

By OTIS TURNER

Nonviolence and the Politics of Liberation

I. THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF KING'S NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT.

While one can isolate several theological themes in the philosophy of King, three in particular are significant for this investigation, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, and the problem of sin and evil. One's understanding of God shapes his understanding of man and likewise the nature of the God/man relationship. The doctrine of sin and evil attempts to explain the existence of forces which interfere with the God/man relationship. Consequently one's understanding of the nature of evil influences his understanding of man and the nature of God. These three themes are interrelated in King. First we will deal with the doctrine of God.

A. *Doctrine of God.*

To begin with, King assumes that the world is no cosmic accident. It is the work of a personal God who is the ground of all reality and the moral principle of the universe. King says that "The universe, because this divine power is at the center, must have a moral order to it — it must involve certain principles that are themselves right and good."¹ The moral order of the universe and the principles therein pervade all creation. The key to understanding the nature of the moral order is through an understanding of the nature of God. King's understanding of God is articulated in terms of what he calls the principle of harmony. The principle means that truth is found in a creative synthesis in which opposites are held in fruitful harmony. Hegel believes that truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two.² God in King's thought is a creative synthesis of opposites held in fruitful harmony. Love and justice are the two primary ingredients King holds in a creative synthesis in the nature of God. He uses the word toughmindedness for the justice of God and tenderheartedness for the love of God. "The greatness of our God lies in the fact that He is both toughminded and tenderhearted."³ The toughmindedness of God is seen in his wrath and justice. His tenderheartedness is reflected in His love and grace.⁴ Neither love nor justice alone describe the nature of God. Were He merely just He would be a cold passionless despot, "like Aristotle's 'unmoved mover,' self-loving but not other-loving."⁵ Likewise, if God were just loving He would be an impotent sentimental God who could

¹ William R. Miller, *Martin Luther King* (N.Y.: Weybright and Talley, 1968), p. 18.

² M. L. King, *Strength to Love* (N. Y.: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1964), p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

not control His universe. "He would be like H. G. Wells' lovable God in *God The Invisible King*, who is strongly desirous of making a good world, but finds himself helpless before the surging powers of evil.⁶ The critical point King makes is that love without justice or justice without love is fundamentally inadequate. One without the other leads to conditions which fail to meet the needs of human existence. Through a harmony of toughmindedness (justice), which alone leads to depotism, and tenderheartedness (love), which alone leads to impotence and weakness, King comes out with a conception of God which makes Him tough enough to transcend the world and control it, yet tender and loving enough to live in it. A God whose essential nature is a creative synthesis of love and justice meets the needs of the human condition. Man needs a loving God to care for him and a firm and just God to deal with the forces of evil.

King believes in a powerful and loving God, to be sure. But the power of God does not negate an element of freedom which King attributes to man. While man needs a powerful and loving God, this does not mean that God will do everything for him. King is quite emphatic on this point. He is critical of Luther's idea of justification by faith alone because he feels that Luther makes man too dependent on God.

The real weakness of the idea that God will do everything is its false conception of both God and man. It makes God so absolutely sovereign and man so absolutely depraved that he can do nothing but wait on God. It sees the world as so contaminated with sin that God totally transcends it and touches it only here and there through mighty invasions. This view ends up with such a pessimism concerning human nature that it leaves man little more than a worm crawling through the morass of an evil world.⁷

King's interpretation of the notion of justification by faith alone is particularly significant for the struggle for black liberation. King is not as opposed to the notion of justification by faith as it appears. The idea that God will solve all problems while man does nothing is the point King wants to refute. It is significant for black people to have strong faith in God. But that faith must translate into social action. King makes man a participant in the process of salvation. In so doing he affirms the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man. King states it this way:

"We must surely affirm the majesty and sovereignty of God, but this should not lead us to believe that God is 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."⁸

King is equally critical of the view that man has within his own power the key to his salvation. This notion makes man his own god

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

and reduces God to a figment of man's imagination. The answer to the problem lies neither in a powerful God who does everything, nor with man who achieves his own salvation. The answer, as King sees it, lies in the principle of harmony which reconciles God and man. The principle of harmony reveals our fallacy in thinking about God. It corrects our lopsided theology which stresses the utter hopelessness of this world and calls upon man to concentrate upon preparing his soul for the world to come.⁹ A religion which concentrates upon the world to come ignores the need for social reform.

In the case of black oppression, the most usable resources available to the black community are the black church and black educational institutions. To a large degree, however, the black church has been and still remains the major staging ground for black protest aimed at social reform. This means that social reform has been and must remain an integral part of the black religious experience. King does not delete the idea of salvation. He makes man a partner in the redemptive process. God is not an "omnipotent czar who makes all decisions for his subjects. . . ." ¹⁰ He is the father who blesses his children only with the blessing they are willing to receive. Social reform is not something God will impose on black people. But He will bless them with it if they are willing to receive it. Man's willingness implies responsibility to act on behalf of social reform. This makes him a necessary participant in social reform, not just one who accepts it. Black religion must translate into social action, because "Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion."¹¹ Salvation only comes through man and God working together. The work of God and man is harmonized through faith. The principle of harmony which makes cooperation between God and man necessary is the cornerstone of King's notion of salvation, as well as his social philosophy.

King ties the struggle for liberation concretely to the black religious experience. The motive and drive for liberation is generated by and grounded in black religion. Religion has often been used to maintain the status quo in race relations. King's interpretation gives religion a different thrust, making it the driving force in the black liberation movement. His genius is reflected in the fact that he not only gave this new thrust to religion, but merged it with nonviolence as a method of liberation.

B. Doctrine of Man.

In articulating his doctrine of man King is careful to avoid cheapening the soul of man while exalting his physical dimensions, or downgrading the physical dimension while exalting the spiritual. Conse-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹¹ M. L. King, *Stride Towards Freedom* (N. Y.: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1958), pp. 28-29.

quently, he finds the Greek understanding of man objectionable at the point where it sees the body as a prison which entraps the soul. Likewise, he finds views which exalt the spiritual over the physical equally objectionable. King argues that the spiritual and physical dimensions of man must be held in harmony.¹²

In the universe there are fixed immutable laws which govern the interrelationship between particles of matter. The chemical compound table salt (NaCl) is a mixture of two elements, sodium and chlorine. The fact that either of the two elements standing alone is dangerous is analogous to the theological point King wants to make. Sodium alone is explosive. Chlorine alone is a lethal gas. When combined in proper proportions, they form an essential and harmless compound, table salt. Because the two elements are harmonized and held that way under normal conditions, the potential danger of either element is prevented from surfacing. Analogously, King makes the point that man is a composite of different elements, either of which alone is potentially dangerous. On this point King is particularly critical of the Reformation and Renaissance view of man. The former was too pessimistic while the latter was too optimistic. The Reformation overemphasized the corrupt nature of man while the Renaissance overemphasized faith in human reason. The former leads to a religion void of social concern. The latter emphasizes social concerns at the expense of man's spiritual needs.¹³

There are several elements which must be harmonized in King's doctrine of man. First, he sees man as a biological being with a physical body. The body is not a prison for the soul nor a place of residence during its earthly abode. Man's physical body is sacred. The body and the soul are mutually complementary and mutually interdependent. Any attempt to minister to one necessarily involves the other. This conclusion is supported by the often quoted phrase "man cannot live by bread alone." The word 'alone' implies that man cannot live without bread any more than he can live by it alone. Man is not just a body; he is a spiritual being.¹⁴

In addition to being a biological being with a spiritual dimension, man is also a free being. Man has the ability to choose the high roads of justice or the low roads of injustice. And while he may be conditioned to respond instinctively, he is not determined by instinct. It is man's ability to choose which makes him free. Man does not have unlimited freedom. He is free within destiny. Man's problem emerges when he oversteps the bounds of his freedom.¹⁵ Man's misuse of freedom precipitated his fall from the grace of God, throwing the two essential elements of the 'Imago Dei' into disharmony. Fallen man is

¹² King, *Strength to Love*, p. 107.

¹³ King, *Stride Towards Freedom*, p. 28.

¹⁴ M. L. King, *The Measure of a Man* (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1959), p. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

characterized by an imbalance between toughmindedness and tenderheartedness. Fallen man who loses the quality of toughmindedness is gullible, too weak to perceive the truth in view of overwhelming evidence. Even if he does, he is not able to act in accordance with truth. Black people who lack the quality of toughmindedness participate in their own degradation. They lack the courage to resist oppression. On the other hand, fallen man who loses the quality of tenderheartedness degenerates into a passionless despot. Such is the case with those who hold tenaciously to the false notion of white supremacy. They can rob the black man of his birthright of freedom and human dignity without the slightest twitch of conscience. The imbalance between these two essential elements is corrected by the grace of God breaking into the heart of man and restoring his ability to use his rational and spiritual faculties. King makes this point quite clear when he says:

There is little hope for us until we become toughminded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice and half-truth, and downright ignorance. The shape of the world today doesn't permit the luxury of softmindedness. A nation or civilization that continues to produce softminded people purchases its own spiritual death on an installment plan.¹⁶

C. *Doctrine of Sin and Evil.*

King's position on the problem of sin and evil is fundamentally the same as the classical position. He believes that all elements in God's creation were perfect and in harmony with each other. Man, who was created a free being, chose to disobey the command of God. This misuse of freedom broke the harmony between man and God, the repercussion of which is manifested in the world as sin. King believes that a more fundamental answer to the problem is shrouded in the mystery of God. Man cannot penetrate the mystery of God because he is finite and God is an infinite being. Consequently, in King's view, it is possible to mistake something for evil when it is not.¹⁷ Man is a victim of the illusion of finitude. He cannot see that "everything must be woven into the purpose of God."¹⁸ The apparent evil in the world must be seen within the larger context of world redemption. While our self-centered pride may be broken, our cords of sympathy will be lengthened. "The cross, which was willed by wicked men was woven into the tapestry of world redemption."¹⁹ What man mistakes for evil is part of God's plan for world redemption.

King does not leave the problem of evil entirely on the level of human disobedience. He elevates it, in part, to the level of a cosmic struggle. From this perspective he sees evil as a force pitted against the force of Good. It is justice pitted against injustice. The cosmic forces of good and evil are dependent upon man's cooperation for their success. King feels that man is inclined toward the good forces in the

¹⁶ King, *Strength to Love*, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

universe. Consequently, he believes that good will ultimately triumph over evil. Man is morally bound to cooperate with the forces of good. The moral claim is rooted in God's plan for creation. Man was not intended to be downtrodden. Every man stands as an equal in the sight of God, from a bass black to a treble white.

If man is morally bound to cooperate with the forces of good, he must be free to do so. Consequently, King roots his notion of liberation in creation. Man was created a free being capable of saying no to God. Were he unable to say no he would be unable to say yes. Such a man would be incapable of love. Man's capacity to say yes or no is what makes him free. Inherent in freedom is the risk of estrangement from God which leads to man's alienation from his fellowman. All of man's problems are rooted in his alienation from God. "Racism is total estrangement. It separates not only bodies but minds and spirits."²⁰ Racism treats man as an "it" and denies him freedom. Sin in any form is wrong; consequently, man is morally bound to refuse to cooperate with it.

II. KINGIAN NONVIOLENCE.

Two grim realities converged to form the context within which King formulated his philosophy of nonviolence. First, black people lacked the physical and material resources to sustain a long-term violent rebellion. Secondly, given the above situation, a violent rebellion could seriously threaten the continued existence of blacks as a part of the American society. Was it these factors which drove King to nonviolence or was it something else? David L. Lewis suggests that it was something else. He is perhaps correct when he says that "Martin's deep Christian concern with the brotherhood of man and his abiding faith in the fundamental decency of his fellowman directed his philosophical speculations far more than cold realism."²¹ While Lewis is fundamentally correct in his position, there are indications that the cold realism of the black predicament did influence King. However, since King ruled out violence as a matter of principle, it is difficult to determine the degree to which he was influenced by pragmatism.

King is quite emphatic in his argument that violence is inherently destructive. Victory achieved through violent means is supposedly short lived. Since King is a student of history, one cannot help but wonder how he views the life expectancy of America since it is a nation born of violence, no matter how noble the cause.

King's formulation of nonviolence is similar to Gandhi's philosophy. Gandhi did not base his theory of nonviolence upon weakness or the absence of the ability and resources to conduct a violent rebellion. He clearly points out that a weak and fearful person cannot be nonviolent for he has no alternative. Gandhi goes on to say, however, that one

²⁰ M. L. King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (N. Y.: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1967), p. 83.

²¹ David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (N. Y.: Frager Publishers, 1970), p. 86.

need not have the material resources to assure a violent victory before he becomes nonviolent. To put it another way, nonviolence is rooted in the notion that one chooses to be nonviolent. This implies that one must be both willing and capable of inflicting violence upon another and deliberately chooses not to do so.

King's theory of nonviolence is composed of five fundamental principles: 1. the ends-means principle, 2. the non-injury principle, 3. the principle of avoiding internal violence, 4. the principle of creative suffering, 5. the principle of non-cooperation with evil which has a positive dimension requiring an attack upon unjust systems rather than upon persons trapped within them.

The ends-means principle is central in King's ethical system. The fundamental assumption of the ends-means principle is that the means must be consistent with the ends. The end inheres in the means as a tree inheres in the seed.²² This implies that no moral ends can be achieved through immoral means. Violence, for King, is an immoral means which cannot result in a moral end. The rationale for his argument is grounded in his conception of creation. The world was created with fixed inter-related principles governing the relationship within the universe. The fixed principles not only apply to the physical world but to human relationships as well.²³ The Christian faith supports this notion when it "sets forth a system of absolute moral values and affirms that God has placed within the very structure of this universe certain moral principles that are fixed and immutable."²⁴

The end of the black movement, as King sees it, is the creation of the Beloved Community, an integrated community of harmonious relationships. The method by which the community is to be achieved must be in harmony with the end sought. This means that the methods must be the ends in progress, the implication of which is that the means is an actualization of the ends. This line of reasoning leads King to reject violence as a matter of principle. He sees no possibility of achieving a lasting community through violence because violence supposedly contains the seeds of its own destruction. Violence only leads to destruction and disillusionment while nonviolence leads to reconciliation and community. Nonviolence seeks to return to the created state of man. It is a powerful and just sword capable of cutting without wounding, a sword that heals. It ennobles the man who wields it.²⁵

The second principle in King's system is the noninjury principle. On this point King argues that any deliberate injury to another person as a tactical move is morally unjustifiable. However, he makes a sharp distinction between injury resulting from a nonviolent act and the deliberate use of injury. This idea is grounded in King's belief that one is morally bound to refuse to cooperate with an unjust system. Should

²² King, *Strength to Love*, p. 109.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁵ M. L. King, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," *New South* (December 1961), p. 4.

that noncooperation result in injury, as might be the case if one boycotted a segregated bus system, forcing it into bankruptcy, the nonviolent protestor is not morally responsible for the injury. So long as the intent of the act is not to produce injury, although injury may result, there is no moral liability.

The third principle is that of avoiding internal violence. Internal violence is a state of mind or attitude which causes one to engage in external violence. Hatred is commonly used to designate such an attitude. King's concern for avoiding internal violence is rooted in his conviction that man's external actions are fundamentally an expression of his internal disposition. A peace loving man cannot deliberately act out of violence, nor can an inwardly violent man be outwardly peaceful and loving.²⁶

The fourth principle in King's system is creative suffering, i.e., redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering is unearned suffering. It results from the evil of the inflicter rather than that of the victim. The redemptive nature of suffering is paradoxical in that by suffering the pain inflicted upon one by an evil person, an appeal is made to the goodness inherent in the person inflicting the injury. This forces him to deal with the evil nature of his act. King argues that when an oppressor is "Forced to stand before the world and his God splattered with the blood of his brother, he will call an end to his self-defeating massacre."²⁷ Therein lies the essence of the redemptive act. He is quite emphatic when he says ". . . if physical death is the price that a man must pay to free his children and his white brethren from permanent death of the spirit, then nothing could be more redemptive."²⁸

The fifth principle requires that an attack be made upon the system rather than the people caught within it. This notion is grounded in the assumption that man's problems are fundamentally social. His actions are determined by the social system within which he finds himself. Change the system and you change the man within it. From King's perspective the Christian faith does not see particular groups as evil, it sees man trapped within the structures of ideological conflict which makes ritual conflict inevitable.²⁹ He makes a radical distinction between injustice and fallen human nature which is problematical. It is difficult to see how King reconciles this idea with his claim that man's actions are reflections of his inward disposition. Would not this make man the creator of the unjust systems rather than being merely a victim? King apparently underestimates the seriousness of man's complicity in the perpetuation of injustice. This, to be sure, is a function of his optimistic view of human nature. Like Rauschenbausch King feels that man's fundamental problem inheres in unjust social systems. His

²⁶ King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, p. 72.

²⁷ King, *Stride Towards Freedom*, p. 177.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁹ Herbert Warren Richardson, "Martin Luther King - Unsung Theologian," *Commonwealth* (May, 1968) V. 88 p. 202.

encounter with the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr caused him some problems with regard to human nature. King claims that Niebuhr's pessimistic view of human nature overlooks the cure of Divine Grace. Belief in the social efficacy of Divine Grace is a salient point in King's social philosophy. He believes that human nature is not only subject to change, but perfectable to some extent. This is the basis upon which he makes the claim that redemption is the root of social change. Since suffering is redemptive, one's suffering at the hands of an oppressor engenders redemptive change which results in social change. An analysis of King's success with the Civil Rights Movement suggests that something other than redemption was the basis of social change.

Nonviolence and the Politics of Liberation.

Nonviolence in King is predicated on the assumption that human nature is amenable to redemptive change. Man, having both the potential for good and evil, may be moved either way depending upon the technique used. In other words, the technique used determines which aspect of man's nature will come forth, his good nature or evil nature. Nonviolence supposedly embodies ingredients which call forth the good in man. Social change, therefore, results from a redemptive change in human nature. This is the claim King makes, and he points to the success in the Civil Rights Movement as evidence. But is this really the case? I submit that a redemptive change in human nature is secondary in the success of the Civil Rights Movement. The success resulted from an interaction between three centers of power of which the Civil Rights Movement was one element. The Federal Government as one element in the trinity of power, and the strongest, intervenes on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, engendering a progressive step in the struggle. Redemption, if it occurred, was a result of coercive change. My purpose is to demonstrate this thesis, thereby shedding some light upon possible ways through which nonviolence may be utilized at the present level of the struggle for black liberation.³⁰

Kenneth E. Boulding points out that, ". . . an unregulated enterprise or relationship in human life will tend to produce more inequality than is morally justified or scarcely acceptable."³¹ This tendency arises from a simple fact. If there are no restraints placed upon human desires, any center of power in human society will be inclined to appropriate more privilege to itself than its social function requires. Reinhold Niebuhr observes that ". . . any kind of significant social power develops social inequality."³² This is a fact King took too lightly. Coercion, therefore, is essential for maintaining any equilibrium. For this reason an uncoerced equilibrium is something short of a real society, not only

³⁰ King, *Stride Towards Freedom*, p. 80.

³¹ Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Organizational Revolution: A Study In The Ethics of Economic Organization* (N. Y.: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1953), p. 235.

³² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (N. Y.: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1932), pp. 7-8.

because any *ad hoc* balance of power is inadequate for the attainment of justice, but also because there is an incipient chaos in an uncoerced equilibrium. Tension resulting from competing interest degenerates into anarchy of conflicting interest in such case. This is why a society must avail itself of coercion to establish minimal order. This means the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals or groups. In such circumstances there is no way to guarantee that this power will not be abused.³³ Watergate is a case in point. The limitations of human nature are such that man is never able to transcend and envisage the interest of his fellowman as clearly as he does his own. Counter power centers are necessary to create a balance of power which is at the foundation of a community. Changes in the foundation require power, power to coerce other power elements within the society. If King was successful in changing society, it was because he was able to coerce certain power centers into acting in accordance with his desires.

Niebuhr indicates that "there has never been a scheme of justice in history which did not have a balance of power at its foundation."³⁴ This perception challenges the idealist who claims love as the sole means to justice. It also raises some problems for the claims of nonviolence. If a balance of power is at the foundation of community, social change results from shifts in that power balance. Nonviolence claims to effect this shift through redemption which results in one voluntarily giving up power or shifting his position. Love as a normative ingredient supposedly breaks through the defenses of the oppressor and redeems him. He then voluntarily concedes power as a result of the redemptive character of love. Niebuhr reminds us that power is intransigent. While love has its role in the balance of power, it is no guarantee for justice. ". . . Without the balance of power even the most loving relations may degenerate into tyranny, and love may become the screen which hides the injustice."³⁵ Women have not gained justice from men despite the intimacy of the family relationship. They will only gain justice when they amass sufficient economic and political power to challenge male autocracy. The problem of the oppressed is a problem of powerlessness. Until they amass sufficient power they will always remain oppressed. Only power can displace power. Therein lies the key to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. King was able to amass sufficient coercive power, although in a nonviolent form, to force social change. August Meier's analysis of the nonviolent movement of the sixties points to the same conclusion.

In fact, contrary to nonviolent direct action philosophy, demonstrations have secured their results not by changing the hearts of the oppressors through a display of nonviolent love, but through national and international pressures generated by the publicity arising from mass arrests and incidents of violence.³⁶

³³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1932), p.192.

³⁴ R. Davis and Robert C. Good, *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* (N. Y.: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1960), p. 107.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁶ C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (N. Y.: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 146.

Louis Lomax observes that "most of his (King's) splendid victories had come when Washington — in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations — intervened to stop white brutality and enact legislation."³⁷

An analysis of both these statements reveals a triumvirate of power with the Federal Government at the apex. The Civil Rights Movement, while coercing southern power centers, likewise coerced the Federal Government to intervene through legislation and court orders. This resulted in the desired change King sought. The pattern is present in all of King's successes. He recognizes this fact when he says:

Nothing was done until we acted on these very issues, and demonstrated before the court of world opinion the urgent need for change. It was the same story in voting rights. The Civil Rights Commission, three years before Selma, had recommended the changes we started marching for, but nothing was done until, in 1965, we created a crisis the nation couldn't ignore. The same kind of dramatic crisis was created in Selma two years later. The results on the national scene were the Civil Rights Bill and the Voting Rights Act, as president and congress responded to the drama and the creative tension generated by the carefully planned demonstrations.³⁸

On another occasion King states that, "President Kennedy was forced by Birmingham and the other tumultuous action . . . to offer to Congress the Civil Rights Bill."³⁹ Put another way, Kennedy was coerced into action.

While King held tenaciously to the notion that nonviolence was the moral force which brought social change, he became aware that nonviolence, in fact, was a form of coercion; and that is what made it successful. At one point King says: "However lamentable it may seem, the Negro is now convinced that white America will never admit him to full rights unless it is forced into doing so."⁴⁰ Note that he does not say redeemed.

King received his greatest jolt when he shifted his movement to the North. At this stage the triumvirate of power dissolved into a two-way struggle, King versus America. Without the third center which could be coerced into intervening, King's success came to a grinding halt. The Chicago fiasco forced King to a more realistic understanding of the forces that black Americans are up against. His vision of the struggle shifted. Although he did not abandon his nonviolent posture, he became increasingly conscious of the role of coercion in social change. Chicago forced him to realize the moral limits of redemptive suffering. King had never encountered anything like the raw political power of the Daley machine. Belatedly he retorted, "Morally we ought to have what we say in the slogan, 'freedom now,' but it all doesn't come now. That's

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁸ Martin Luther King, *Trumpet of Conscience* (N. Y.: Harper and Rowe, Publishers, 1967), p. 54.

³⁹ Martin Luther King, "Let Justice Roll Down," *Nation*, (March 15, 1965) p. 374.

⁴⁰ King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, p. 106.

a sad fact of life you have to live with."⁴¹ Never before had King openly imposed such practical limits upon the struggle of the disadvantaged. The experience at Chicago made it difficult for King to deal with the Black Power call for violent strategies.

King never reached the point of admitting that violent forms of coercion were morally justifiable. However, he did soften his criticism of those who engaged in violence. After a summer of riots King says: "*I am not sad that black Americans are rebelling; this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable. Without this magnificent ferment among Negroes, the old evasions and procrastinations would have continued indefinitely.*"⁴² (Emphasis mine.) Another indication of King softening his position on violence is seen in the distinction he makes between violence against persons and violence against property. He writes:

I am aware that there are many who wince at the distinction between property and person — who hold both sacrosanct. My views are not so rigid. A life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being. It is a part of the earth man walks on; it is not man.⁴³

King began speaking more and more about the need for power, the power to force change, not beg for it. Moral persuasion is simply not enough. King puts it this way:

Equally fallacious is the notion that ethical appeals and persuasion alone will bring about justice. This does not mean that ethical appeals must not be made. It simply means that those appeals must be undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power.⁴⁴

Whatever form of constructive coercive power King had in mind we may never know. He went to the mountain top and never returned.

⁴¹ Paul Good, "Bossism, Racism and Dr. King," *Nation* (September, 1966), p. 240.

⁴² Martin Luther King, "A Testament of Hope," *Playboy* (January, 1969), p. 1.

⁴³ King, *Trumpet of Conscience*, p. 56.

⁴⁴ King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, p. 152.

