

By L. HAROLD DEWOLF

Martin Luther King, Jr., as Theologian

A thorough study of this subject remains to be done. As I write the present essay, I am limited not only by the necessity of brevity, but also by a very short time between request and deadline. As a consequence it was impossible to consult any unpublished papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., and especially his Ph.D. dissertation which I supervised twenty years ago. When I moved into formal retirement I gave away most of my books and papers. Of major secondary sources I have at hand only *King: A Critical Biography* by David L. Lewis¹ and a prized autographed copy of *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Coretta Scott King.² Principal sources for this article are his four volumes published between 1958 and 1967,³ the last three of them represented in my library by treasured copies with generous personal notes in King's handwriting, and his posthumously published book⁴ in which Mrs. King inscribed an appreciative autograph.

The reader will find here an introduction to King's theological method, his teachings about God, Jesus Christ, the human being, the church and eschatology, some comments about important influences on his theological thought and a concluding characterization of his theology.

METHOD

His mind and heart deeply steeped in biblical teaching, King's thought and language show constantly his dependence upon both the Old and New Testaments. While he loves to quote from the Scriptures and his great speeches owe much to biblical language, he was no Fundamentalist. In the first sermon of his published collection he says, "The historical-philological criticism of the Bible is considered by the softminded as blasphemous."⁵ Such Fundamentalist method he blames for the common false opinion that science and religion are opposed.⁶ He does not fall into the common trap of supposing that all passages of Scripture are equally authoritative for the Christian. For example, in the name of Jesus he forthrightly condemns the old *lex talionis*;⁷ indeed this repudiation is an important element in his thought.

¹ Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971 (orig. 1970).

² New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

³ *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958); *Strength to Love* (Harper and Row, 1963); *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁴ *The Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

⁵ *Strength to Love*, 3. Cf. *ibid.*, 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

In contrast to both Fundamentalism and the Neoorthodoxy so popular in his time, he makes much use of philosophy in positive support of Christian doctrine. He employs theistic arguments of the philosophers;⁸ and he is fond of citing Hegel's dialectic as he insists on seeing the whole of complex issues and especially in coherently joining the two poles of biblical paradoxes.⁹ Even the philosophy of Karl Marx he reads with care, because, although he wholeheartedly condemns communism as incompatible, in theory and in practice, with his own Christian faith,¹⁰ nevertheless it deserves study both because it is so powerful in the present world¹¹ and because its theory contains elements of truth.¹²

King's theology was threshed out in a rare combination of serious study and hard testing in practice. As a doctoral major in theology he was devoted to his studies with rare self-discipline, a veritable scholar's scholar. In the years of his active ministry he continued hard study and disciplined thought. But he continually risked his life, his cause and his beloved family for the Christian faith as he understood it. It was precisely as he did so that he found his belief about God most profoundly confirmed and enriched.¹³

DOCTRINE OF GOD

Martin King was never tired of preaching the greatness of God, the ultimate power, creative force and governor of the universe. In the darkest nights of slavery men and women cut by "the rawhide whip of the overseer" and put on "the auction block where families were torn asunder"¹⁴ still maintained hope for the coming dawn. "Faith in the dawn arises from the faith that God is good and just."¹⁵ We cannot understand why there is so much evil in the world — though much of it has been chosen by human free will.¹⁶ But however powerful and oppressive it becomes, the person who truly believes in God can endure with hope, knowing "that the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate."¹⁷

This faith in God's ultimate power and good is our assurance that the universe is on the side of justice.¹⁸ Therefore nothing can drive us from our struggle to right present wrongs.

God is personal. He has none of the bodily and other limitations of human persons, but he is self-conscious and self-directed. "In him

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ E.g., Jesus' "Wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Ibid., 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 93-96

¹¹ Ibid., 93.

¹² Ibid., 96, 98-99.

¹³ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 134-135; *Strength to Love*, 141-142. Cf. *Why We Can't Wait*, 72-75.

¹⁴ *Strength to Love*, 49.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49. Cf. 101; *Stride Toward Freedom*, 69-70.

¹⁸ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 106-107. *Trumpet of Conscience*, 75.

there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart: *this* God both evokes and answers prayer."¹⁹

God truly loves all human persons. Love is in practice the most effective power we can use for justice and brotherhood. But the highest reason for loving even our enemies is given in Jesus' words, "Love your enemies . . . *that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven.*"²⁰ For by loving our enemies we become more like God, come to know him "and experience the beauty of his holiness."²¹ This does not mean that God is complacent and indulgent. He "is both tough-minded and tenderhearted. . . . God has two outstretched arms. One is strong enough to surround us with justice, and one is gentle enough to embrace us with grace."²²

God is both transcendent and immanent. "He is toughminded enough to transcend the world; he is tenderhearted enough to live in it."²³ Hence true religion is both other-worldly and this-worldly.²⁴ God not only creates and rules the vast universe; he also acts in the immediate present, to bring us hope and victory for love and justice in our darkest hours of discouragement. Here King speaks of particular instances in which God has acted to answer his agonized prayers and those of his people.²⁵ Prayer, however, is no cheap magic to relieve us of responsibility and work.²⁶ We must work as we pray. God is not an "Almighty Monarch who will impose his will upon us and deprive us of the freedom to choose what is good or what is not good." He does not compel the prodigal to stay home. But his love follows him and welcomes him when he returns.²⁷ King is a synergist, though his ultimate faith is in God.²⁸

CHRISTOLOGY

He confesses that the Jesus who died on Calvary was "the only begotten Son of the Creator."²⁹ This basic Christian confession is not spelled out in precise terms. The influence of Schleiermacher is seen when King speaks of Jesus' "unique God-consciousness" and in the same sentence he ascribes to him also a "never-ceasing devotion to God's will."³⁰ We are reminded of Albrecht Ritschl as King testifies repeatedly that we find God "in Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives"³¹ and adds,

By knowing him we know God. Christ is not only Godlike but God is Christlike. . . . If we are to know what God is like and understand his

¹⁹ *Strength to Love*, 141-142. Emphasis King's.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39. Emphasis King's.

²¹ *Ibid.* Cf. *Stride Toward Freedom*, 9, 62, 84, 137-138.

²² *Strength to Love*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Strength to Love*, 50, 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁸ *Why We Can't Wait*, 89.

²⁹ *Strength to Love*, 25.

³⁰ *Why We Can't Wait*, 89.

³¹ *Strength to Love*, 76.

purposes for mankind, we must turn to Christ. By committing ourselves absolutely to Christ and his way, we will participate in that marvelous act of faith that will bring us to the true knowledge of God.³²

Right here we are reminded of Jesus' words, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God. . . ."³³

It is often evident that the humanity of Jesus means much to King. Because Jesus was a man living among an oppressed people and himself persecuted, arrested and killed, King is able to direct the attention of discouraged, often abused and imperiled black followers to their Lord's example of unfailing obedience to God's will for love and justice. When accused of being "an extremist," he declares that Jesus Christ "was an extremist for love, truth and goodness."³⁴

In his last Christmas sermon, King spoke especially of world peace and he said, "Christ came to show us the way."³⁵ The work of Christ, as viewed by this great modern disciple, was to show us the spirit and purpose of God and at the same time the way in which we were to walk. Nowhere does King try systematically to analyze the whole significance of Christ's sacrificial death. But again he emphasizes the element of revelation. "Calvary is a telescope through which we look into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking into time. Out of the hugeness of his generosity God allowed his only-begotten Son to die that we may live."³⁶

By precept as well as example, Jesus is seen as the supreme teacher. His teachings and his life are uniquely one. He is not just another teacher, however. "Jesus is eternally right."³⁷ The context of this last statement concerns the desperate need of the nations to displace hostility and war with justice and love.

The love of which Jesus speaks, King never tires of saying, is not a mutual liking (*philia*) nor yet the often sublime aspiring love of the Greek philosophers (*eros*), but a strong, committed will to the other's good which is overflowing, creative and redemptive (*agape*), a powerful love which comes from God through us to others.³⁸

The way of the cross by which we are saved is no mere accepting of certain beliefs nor is the salvation only for another world. To walk in the way of the cross is to give oneself for love and justice, to account one's life as expendable for the sake of fulfilling the need of others, to suffer violence and never return it.³⁹ In the face of suffering, threats and repeated imprisonment, King declares, "To be a Christian, one must take up his cross, with all its difficulties and agonizing and

³² Ibid.

³³ John 7:16-17 (RSV).

³⁴ *Why We Can't Wait*, 92.

³⁵ *Trumpet of Conscience*, 75.

³⁶ *Strength to Love*, 134.

³⁷ Ibid., 41.

³⁸ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 104-105; *Strength to Love*, 39; *Where Do We Go From Here*, 37; *Trumpet of Conscience*, 72-73.

³⁹ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 179.

tragedy-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its marks upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which comes only through suffering."⁴⁰

DOCTRINE OF THE HUMAN BEING

Martin Luther King, Jr., lived and died before we had been made sensitive to the male dominance implied in much of our language. It is not strange that he employed the traditional theological terminology, using the word "man" rather than "human being." In private life he did much housework while both he and his young wife were in studies and she was excessively busy, but after that he assumed that he would be "the head of the family," and he *was*, even though both laughed about it and he treated his wife with deep respect, as I often observed in their home and as she bears witness.⁴¹ But what he has to say about the nature of "man" clearly refers to men and women alike.

His doctrine concerning human beings is solidly rooted in Scripture and is neatly summarized in his statement that "all men are made in the image of God; all men are brothers; all men are created equal; every man is heir to a legacy of dignity and worth; every man has rights that are neither conferred by nor derived from the state, they are God-given."⁴²

Our lives are beset with evil.⁴³ It is hard to understand why there is so much suffering and wickedness in the world which God created. But Jesus recognized the terrible reality of evils as the work of "an enemy." They are "not illusions or errors of the mortal mind."⁴⁴ There is great mystery here which we cannot understand, though we see much evil which is due to human folly.⁴⁵ God does not overwhelm us and destroy our freedom even to banish evil.⁴⁶ He gives men the power to choose sin and cruelty to others when they will. Yet "God's unwillingness to deal with evil with an overbearing immediacy does not mean that he is doing nothing."⁴⁷ Neither does even the worst of men's sin destroy the image of God in them.⁴⁸

THE CHURCH

The church is seen by King in the light of the purposes held by its early leaders. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" he addressed the moderate and liberal white clergy who had complained of his "unwise and untimely" intervention in the race relations of the city. He reminds them that when the early Christians came into a town the local powers

⁴⁰ *Strength to Love*, 14.

⁴¹ Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 91.

⁴² *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 84. Cf. *Stride Toward Freedom*, 190; *Strength to Love*, 45-46, 90.

⁴³ *Strength to Love*, 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

tried "to convict the Christians for being 'disturbers of the peace' and 'outside agitators.'" Yet "the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were 'a colony of heaven,' called to obey God rather than man."⁴⁹ "By their teaching and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests."⁵⁰ Unfortunately, he observes, not only does the church today fail to take such bold stands against entrenched evils, but "often it is an archdefender of the status quo."⁵¹ There are exceptions which he applauds,⁵² but the church as a whole falls far short of being the inspired prophetic voice God calls it to be.

He is critical of both white and black churches which fail to confront life in its totality or to welcome all who wish to worship. The white church has imposed a racially segregated pattern of membership,⁵³ as well as supporting an unjust social system. The churches of black people have tended to live on emotional excitement with little of substance or, on the other hand, to become proud of catering to an educated class, with "cold and meaningless" worship, "music dull and uninspiring, and the sermon little more than a homily on current events," while the people desire to hear about Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

Any such church "fails to recognize that worship at its best is a social experience in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their unity under God."⁵⁵ The true church must also preach the gospel of Jesus. "If one is truly devoted to the religion of Jesus he will seek to rid the earth of social evils. The gospel is social as well as personal."⁵⁶

In the whole community the church has special responsibility. "It is the voice of moral and spiritual authority on earth."⁵⁷ The church in America has shamefully betrayed this trust as it has "sanctioned slavery" and "cast the mantle of its sanctity over the system of segregation."⁵⁸ For such failures "the judgment of God is upon the church." It must "recapture its prophetic zeal or it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."⁵⁹

ESCHATOLOGY

Martin Luther King, Jr., often spoke about short-term and long-term goals of the civil rights movement. He confused neither with the ultimates of Christian hope.

⁴⁹ *Why We Can't Wait*, 96.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵³ *Strength to Love*, 47.

⁵⁴ *Strength to Love*, 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁶ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 117. Cf. *Strength to Love*, 121.

⁵⁷ *Where Do We Go From Here*, 96.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 96. Cf. *Strength to Love*, 97-98.

⁵⁹ *Where Do We Go From Here*, 96; Cf. *Stride Toward Freedom*, 207-208.

He writes,

Certainly, otherworldly concerns have a deep and significant place in all religions worthy of the name. Any religion that is completely earthbound sells its birthright for a mess of naturalistic pottage . . . But a religion true to its nature must also be concerned about man's social conditions. Religion deals with both earth and heaven, both time and eternity.⁶⁰

Coretta Scott King quotes from a sermon her husband preached in Montgomery, "The God who brought our whirling planet from primal vapor and has led the human pilgrimage for these many centuries can most assuredly lead us through death's dark night into the bright daybreak of eternal life."⁶¹ In his sermon "A Knock at Midnight" he says, "Some who knock on the door of the church are tormented by the fear of death as they move toward the evening of life. We must provide them with the bread of faith in immortality, so that they may realize that this earthly life is merely an embryonic prelude to a new awakening."⁶²

The perspective of eternity which he grasped prevented his "identifying the Kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system, a temptation to which the church must never surrender."⁶³ He thought that Walter Rauschenbusch had come "perilously close" to this error.

Yet King continually urges us to work with "every ounce of our energy," and with love, "to create the beloved community."⁶⁴ While maintaining "ultimate allegiance to God" and keeping in view his heavenly kingdom, Christians are to work constantly to establish justice and brotherhood in this world. For "man has a dual citizenry. He lives both in time and eternity."⁶⁵ Indeed it is precisely his heavenly citizenship which should give him direction and courage for his God-appointed tasks in present society.⁶⁶

INFLUENCES ON KING'S THEOLOGY

Near the beginning of this essay King's use of philosophy in theistic argument and in other relationships with biblical teaching was mentioned. In his preaching and writing the philosopher most frequently cited was Georg W. F. Hegel. His first acquaintance with Hegel's thought was in undergraduate days at Morehouse College. He began more serious study of the German dialectician at Crozer Theological Seminary. But it was under the instruction of Edgar S. Brightman at Boston University that his first-hand study of Hegel developed into a critical maturity.⁶⁷ Brightman once told me that he had begun to regard as incomplete any year in which he did not teach a seminar on

⁶⁰ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 36.

⁶¹ *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 105.

⁶² *Strength to Love*, 48. Cf. 86 and 134.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁵ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 207.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁶⁷ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 100-101.

Hegel or guide some graduate students in Directed Study concentrated on Hegel. Neither Brightman nor King accepted Hegel's metaphysics, social philosophy, or philosophy of religion. Both, however, were fascinated with Hegel's dialectical method of thought.⁶⁸ Regardless of subject matter, King never tired of moving from a one-sided thesis to a corrective, but also one-sided antithesis and finally to a more coherent synthesis beyond both.⁶⁹ This method protected him against both narrow biblicism and skeptical naturalism, over-optimistic activism and retreat into quietism, other-worldly escape and this-worldly bondage, individualism and collectivism, simple doctrines of man as sinner and as naturally good.

King's father had combined, all through the years, effective evangelistic preaching and strong personal leadership of the Atlanta black community in economic and political affairs.⁷⁰ George W. Davis, in his theological teaching at Crozer, had encouraged his liberal method, his warm evangelical spirit and his social concerns. But it was reading from Walter Rauschenbusch which gave the younger King theological understanding of the church's essential ministry both to individual needs and to social reform.⁷¹ Yet King thought Rauschenbusch too optimistic about social progress.

Reinhold Niebuhr helped make him aware of the great difficulties in basic reform and of the tendency for every reform to lead to new evils. But King rejected Niebuhr's "Christian realism" which had the effect of compromising disastrously with the world's evil, and even of defending the nuclear arms race. Neither the thesis of liberal optimism nor of Niebuhrian "realism" would do. King sought a synthesis and found it among the personalistic professors at Boston University, especially with Walter G. Muelder and Allan Knight Chalmers, as far as practical efforts at social reform were concerned and with Edgar S. Brightman and me in the philosophical and theological understanding of God and human beings.

David L. Lewis, in his careful critical study, curiously relates King's belief in "a personal God" to the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. I say "curiously" because King never speaks of Niebuhr in this connection and systematic thought concerning the nature of God does not appear in the writings of Niebuhr. On the other hand, Boston University was known in those days as the center of personalistic philosophy and theology and both Coretta Scott King and her husband attribute major influence in that direction to Brightman and me. Mrs. King writes of the studies at Harvard as "side excursions" and continues, "My husband was wholeheartedly committed to the philosophy of personalism of which Boston University was the center."⁷² King himself writes,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For an example, see *Strength to Love*, 1.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Stride Toward Freedom*, 19-20.

⁷¹ Ibid., 91-92.

⁷² *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 92.

"It was at Boston University that I came to see that Niebuhr had overemphasized the corruption of human nature. His pessimism concerning human nature was not balanced by an optimism concerning divine nature."⁷³ In the same passage he writes,

I studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. Both men greatly stimulated my thinking. It was mainly under these teachers that I studied personalistic philosophy — the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality — finite and infinite — is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.⁷⁴

This forthright statement should long ago have put an end to such speculations as those of Lewis and of Ira Zepp in which they have looked to Niebuhr or to Paul Tillich for the major influences and in the process have distorted King's own position.

King was stimulated by the thought of Tillich as I have been. But when he wrote his doctoral dissertation as a comparison of the conceptions of God held by Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman he rejected the basic positions of both men and thought through his own reasons for doing so.

He has sometimes been accused of being more of a Marxian or a disciple of Henry David Thoreau or of Mohandas K. Gandhi than a Christian minister. But such notions can seem plausible only from a great distance. Anyone personally acquainted with the man or his writings must certainly know better.

In his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" he states systematically and vigorously his reasons for rejecting Marxian communism.⁷⁵ I once heard him publicly state similar reasons to an avowedly communist questioner at Ford Hall Forum in Boston. Yet in his typically discriminating openness of mind he acknowledges partial truths in Karl Marx's critique of traditional capitalism and in the vigor of his attack on social injustice. While the cure which Marx prescribed turns out to be an especially oppressive totalitarianism, it does indicate the need for a synthesis beyond both the individualistic selfishness of traditional capitalism and the repression of the individual in collectivism.⁷⁶

Certainly Thoreau's writing encouraged King to include civil disobedience among his methods of bringing about social reform. The influence of Gandhi was greater. It is far from true, however, to say that Gandhi displaced Jesus Christ in King's allegiance. What King himself says of the Montgomery bus protest could be accurately said of his leadership in the whole nonviolent civil rights revolution: "Christ

⁷³ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 100.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Stride Toward Freedom*, 92-93.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method."⁷⁷

King's catholicity of spirit and method enabled him to draw into the movement under his leadership people of many religious and philosophical commitments. He writes of the "divine dimension" of power which he experienced in the bus protest and is willing to describe it in terms used by various others for this supra-human creative power at work in the world. He includes the terms of Alfred N. Whitehead, Henry N. Wieman and Paul Tillich, though he adhered to none of their systems.⁷⁸ Even more eclectically he writes, "Love is the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality," and speaks of this as a "Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality."⁷⁹ However, when he goes on to spell it out in fuller summation he turns to the First Letter of John in the New Testament.⁸⁰

KING'S THEOLOGY CHARACTERIZED

David L. Lewis, while acknowledging that Martin Luther King, Jr. was "highly competent, . . . highly sensitive and intelligent, highly competent scholastically, capable of occasional insight bordering on genius," nevertheless insists that "his intelligence was essentially derivative" and that he "lacked the comprehensive critical apparatus and the inspired vision that bless good philosophers."⁸¹ To this somewhat patronizing comment I would respond that (1) all modern theology which is competent is "essentially derivative"; (2) first-rate theologians and philosophers devote many years to mastering historical and contemporary thought before creating systems partially new and King was assassinated when he was only 39; and (3) immediately after achieving his doctorate he was thrust into such pressure of responsibility, peril, and incessant work putting his theology into practice, that he had little time for refining and systematizing his thought or for speculating further on unresolved problems like the problem of evil or the dialectic of divine destiny and human freedom. It was only by his special genius that he was able to state with precision and systematic coherence so much of theological thought as can be found in his writings.

At nearly all points his system of positive theological belief was identical with mine and occasionally I find his language following closely the special terms of my own lectures and writings. The main original theological contribution of his tragically shortened career was his remarkably consistent translating of this theology into action. In this process he related his theological beliefs in an authentic and original way to various social theories and movements.

He was evangelical in the true sense, far from a rigid and socially

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-70. Cf. 106-107.

⁷⁹ *Where Do We Go From Here*, 190.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

⁸¹ *King: A Critical Biography*, 45.

conservative Fundamentalism but equally far from those liberal theologies which have lost the passion for sharing an obedient faith in Jesus Christ. He was especially liberal in the catholicity of his welcome to persons and ideas of many traditions so that at times he seemed about to move into syncretism. But always he stopped short of that by his hard-headed critical testing of ideas and his single-minded commitment to Christ.

He had a personal dream which he shared with me for the last time near the end of his life, that he would some day before long be able to settle down into the scholarly life of a professor of theology — and he had been offered a number of suitable positions. He said, however, that for the immediate future he could not pursue that course without casting himself in the role of a deserter from the struggle in which he was engaged.

If he had chosen the halls of academia I have no doubt he would have become one of the most eminent Christian theologians of his generation. Instead he gave the world an unequalled example of Christian theology — catholic, critical, evangelical, related to all of life — in passionately committed, wholehearted, and effective action.

