browsing through the "New Books" shelf in the Harvard-Andover Library at Harvard Divinity School. Horton later recalled the decisive encounter: "[There] was undeniable exhilaration in rehearing and relearning that God is God, that he *will* will what he will *will*, that he is not caught in the trammels of the world he himself has created, and that man can produce him neither as the conclusion of a syllogism, the Q.E.D. of an experiment, nor the crown of a civilization." After falling under the spell of the book's "passionate and penetrating faith" and completely losing track of the passage of time, Horton resolved that never again would it be possible for his generation to "listen with equanimity to the teaching that an optimistic humanism is all that man needs to be himself."⁶⁸

King's encounter of Barth, though perhaps not as dramatic as Horton's, was decisive still, and has been understated by scholars. In *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, volume II and III, especially the writings of King's student years, there are found as many references to Barth as

King, or any other leader of the emerging black movement, call capitalism his enemy. Their struggle altered the fundamental characteristic of southern society, the second-class citizenship of blacks, but it set aside for consideration by future generations many of the historic demands of southern dissenters: 'land for the landless,' 'full and decent employment,' a halt to the invasion of carpetbag industry, the holding in common of 'all natural resources and all scientific processes,' and the 'liberation of all workers from enslavement to the machine.'" [*Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959* (Charlottesville: University Press of America, 1981), p. 258.]

to Reinhold Niebuhr. King likes what he hears in Barth--his penchant for overturning established categories of thinking and his serious reckoning with human fallenness and with the righteousness of God. "We in the Anglo-Saxon world," King wrote, "securely relying upon our vast natural resources, our highly developed science and technology, and our fairly stable social institutions, have been thinking and talking far too glibly about the Kingdom of God as of something that we might hope to 'bring in' by our own human efforts. Half unconsciously, we have been confusing the ancient hope of the coming of God's Kingdom with the modern doctrine of progress. Have not we depended too much on man and too little on God?"⁶⁹ King confesses that "maybe man is more of a sinner than liberals are willing to admit." Man should also admit that "many of the ills of the world are due to plain sin."⁷⁰ While it may be true that "the sinfulness [sic] of man is often over-emphasized by some continental theologians"--not only Barth but Emil Brunner and Friedrich Gogarten--King dissents from the liberals and insists that the word sin must "come back into our vocabulary" in full force. "The tendency on the part of some liberal theologians to see sin as a mere 'lay of nature' which will be progressively eliminated as man climbs the evolutionary ladder seems to me quite perilous." For "only the one who sits on the peak of his intellectual ivory tower looking unrealistically with his rosey colored glasses on the scene of life can fail to see this fact."

Over the course of King's lifetime, the deep wounds wrought by the "sinfulness of man" in American society intensified the idea of the beloved community theologically; in time it came to express with an even greater sense of crisis the eschatological in-breaking of God in history. (There is no evidence King continued reading either Barth.) In fact, according to Lischer, after 1966, King dropped the term "beloved community" from his speeches and sermons, preferring to stick solely with the "Kingdom of God". Lischer explains, "As King's social idealism was succeeded by more realistic appraisals of human evil, references to the Beloved Community gradually disappeared from his sermons, their place taken by the theological symbol 'the Kingdom of God'. On the basis of King's published writings and utterances, scholars have debated the question of the kingdom's this-worldly as opposed to other-worldly character, but they have not commented on the radical conversion implicit in the shift from the humanism of the 'Community' to the theology of the 'Kingdom'. The former carries overtones of utopian idealism;

the latter acknowledges God's claim upon all human achievements."⁷¹

I might add to Lischer's helpful insight by suggesting that King's idea of the beloved community was always different in tone and intention than its liberal formulations--for the theological reasons already stated. But Lischer is correct to say that the rhetorical shift in emphasis from beloved community to Kingdom of God echoes the shift from "identification to rage" which King made in the final years of his life. "Confrontation was the theological flip-side of identification," Lischer says. Identification with mainstream values--the hints of civil religion and American exceptionalism in King's middle years--gives way to searing judgment. Racism was as American as apple pie, as human as pride. No doubt, confrontation had never been absent from King's repertoire of proclamation and provocation; but after the riots and uprisings, after the movement had swept through the South without its revival call answered, and as the shadows of Vietnam began to cover the American soulcape, King dropped the inclusive "we" in talking about the movement's aims. He dropped the "we" of national redemption and social transformation--"to redeem the soul of America" read SCLC's motto--the "we" of the beloved community. The soul of America is unredeemable, King concluded, for a nation "born in genocide" can never be redeemed apart from the judgment of the righteous God.⁷² "Life is a continual story of shattered dreams," King told his Ebenezer congregation in March of 1968. A few weeks later, on the eve of his assassination, he lamented to the Memphis crowd gathered in support of the sanitation workers's strike, "The world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around."⁷³ The righteousness of God divides and sunders, full of fear and trembling. In these final speeches, Barthian crisis has surfaced in a particularly visceral form. The hour is late. The reconciling gesture remains unreciprocated. The dream has become a nightmare. And judgment falls on us all.

Conclusion

Such ideas offer a wealth of material for further consideration, and much important work lies ahead. Still, I hope in this essay to have made clear that a theological interpretation of the civil rights movement is not a matter of writing religious genealogies of moral actions, of civic piety or of representations of human goodness, nor is it a matter of attending to the non-material

influences of social activism. The interpretation involves the task of understanding the specific details of theological convictions in their dynamic particularity. In future discussions, it will not be enough to say that King, Hamer, Lewis, Young, Shuttlesworth and all their fellow travelers in the Spirit were civil rights activists influenced by religion, and that religious faith motivated acts of courage and compassion. Theologians, working together with historians and other scholars, will have to reckon with the meaningful fact that these religious persons believed particular things about God and that these beliefs create a new world within which all of life is beheld anew. We might then be surprised to learn that it is altogether appropriate for theologians to retell the story of the civil rights movement in the South as the story of the church.⁷⁴

Notes

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), p. 255.
2. W.E.B. DuBois cited in Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 21.
3. Andrew Young, *A Way Out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), p. 57.
4. John Lewis, Interview with the author.
5. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Desegregation: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999), p. 292-93.
6. In his book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, the Yale Law professor Stephen Carter observes the same indifference or disregard toward belief and its practices that we find in academic life. "[When] pundits discuss the work of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.," says Carter, "the only member of the clergy whose life we celebrate with a national holiday, the fact of his religious calling is usually treated as a relatively unimportant aspect of his career, if, indeed, it is mentioned at all." [*The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
7. King cited in Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 225.
8. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Significant Contributions of Jeremiah to Religious Thought," *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Volume I, edited by Ralph E. Luker and Penny Russell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 191.
9. These questions are not intended to psychologize theological commitments but to foreground them in a way that demands interpretive respect.
10. Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 73.
11. King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 75.
12. *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Volt III, p. 73.

13. Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 198.
14. "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (as revised in conference, April 29, 1962)," The Charles Sherrod Papers, file 24, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
15. "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," April 29, 1962. Charles Sherrod Papers, File 24. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
16. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 10ff.
17. King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by Clayborne Carson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), volume III, p. 344.
18. Richard King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 99. For an interesting discussion of the term's philosophical antecedents, see John E. Smith, "Royce: The Absolute and the Beloved Community Revisited," in Leroy Rouser, *Meaning, Truth and God* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1982), pp. 135-153.
19. King, "Non-Aggression Procedures in Interracial Harmony," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 327.
20. See Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, and Ralph Luker's groundbreaking essay, "Kingdom of God and Beloved Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.," in *Lived Theology in America: The Promise of Reconciling Communities*, edited by Charles Marsh and Tracy K'Meyer, forthcoming.
21. Josiah Royce, *The Christian Doctrine of Life*, p. 196.
22. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, volume III, edited by Peter C. Hodgson, translated by R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 372.
23. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, volume III, p. 347.
24. Josiah Royce, *The Christian Doctrine of Life*, p. 196.
25. Josiah Royce, *The Christian Doctrine of Life*, p. 201.
26. Another example of Royce's reconceptualization is the doctrine of Grace, which he describes in terms of the virtue of loyalty. Loyalty to community pulls individuals out of their isolation into social relation. Royce explains, "And the community to which, when grace saves him, the convert is thenceforth to be loyal, we may here venture to call by a name which we have not

hitherto used. Let this name be 'The Beloved Community.' This is another name for what we before called the Universal Community. Only now the universal community will appear to us in a new light, in view of its relations to the doctrine of grace. And the realm of this Beloved Community, whose relations Christianity conceives, for the most part, in supernatural terms, will constitute what, in our discussion, shall be meant by the term "The Realm of Grace." (125) from *The Christian Doctrine of Life*.

27. Josiah Royce, *The Real World and the Christian Ideas*.

28. Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 2.

29. Casey Nelson Blake, *The Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 118.

30. Blake, *The Beloved Community*, p. 121.

31. Blake, *The Beloved Community*, p. 121.

32. Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 124.

33. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 310.

34. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, translated by Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 197-200.

35. Cited in Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 123. Or as Bonhoeffer wrote from Tegel concentration camp in one of his final letters before his execution: "It is certain that we may always live close to God and in the light of his presence, and that such living is an entirely new life for us; that nothing is then impossible for us, because all things are possible with God; that no earthly power can touch us without his will, and that danger and distress can only drive us closer to him...In Jesus God has said Yes and Amen to it all, and that Yes and Amen is the firm ground on which we stand." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 391.

36. Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 20.

37. Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 15.

38. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 306.

- 39..... King cited in *The Papers*, volume III, p. 200.
- 40..... King cited in *The Papers*, volume III, p. 201.
- 41..... King cited in *The Papers*, volume III, p. 202.
42. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 306.
43. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 306.
44. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 328
45. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 328 (my emphasis).
46. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 417.
47. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 462.
48. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 418.
49. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 328.
50. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 462; King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 17.
51. King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), p. 17.
52. King, *A Testament of Hope*, p. 24.
53. King, *The Papers*, volume I, p. 249.
54. King, *The Papers*, volume I, p. 249.
55. King, *A Testament of Hope*, p. 17.
56. King cited in David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p. 75.
57. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961) p. 116.
58. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, p. 116.

59. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, p. 117.
60. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV/3/1, p. 114.
61. Cited in McCahharer, *Christian Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000):, pp. 14-16.
62. King, "Paul's Letter to American Christians: Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church," *The Papers*, volume III, p. 416.
63. King, *The Papers*, volume III, p. 420.
64. Paul Deats, "Introduction to Boston Personalism," *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, edited by Paul Deats and Carol Robb (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), p. 3.
65. John H. Lavelly, "Reflections on a Philosophical Heritage," *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, p. 272.
66. Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 53.
67. King, *The Papers*, volume II, p. 136.
68. Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), p. 4.
69. King, *The Papers*, volume II, p. 137.
70. King, *The Papers*, volume II, p. 137.
71. Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p. 234.
72. As Stanley Hauerwas has written in a fascinating article on King, "The crucial question remains whether Americans can ever acknowledge what it means to be a slave nation. That is what Martin Luther King, Jr. never forgot and what we who would follow him must remember." ("Rememebering Martin Luther King, Jr. Remembering," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, p. 147
73. King, "I See the Promised Land," cited in a *Testament of Hope*, p. 279.
74. A different version of this essay appeared in the volume, *Ideas and Civil Rights*, edited by Ted Ownby (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), and I am grateful to the press for permission to reprint sections of that essay.