

BOOK REVIEWS

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: THE MAKING OF A MIND

by John J. Ansbro Orbis Books \$17.95

Few non-governmental American citizens have been the subject of more printed criticism than Martin Luther King, Jr. One of the greatest services done Dr. King has been performed by John J. Ansbro in his painstakingly thorough answer to Martin's critics in his new book, Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making Of A Mind, a 368-page hard-back intellectual history of King's philosophical theology, published by Orbis Books. It is far more difficult to write a documented history than a biography. That is exactly what John J. Ansbro has done.

The book contains 1,392 separate notes, many of which are brief essays responding to Martin's critics. Ansbro pinpoints major and minor differences and similarities between King and people like Peter A. Bertocci, Walter G. Muelder, Edgar Brightman, L. Harold DeWolf, J. H. Jackson, Henry David Thoreau, Howard Thurman, Mahatma Gandhi, George Kelsey, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Anders Nygren, James Cone, Friedrich Nietzsche, George W. Davis, Malcolm X, Paul Ramsey, Paul Tillich, Henry Wieman, Immanuel Kant, Socrates, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Thomas, Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Gregg, C. Eric Lincoln, Jerry Falwell, and movements like communism, Black power, and the Black Muslims.

Ansbro expounds King's views systematically and corrects some serious misinterpretations of David Levering Lewis's King: A Critical Biography. Lewis wrote that King "lacked the comprehensive critical apparatus and the inspired vision that bless good philosophers." The entire book by Dr. Ansbro is a classic refutation of Dr. Lewis's single-perspective history.

Opinion-makers like Senator Jesse Helms should read The Making Of A Mind. King was not a "Marxist Activist," as Senator Helms claimed in his attempt to block the passage of the King Holiday Bill. King admired Marx's passionate concern for the underprivileged but leveled several serious criticism against Communists theory and practices. King rejected the Communist doctrine of man, history, and reality, and Lenin's denial of eternal moral principles, the Communist states' suppression of freedoms of the press, vote, and assembly. King criticized Marx for rejecting Hegel's idealism and spiritualism, he disagreed with the commu-

nist view of God, religion, and the Church; he cites the inadequacies of atheistic humanism for dealing with human sin and self-improvement. King felt that if the church was to combat communism, its "most formidable rival," it must use its influence to open the doors of opportunity and seek to eliminate economic insecurity, injustice, racial discrimination, and poverty, all of which provide a fertile soil for Communism. King said "A true Christian cannot be a true communist, for the two philosophies are antithetical and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot reconcile them."

Louis Waldman would also greatly benefit from this book. Waldman was the Chairman of the Committee on Civil Rights of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. He made a very negative and detailed critique of King's civil disobedience. On behalf of King, Ansbro has answered every charge and demonstrated the danger of writing critically while failing to be influenced by synoptically guided reasoning.

King appears to be intellectually and spiritually more mature than his critics. Ansbro has projected himself as the foremost Kingian scholar in print. He even indicates in a few places how King might have strengthened his case.

Ansbro notes the differences between King and Gandhi. King did not encourage the voluntary closure of shops, raids on property, the voluntary renunciation of property, resignations from political groups, fasting, the usurping of Government functions, the establishment of functions that parallel Government functions, or the non-payment of taxes. King's goal was the transformation of the structures of the existing system so that all citizens could experience integration within the system. Gandhi was seeking independence from an alien system.

As if to address the elements of the "power of positive thinking" in the Christian Church, John Ansbro points out that King recognized that the cult of collective optimism does not often recognize the cult of collective evil. King held that "it is an immoral act to compel a man to accept injustice until another's man's heart is straight." Therefore, King used different kinds of methods in the civil-rights struggle: education, legislation, litigation, nonviolent direct action, and massive civil disobedience. He conceived of nonviolent resistance to evil as Christian ethical action founded on love and on the faith that God is altogether just. The Making Of A Mind comes closest to being the definitive work on King as philosopher and systematic theologian. It traces King's defense of his philosophical theology and his strategy of teleological, idealistic nonviolence.

The personalists are greatly indebted to Ansbro for his treatment of their 100 year old school of thought that was once a movement in ethics and the Christian Church. Black scholars, however, both published and unpublished on King will appreciate that Ansbro wrote: "In the light of his personal experiences, King did not need personalism to provide him

with the passion to oppose segregation, but personalism with its emphasis on the value of the person did help formulate the principles for his attack upon this evil." (p. 77)

With an unmistakable reference to King's childhood and Morehouse College years, Ansbro notes that King "had experienced some of the ways in which the evil of segregation systematically does violence to the human personality." (p.76).

Responsible scholars who understand that life is cumulative and that all contemporary theology which is competent is primarily derivative will appreciate Ansbro's saying that, "King did not have to look to personalism to discover his moral obligation to form a consistent life plan. Long before his encounter with personalism, he had chosen to devote his life to service of others in the ministry, but once he decided that his service involved a total and persistent public assault on segregation, the moral laws of personalism served to reinforce that commitment." (p. 86)

It is not the aim of Ansbro to state the history of personalism in western philosophy. He limits his goal when he says, "To understand the nature of King's challenge to American society requires a comprehensive and systematic examination of his strategy of nonviolence. In attempting such an examination, this work emphasizes central insights from ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary thinkers who moved him to construct his own strategy." Ansbro describes his effort as "an exploration."

For the first time we are able to get a systematic look at some of King's metaphysical thought, a fundamental source of his method. The Making Of A Mind reveals a few of the methodological options in the Boston tradition available to King. Method is not a part of Ansbro's outline, but a discerning reader can discover options in the personalistic views of human nature, the philosophy of history, the critique of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the exposition on the moral laws, especially the "law of the best possible." King's metaphysical position, the methodological options available to him and his model of the person are comprehensively glimpsed in the personalistic moral laws. These ethical principles leave great flexibility for the evolvement of methods.

Ansbro is, at his best throughout his book, demonstrating that personalistic views avoid methodological and metaphysical imperialism or dogmatism. King's tenet of empirical coherence requires open-endedness and seeking an ever-widening coherence in the ethical life. It is called "growing experiential coherence." If personality as a whole is your principle, as it was for Martin King, Jr., then you must serve wholes, or seek those values which are coherent in the new situation.

Ansbro's book is a good case for the argument that King is the personalist of the century. Warren Steinkraus, whom Ansbro cites, makes the point that "the most significant contribution of King to personalist thought is his development of the doctrine of nonviolence." (Idealistic

Studies, January 1976) King was without a doubt the greatest scholar-activist in the personalist tradition.

Nevertheless, there are some problems. First, the book does not contain a bibliography of King's writings or writings on King.

Second, one will search in vain to find much on why so many who ought to know claim Benjamin Elijah Mays as the chief mentor of King. The author simply says that Mays helped King enter the ministry. There is a direct connection between Mohandas Gandhi and Benjamin Mays, Howard Thurman, Mordecai Johnson, Samuel Williams to Martin King, Jr. The fact that all of these men except Gandhi had a significant relationship to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia is worth far more investigation than Ansbro presents.

Third, Samuel Woodrow Williams is briefly mentioned by Ansbro; but Gladstone Lewis Chandler is not. Dr. Williams taught King the Introduction to Philosophy, where the class was required to read Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience." Young King read this essay three times. It was the first formal lesson King had on how to deal with unjust governments. Professor Chandler is the celebrated teacher of English whom King and countless Morehouse men have canonized as grammarian without peer. He greatly influenced King's love of words. The intellectual impact of Williams and Chandler on King must be measured.

Fourth, the same is true for Dean Brailsford Brazeal who planned all the daily chapel programs at Morehouse, and Walter Chivers who was King's major professor in sociology. Both men only received polite bows from Professor Ansbro.

Fifth, the criticisms of William R. Jones that King does not distinguish between redemptive and non-redemptive suffering are only partially addressed by Ansbro, with no specific mentioning of Jones by name. The theodicy of vicarious suffering is Jones's main criticism of King and his theology.

Sixth, Paul Robeson and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. are ignored by Ansbro, perhaps because King does not mention them in his own accounts (Stride Toward Freedom). Both used the term black power before Willie Ricks and Stokely Carmichael. Robeson's rally of the American Crusade to End Lynching held at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. on September 24, 1946 was a model and precursor of the 1963 March on Washington. King and Rosa Parks personally heard Powell lecture on the direct-action nonviolent resistance program that he led in Harlem in the 1930s. Exactly three weeks later King helped start the Montgomery bus boycott. Later Powell was publically critical and yet supportive of King. Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. documented Powell's contribution to the Montgomery boycott in "From Harlem to Montgomery: The Bus Boycotts and Leadership of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Martin Luther King, Jr." Historian (August, 1979, pp. 732-33) Powell

describes his November 1955 visit to Montgomery in Adam by Adam, his autobiography.

Seventh, T. J. Jemison, current president of the National Baptist Convention U. S. A., Inc. also greatly effected the Montgomery bus boycott strategy used by King. Jemison's influence is not mentioned by Ansbro. King indicated in Stride Toward Freedom that Jemison had piloted a similar boycott at Baton Rouge, Louisiana two years prior that "proved profitable" for his contribution in Montgomery.

Eight, Ansbro quotes John Williams in, The King God Didn't Save p. 54, when he correctly indicates that Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, the former president of the National Baptist Convention, U. S. A., Inc. rejected all proposals to help King during the Albany Movement. Jackson, however, deserves as much attention as any critic of King. He wrote a 270 page book aimed against the methods of King and the movement, titled, Unholy Shadows and Freedom's Holy Light, (Townsend Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1967.) He was King's most vigorous and powerful contemporary ideological opponent among black Americans.

Ninth, Dr. Ansbro does not set out to deal with all of King's critics. One wishes, however, that he had included the November 26, 1960, N. B. C. televised thirty-minute debate between King and James J. Kilpatrick, America's preeminent segregationist.

Tenth, the views of Brightman, Muelder, Bertocci, DeWolf, Chalmers and Schilling provided King methodological variation within the Boston personalism. Allan Knight Chalmers, the greatest activist in this group, and cited by King, gets very little attention from Ansbro. King maintained his correspondence with Dr. Chalmers during the height of the movement in the South. S. Paul Schilling, who was the second reader of King's Ph.D dissertation is not listed at all.

Both Muelder and DeWolf add laws to the eleven ethical principles hammered out by Brightman. Bertocci considers them from a psychological perspective, while Brightman is the only one who gives us their historical background. Ansbro only refers to Brightman's eleven moral laws, when in fact they number sixteen, with possibilities for more.

Eleventh, the dependence of Dr. King on the religious philosophy and metaphysics of Peter Anthony Bertocci has yet to be researched. Bertocci is the missing link in understanding Dr. King's wider teleological-idealistic-personalism, and comprehending the metaphysical significance of King's popular statement that "even though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice." Being grounded in theological personalism means insistence on the necessity of incorporating Christian belief within an overall view of the nature of things. There are also many similarities between the views of Peter Bertocci and Benjamin Mays, especially on the model of a person.

Twelfth, it is curious also that Dr. King gives us an indication that he

was familiar with the father of American personalism, Borden Parker Bowne. Yet Professor Ansbro makes no note of Bowne.

Finally, I would not contend as some that The Making Of A Mind has too much white influence. But I would argue that it has too little black recognition.

Because of its outstanding quality, however, and in spite of the above mentioned omissions, I have selected Ansbro's book as required reading in my course on the Life and Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. at Morehouse College. This book is destined with Stephen B. Oates' Let The Trumpet Sound, to set the floor for all future research concerning the intellectual development of Dr. King. We still need a three or four volume decisive work on King similar to Ernest Jones' The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud. Professor Ansbro has at this point anchored himself among the unquestioned authorities on the theistic personalistic-idealism undergirding King's participation in the civil and human rights struggle. As the first professional philosopher to analyze the strategies and tactics of Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolent resistance and to critique 50 of his critics (both individual and institutions), he revealed the comprehensive internal consistence of King's thought, and the grand vision of this twentieth-century ecumenical prophet. The whole book rejects single-cause analysis and single-cause solutions, and gives a more varied and in-depth analysis than those provided by previous writers. Its publication will greatly benefit all those who give careful attention to its contents.

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