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A comparative analysis of the ideal of community in the thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr

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Dissertation

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY
IN THE THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN
AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

by

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY
IN THE THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN
AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

(Walter Earl Fluker)

Boston University Graduate School, 1988

Major Professor: John Henderson Cartwright, Martin Luther
King, Jr. Professor of Social Ethics

Abstract

Howard Thurman (1900-1981) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) were both Christian pastors and social
prophets who made significant contributions to the religious
and social life of America and the world. Although Howard
Thurman is the lesser known of the two, his life and min-
istry influenced many individuals (including King) who
have impacted American society and the larger world com-
munity.

Both thinkers were also black Americans whose
earliest experiences of oppression based on the coalescence
of color and race in the segregated South had a profound
impact on their quests and interpretations of human com-
munity. While this dimension of their lives and its
influence on the development of their understandings of community is a major concern of this study, the fundamental problem addressed, however, is the ideal of community in Thurman and King. Its significance lies in its examination of their respective approaches to the explication and application of the ideal of community. It is the claim of this study that a comparative analysis of the problem in Thurman and King can yield fruitful insight into the conception, character, and actualization of human community.

Analytic and comparative modes were utilized to interpret each thinker's understanding of community. Basic questions were raised for both which served as the essential structure for the method of the study. The first question was concerned with the nature of community: How is community conceived? What is its character? The second question was concerned with the experiential and intellectual sources of the ideal of community in their respective searches: What were the social and intellectual sources which informed and shaped their understandings of community? Thirdly, the question of the actualization of community was examined: What are the barriers to be overcome in the actualization of community? How is community actualized?

The continuities and discontinuities which exist between Thurman and King reveal different dimensions of the common problems which their conceptualizations and
recommendations for the actualization of community address, and hopefully, provide new insights and directions in the creation of a model for the work of community in the world.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare the ideal of community in the thinking of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. For both, the search for community was a life-long quest and the ideal of community was the single, underlying thesis of their thoughts and ministries.¹

The Significance of the Problem

Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. were both Christian ministers and social prophets who made

¹Thurman writes, "... a strange necessity has been laid upon me to devote my life to the central concern that transcends the walls that divide and would achieve in literal fact what is experienced as literal truth: human life is one and all men are members of one another. And this insight is spiritual and it is at the hard core of religious experience." Howard Thurman, The Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy Segregation and the Ground of Hope (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. x; King comments, "In a real sense, all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality." Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 70.
significant contributions to the religious and social life of America and the world. Although Howard Thurman is the lesser known of the two, his life and ministry have influenced countless individuals (including King) who have impacted American society and the larger world community. Several writers have made reference to the influence of Howard Thurman on his younger fellow visionary, but no scholarly treatment has demonstrated a formal tie between the two.


3 See John Ansbro, The Making of a Mind (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), pp. 27-29, 272; Lerone Bennett, What Manner of Man, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 74-75; "Dr. King Mentor Remembered," Boston Globe, 15 January 1982, pp. 13-14; Smith, Mystic, pp. 118-19. The influence of Thurman on King's conception of community is suggested by Lewis V. Baldwin in an unpublished manuscript entitled, "Understanding Martin Luther King, Jr. within the Context of Southern Black Religious History," p. 19; see also, Lewis V. Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 12:1-2 (Fall 1984/Spring 1985): 1; and Larry Murphy, "Howard Thurman and Social Activism," in God and Human Freedom, pp. 154-55. The writer has also conducted a search for a formal connection between the two without success. This research consisted of interviews with both of their widows, a review of the King and Thurman collections at the Mugar Library, Boston University, the Thurman materials at the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund in San Francisco, and the archives at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia.
Both thinkers were also black Americans whose earliest experiences of community and non-community in the segregated South had a profound impact on their quests and interpretations of human community. These early experiences, and later ones, are given in autobiographical statements throughout their writings, sermons, and speeches. This dimension of their lives and its influence on the development of their understandings of community is a major concern of this dissertation. 4

Perhaps Thurman's own accounting of the nature of their relationship is sufficient. Thurman relates only two instances of meeting with King: one, in the informal setting of his Boston home, while King was a Ph.D. candidate, and the other, after the tragic stabbing of King in Harlem. Neither meeting seems to indicate any substantive exchange on philosophies of thought and action. See, Howard Thurman, Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979), pp. 254-55.

Few studies to date have given significant attention to the impact of the black experience on either of these thinkers. For Thurman, Smith's work, The Mystic as Prophet, comes closest to treating this dimension. See also Irving S. Moxley, "An Examination of the Mysticism of Howard Thurman and Its Relevance to Black Liberation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1974).

It is interesting to note that neither Ansbro nor Smith and Zepp in their treatments of the intellectual sources of King's thought, give any serious attention to the role of the black church and its impact upon King. See Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974); see James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Theology--Black Church," Theology Today (January 1984): 409-20; Paul R. Garber, "King Was a Black Theologian," Journal of Religious Thought 31 (Fall-Winter): 16-32; William D. Watley's treatment of the
The fundamental problem of this study, however, is the ideal of community in Thurman and King. Its significance lies in its examination of their respective approaches to the explication and application of the ideal of community. It is the claim of this dissertation that a comparative analysis of the problem in Thurman and King can yield fruitful insight into the conception, character, and actualization of human community.

Definitions and Limitations

"Community" is both a descriptive and normative term. The specific use of "community" in Thurman and King is founded upon theological and philosophical idealism, which maintains that mind and spiritual values are fundamental in the world as a whole. Both Thurman's and King's general metaphysical views are teleological and it is in this context that their definitions of community are best understood.

"Community," for Thurman, refers to wholeness, integration and harmony. For Thurman, all life is interrelated relationship between the black religious experience, evangelical liberalism, and personalism and their impact upon the thinking of King is the most serious treatment to date on this important aspect of his intellectual development. See William D. Watley, Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethic of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), pp. 17-45.
and involved in goal-seeking. In each particular manifestation of life, there is the potential for it to realize its proper form; and the actualization of potentiality in any form of life is synonymous with community. "Community" as "actualized potential" is true at all levels of life: in tiny cells and in human society.

The theological dimension of Thurman's understanding of "community" is the affirmation that the Mind of God realizes itself in time. The origin and goal of community, therefore, is in the Mind of God which is coming to itself in time. This theological dimension of community is fundamental for all of Thurman's philosophical and ethical claims.

The problem of "community" is stated explicitly by Thurman as "the search for common ground." The nature of the problem is rooted in the relationship of the individual to social existence. While the primacy of the individual

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5. Thurman says, "The degree to which the potential in any expression of life is actualized marks the extent to which such an expression of life experiences wholeness, integration, community. The clue to community can be found in the inner creative activity of living substances." Howard Thurman, The Search for Common Ground (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 4.

6. Ibid., pp. xi-xiv.

7. Thurman writes, "Over and over again I have asked myself: What is the common ground that floats the private adventure of the individual or the solitary life? Is it merely conceptual, is it only the great idea, concept or
is a major concern for Thurman in his treatment of the problem of community, his ultimate vision is one of a harmonious human society.  

For Martin Luther King, Jr., all human life is interrelated and must be seen as a single process culminating in the "beloved community." Although King's conception of the "beloved community" represents a synthesis from a wide range of thinkers, a simple working definition which will receive greater explication later in the study is "a community ordered by love." "Community," here refers to integration, mutuality, and harmony. "Love" refers to the

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8 He states, "There is a spirit abroad in life of which the Judeo-Christian ethic is but one expression. It is a spirit that makes for wholeness and community. It is the voice of God and the voice of man; it is the meaning of all the strivings of the whole human race toward a world of friendly men underneath a friendly sky." Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, pp. 112-13.

9 The term, "beloved community," has its origins in the philosophical idealism of Josiah Royce. For Royce, the "Beloved Community" was the ideal Christian community which is founded upon "loyalty" and sacrifice. See Josiah Royce, The Problem of Christianity, with Introduction by John Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); see also John H. Cartwright's treatment of the concept in relation to King in his article, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," Debate and Understanding 1:3, Ronald Lee Carter, ed. (Semester II, 1977): 171-78. Here Cartwright notes that King was a highly eclectic thinker and his idea of the "beloved community" is a creative synthesis from many diverse sources.
Christian conception of agape. The theological dimension of the "beloved community" is primary for King, and therefore, the idea of a personal God, who is a creative force who works for universal wholeness, informs his philosophical and ethical claims.

In this study, the term "ideal of community" refers to community in two respects: as the norm for ethical reflection and the goal toward which all of life strives.

"Black community" refers to the definition presented by James E. Blackwell. He defines the "black community" as "a highly diversified, interrelated aggregate of people who unite into relatively cohesive structures in response to white oppression, racism, and patterned repression." He also contends that

"... there is no single authentic black experience in America except that which is developed as a consequence of ubiquitous white racism and the prevalent color consciousness. Because of variations in manifestations of racism and color consciousness, multiple black experiences occurred, each one as authentic as the other. The common denominator for all of them, however, is the coalescence of racism and color." 

10King says, "I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power." King, Strength to Love, p. 154.


12Ibid., p. 5.
The Method of the Dissertation

Analytic and comparative modes will be utilized to interpret each thinker's understanding of community. Basic questions are raised for each which emerge as the essential structure for the method of the dissertation. The first question is concerned with the nature of community: How is community conceived? What is its character? Since Thurman and King gave biographical clues as to their personal quests for community, the second question is concerned with the experiential and intellectual sources of the ideal of community in their respective searches: What were the social and intellectual sources which informed and shaped their understandings of community? Thirdly, the question of the actualization of community is raised: What are the barriers to be overcome in the actualization of community? How is community actualized?

These questions form the analytical construct which will be used to examine and compare each thinker's treatment of the ideal of community. The method follows the pattern of the questions: 1) the nature of the ideal of community; 2) the experiential and intellectual sources of community; and 3) the actualization of community.
Previous Research in the Field

A careful review of the literature suggests that no scholars, at this time, have offered a comparative analysis of the two thinkers. However, Thurman's and King's respective conceptions of community have received scholarly treatment in several places. Luther E. Smith discusses the centrality of community in the thinking of Thurman, but an extensive critical analysis of community is not his primary concern. His focus is on Thurman's contributions as a prophetic witness and mystic. In a later article, Smith returns to this theme, but here it is capsuled and therefore limited by its emphasis on the

13 Computer based searches were conducted in May 1983 (Boston University) and March 1984 (Emory University). The searches revealed a number of dissertations and published works on Martin Luther King, Jr., but none, with the exception of Smith and Zepp, has dealt extensively with his understanding of community; and to date, none has offered a comparative study of the two subjects. Several dissertations have been done on Howard Thurman which have some relevance for this study. These include: Carlyle Felding Stewart, III, "A Comparative Analysis of Theological-Ontology and Ethical Method in the Theologies of James H. Cone and Howard Thurman" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1982); Mozella Gordon Mitchell, "The Dynamics of Howard Thurman's Relationship to Literature and Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1980); Luther E. Smith, "An American Prophet: A Critical Study of the Thought of Howard Thurman" (Ph.D. dissertation, Saint Louis University, 1979); and Moxley, "Mysticism of Howard Thurman."

14 See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 43-96.
relation between responsibility and freedom as they address community.  

Barnett J. W. Greer examined Thurman's idea of community and its practical realization in the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, which was founded by Thurman and Alfred Fisk in 1944. Greer's emphasis, however, is on the viability of the Fellowship Church as an empirical manifestation of Thurman's idea of community. Scholarly treatments of the intellectual sources which shaped the theological and philosophical ground for King's idea of community have been done by Smith and Zepp, Ansbro, Watley, and Cartwright, but these studies, with the exception of Ansbro, do not mention Thurman.


16 Barnett J. W. Greer, "Howard Thurman: An Examination and Analysis of Thurman's Idea of Community and Viability of the Fellowship Church," Doctor of Ministry Project, Claremont School of Theology, May 1983.

17 Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community.

18 Ansbro, Making of a Mind.

19 Watley, Roots of Resistance.

20 Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community."

21 Ansbro addressed the relation of Thurman's perception of the range of Christian love to King's
Sources of the Study

Sources used in this study are both primary and secondary. They include books, articles, essays, sermons, meditations, lectures, tapes, and audio-visual materials.

This writer was a member of a seminar group which met with Howard Thurman in San Francisco in October 1979. The seminar was concerned with the nature of religious experience and its implications for social action.

Further research was conducted at the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund in August 1982, the Special Collections Division of the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University which holds the Thurman papers and part of the King papers, and at the archives of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia.

Other preliminary research has included interviews with the following persons: Howard Thurman; Mrs. Sue Bailey Thurman, widow of Howard Thurman; Mrs. Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Melvin H. Watson, Sr., close associate and friend of Thurman and King; Harold DeWolf, King's major professor at Boston University; Walter G. Muelder, Dean Emeritus, Boston University School of Theology; James H. Cone, Charles A. Briggs Professor of understanding of the redemptive power of agape. Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 27-29.
Systematic Theology, Union Seminary, New York; Marvin Chandler, former Executive Director of the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund and interim pastor of the Fellowship Church; Luther Smith and Carlyle Stewart, III whose dissertations were on Thurman; Ms. Dorothy Eaton, member of the Fellowship Church; Ms. Muriel Bullard, historian and founding member of the Fellowship Church; and Ms. Joyce Sloan, former tape librarian for the Trust.

Plan and Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three parts. Parts I and II will be devoted to the ideal of community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., respectively. Under Parts I and II, the nature of community, the experiential and intellectual sources of the ideal of community, and the actualization of community will be examined. Part III will be devoted to the comparative analysis of the ideal in each and will present findings and conclusions.

Chapters II and V will treat the nature of community in Thurman and King, respectively. The task of these chapters is to analyze each thinker's particular conception of community in respect to his definition and treatment of the normative and empirical dimensions of the problem. Also the character of community will be explored in reference to the triadic relationship between God, self and the world.
The experiential and intellectual sources of community in Thurman and King are examined in Chapters III and VI. Biographical profiles, emphasizing significant periods and influences in their respective quests for community will be given. Intellectual sources will be examined with special interest in their relationship to the development of the ideal in each thinker. The formative influences of the black community will also receive special attention.

Chapters IV and VII will examine each thinker's recommendations for the actualization of community. These chapters will include an analysis of the barriers to community and the means for overcoming them. The barriers refer to Thurman's and King's interpretations of the personal and social manifestations of evil and sin. This discussion will also involve a brief descriptive analysis of their treatments of theodicy.

The recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community, recommended by each thinker, will include an examination of community as the norm and goal of the moral life, love as the means of actualization, and the nature and role of the church and religion in the actualization of community.
Chapter VIII is the comparative analysis of the ideal of community in the subjects of our study. The comparison will identify continuities and discontinuities in Thurman and King in respect to the nature of community, the experiential and intellectual sources of community, and the actualization of community.

Chapter IX is the final chapter on findings and conclusions.
PART I

THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF
HOWARD THURMAN
CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN

Howard Thurman identified his life-long quest for community as "the search for common ground." For Thurman, the ideal of community served both as the goal toward which all life strives and the norm for ethical reflection. In this chapter, the nature of community in the thought of Howard Thurman is examined in reference to his understanding of the conception of community and the triadic character of community.

The Conception of Community

For Thurman, community refers to wholeness, integration, and harmony. Fundamental to his conception of community is the teleological nature of life. All life, according to him, is involved in goal-seeking. In each particular manifestation of life, there is the potential for it to realize its proper form, or to come to itself. The actualization of any form of life is synonmous with community. Community as "actualized potential" is true
at all levels of life, in tiny cells and in human society.¹

Life serves as a hermeneutical principle in Thurman's analysis of the nature of community. He argues that the most obvious characteristic of life which is often overlooked, gives the initial clue to the nature of community. This inherent quality is that "life is alive."² Attention to the processes at work in living things all around us reveals that there is a hard purposefulness, a

¹ Thurman says, "The degree to which the potential in any expression of life is actualized marks the extent to which an expression of life experiences wholeness, integration, community. The clue to community can be found in the inner creative activity of living substances." Thurman, Search, p. 4. In his Mendenhall Lectures at DePauw University, entitled, "Community and the Will of God," he says: "... community, or the functional and creative wholeness, is a manifest tendency in life itself, that the intent of the Creator of life gives to all forms of life the communal potential, that the degree to which the potential becomes actualized, community results."

² He says, "... one of the simplest and for me the most profound observations is that life itself is alive. This is a living, pulsing, breathing dimension of experience ... this is in essence a dynamic universe and wherever there is life there is some kind of structure of dependability, some inner logic that gives meaning and structure and viability and purpose, not in a metaphysical sense, but purpose in the sense that is expressed when you notice that a house plant finds a way to turn towards the sun without any guidance from you." "Man and the Experience of Community," Long Beach California State College, n.d., Thurman Collection, Boston University, p. 2.
determination to live in life itself. According to Thurman, this "directiveness" in life which is at work in nature also manifests itself in the personal and social dimensions of human existence. There is, for him, a fundamental structure of interrelatedness and interdependability inherent in all living things, including the social arrangements by which human beings relate to one another.

It is not an overstatement that the purpose of all the arrangements and conventions that make up the formal and informal agreements under which men live in society, is to nourish one another with one another. The safeguards by which individuals or groups of men establish the boundaries of intimate and collective belonging are meant ultimately to guarantee self-nourishment.

The Sources of Community

The sources for Thurman's thinking regarding the nature of community are found in racial memory, living

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4 Thurman borrows this term from E. S. Russell, "The Directiveness of Organic Activities," an address delivered before the Zoology Section of the British Association, 1934. "Directiveness" is used as a neutral term in distinction from "purposiveness" which has a psychological connotation. See Mendenhall Lectures, p. 2.

structures, utopias, common consciousness, and in identity.\(^6\) Thurman begins his examination of the ideal of community in racial memory by analyzing creation myths. His purpose is to explore what the memory of the human race has to say about the nature of community and its ageless concern for "lost harmony." His central question is "What is there that seems to be implicit, or inherent in racial memory that is on the side of community?"\(^7\) He examined the creation myths of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Hopi Indians. A consistent theme, Thurman maintains, in both accounts is "creation with the harmony of innocence; the loss of innocence with the disintegration of harmony."\(^8\) This theme has significant implications for Thurman's understanding of innocence and good and community as an ideal or goal that must be achieved.\(^9\) In each account, human beings' original experience of community is both potential and actualized potential in the framework of innocence.

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\(^6\) The Search for Common Ground is a philosophical exposition of the nature of community where each of the above sources is examined. See also his Convocation Address, Pittsburg Theological Seminary, November 1971 and his Mendenhall Lectures, "Community and the Will of God."

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^8\) Thurman, Search, p. 22.

\(^9\) The discussion will return to this theme in Chapter IV, "The Actualization of Community."
In this state of innocence, the things which work against community are dormant or unactualized, but once they are actualized by the agency of human free-will, disharmony results and innocence is lost. The loss of innocence marks the loss of community within persons, in interpersonal relationships, in divine-human relationships, and in nature. Thurman argues that once innocence is lost it can never be restored. After the fall from innocence, the divine-human project of "goodness" or "community" becomes the goal toward which human endeavor must be directed. "Community" or "goodness," unlike innocence, must be achieved through free, responsible actions. Goodness as achieved community is predicated on the radical freedom of the individual to make a conscious, deliberate choice to strive for wholeness, harmony, and integration within the self and in relations with others and the world. This is a key concept in Thurman's anthropology and ethical theory. Innocence is given without knowledge; goodness, however, is achieved through knowledge and responsibility. He writes:

10"Innocence," in Thurman, "is the state of being which exists without knowledge and responsibility." It is that "which is essentially untried, untested, unchallenged. It is complete and whole within itself because it has known nothing else." Thurman, Search, pp. 26-27.
When the quality of goodness has been reestablished, a great change has taken place. Eyes are opened, knowledge is defined, and what results is the triumph of the quality of innocence over the quality of discord; a new synthesis is achieved that has in it the element of triumph. That is, a child is innocent, but a man who has learned how to winnow beauty out of ugliness, purity out of stain, tranquility out of tempest, joy out of sorrow, life out of death—only such a man may be said to be good. But he is no longer innocent.\textsuperscript{11}

Thurman contends that the creation myths demonstrate that this sense of lost harmony is still a part of the collective consciousness of the human race, and therefore, we can never accept the absence of community as the human destiny.\textsuperscript{12}

Secondly, Thurman examines the nature of community in living structures. He argues that community can be analyzed at two levels of living structures. The first is life in the sense of existence, i.e., in process, in its manifold forms and configurations which manifest themselves in time and space; in an orderly and purposeful universe. Here the concern is with living structures which are without any particular consciousness as we experience them. Thurman maintains that there is present at this level a discernible order or pattern which seems to be realizing itself in time. This, he suggests, can be understood

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 24.
without reference to religious characterizations or presuppositions. Order is a given of existence, it is a part of the facticity of life.\textsuperscript{13}

A second dimension of living structures, which Thurman treats in his analysis, are those entities which exhibit "consciousness."\textsuperscript{14} Here he explores the relationship between the biosphere, ecosystems, and organisms in their respective functions and interrelatedness. Thurman stresses that structural dependability, which is characteristic of all life as it strives toward community, is discernible in these conscious living structures as they seek to actualize their own unique potential. He writes:

The potential in any given expression of life is actualized and becomes involved in this very process in the actualizing of the potential of some other form of life upon which it is dependent. The cycle is endless, and the integration of any form cannot be thought of as independent of a similar process in other forms. Here is structural dependency expressive of an exquisite harmony—the very genius of the concept of community.\textsuperscript{15}

He is particularly concerned with the human organism, and seeks to demonstrate its empirical workings of interdependability and interrelatedness with other living

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 30.

\textsuperscript{14}"Consciousness" refers to "awareness," "irritability"; consciousness is not separate from, but a vital part of the functioning of the non-conscious universe. Ibid., p. 32.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 34.
phenomena. The human organism, according to Thurman, reveals an evolutionary process which is characterized by directiveness and purpose. The emergence of mind in the human organism may be a product of the species' response to the history of the organism itself. The human mind does directly and deliberately what nature has done through ages of trial and error.\textsuperscript{16} When an individual consciously seeks community, therefore, s/he will discover that "what he is seeking deliberately is but the logic of meaning that has gone into his creation."\textsuperscript{17}

The third source of his reflection on the nature of community is the notion of utopia or "the prophet's dream." He examines the utopias in Isaiah 11:1-9, Plato's Republic, The New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse (Revelation 21), and Sir Thomas More's Utopia. Utopias arise, according to Thurman, out of the individual's experience of disharmony in the present. The utopian dream of harmony and order, therefore, is a projection of the ideal of community

\textsuperscript{16}Thurman suggests that the mind as mind evolved from the body as part of the unfolding process of potential resident in life; and that mind as such is the basis for the evolution of "spirit." The imagination as mind-evolved spirit continued the same inherent quest for community which is resident in nature and the body. See Mendenhall Lectures, III, "Community and the Prophet's Dream," p. 1.

\textsuperscript{17}Thurman, Search, p. 34.
which is instinctively a part of human nature. The utopian literary form, according to Thurman, represents the quality of hope about the human situation and the future. It demonstrates the rational necessity and possibility of a realized future that must be honored as long as the potential for community in the individual, society, or the world has not been actualized. It does not matter, says Thurman, whether the dreamers believe the dream will come to pass in the particular historical context in which they live, but "they dare to say, nevertheless, that it will come to pass, sometime, somewhere."

The fourth source for Thurman's investigation of the nature of community is "common consciousness." The notion of "common consciousness" refers to the affinity between human consciousness and other forms of conscious existence manifest in nature. The theme of the kinship

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18 Thurman says, "The interesting thing about Utopias is this: they have within their limitations all the elements of community. They do not say anything about whom they are excluding, but theirs is a custom-made projection of dreams of order and harmony which the individual projects and holds at dead center in his soul and mind, seeking thereby to bring to pass in his contemporary experience that which indicates his contemporary experience is under the tutelage of this creative transcendent projection." Convocation Address, Pittsburg Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pa., Nov. 4, 1971, Thurman Papers, Boston University, p. 6.

19 Thurman, Search, p. 44.
of all living things extends even into the realm of com-
munication between animals, plants, and human beings. Thur-
man reasons that if life is one, then there ought to be
a fundamental sense of unity at all levels of existence.
Since life in any form cannot be fundamentally alien to
life, then more than two forms may share the same moment
in time without resistance and without threat. 20 This
understanding of "common consciousness" is foundational
for Thurman's understanding of love and the role of imagi-
nation. 21

The fifth source in Thurman's examination of the
nature of community is the notion of identity. A sense
of self, according to Thurman, is the clue and ground for
community with others. Identity is rooted in self-awareness.
The self-conscious experience of one's body as being a
part of nature and sustained by other forms of life sheds
light on the individual's kinship with all living things.
An individual's body is also his unique, private posses-
sion. 22

20 See Thurman's Convocation Address, Pittsburgh
Seminary; and Thurman, Search, p. 57.

21 See discussion of love as ethical principle in
the actualization of community in Chapter IV.

22 "The body is a man's intimate dwelling place; it
is his domain as nothing else can ever be." Thurman,
Search, p. 78.
The quest for personal identity is also part of the mind's inherent logic which seeks wholeness and integration. As stated earlier, the mind is part of the evolution of the body.\textsuperscript{23} He rejects the notion that the mind appeared by a particular act, decree or fiat. An individual's identity stands in direct relationship to the mind's actualization of its inherent potential. Thurman argues that, "In this sense a man's journey into life may be characterized as a quest for community within himself."\textsuperscript{24} The dynamic push for order and harmony at the self-conscious level bears striking affinity with what occurs instinctively in subhuman forms of life. The family and society are the communal contexts in which the individual finds his identity. These will be discussed in a later section.\textsuperscript{25}

Summary of Conception of Community

In summary, we have examined Thurman's conception of community as "actualized potential" which is rooted in the dynamic, teleological nature of life. The inherent quality of community is discernible, according to Thurman,

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., pp. 79-80, 41.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{25}See discussion of "The World" under The Triadic Character of Community.
at microcosmic and macrocosmic levels of existence. The sources of his search for "common ground" or community include creation accounts, living structures, utopias, common consciousness, and identity. These sources, Thurman maintains, reveal the fundamental nature of community as an inalienable pattern in life which seeks wholeness, integration, and harmony. The second part of this chapter is concerned with the triadic character of community represented in his understanding of the individual, God, and the world.

The Triadic Character of Community

In Thurman's understanding of the nature of community, there is a triadic relationship between the individual, God, and the world. These three elements are integrally related and form the basic analytical construct for the dynamic character of community. Community is a cooperative project involving all three elements. The individual and God are the primary principals, while the world, though positive and salient, remains secondary in relation to the centrality of religious experience. It should be stated that religious experience is the fundamental category for all of Thurman's thinking regarding
community. 26 His ordering of the respective elements informs this analysis. This discussion shall proceed as follows: 1) the individual: the nature of the self and human freedom and responsibility; 2) God: the nature of God, community as the will of God, the immanence of God and the power of his love to create the basis for community within the individual and the world; 3) the world: the universe, nature, human society, and the state; and 4) the totality: the nature of the religious experience, world-mindedness and disciplines for preparation.

The Individual

The Nature of the Individual

In Thurman's conceptualization of the nature of community, the individual is the point of departure. It is a persistent note in his thinking that the individual must begin with her/himself, with her/his own "working paper." 27 The development of a sense of self is the basis upon which one comes to understand her/his own unique

26 He says, "human life is one and all men are members of one another. And this insight is spiritual and it is the hard core of religious experience." Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. x.

potential and self-worth. Without such a sense of self, one drifts aimlessly through life without a true understanding of one's place in existence.  

A healthy sense of self is garnered out of a dynamic tension between the individual's self-fact and self-image. The person's self-fact is her/his inherent worth as a child of God; it is the central fact that s/he is part of the very movement of life itself.  

The individual's self-image is formed by relationships with others and to a large extent, determines one's destiny. However, the individual must ultimately rest her/his case with her/his self-fact, her/his inherent worth and dignity. He writes, "The responsibility for living with meaning and dignity can never be taken away from the individual." This is a crucial point for Thurman's treatment of the individual's response to dehumanizing onslaughts.

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29 According to Smith, the emphasis on the centrality of personality places Thurman in the heart of the Evangelical Liberal position where "personality centered Christianity is a basic tenet of liberalism." Smith, Mystic, p. 49.

30 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 93.
like racism and other forces which work against human potential and community.\textsuperscript{31}

The sense of self is rooted in the nature of the self for Thurman. Thurman makes a distinction between the inner and outer dimensions of the self. For him, the individual is both a child of nature and a child of spirit. The outer dimension of the self is part of the external world of nature.\textsuperscript{32} The clue to the outer world of relations, however, is found in the inner world of experience.\textsuperscript{33} The mind is the place to begin in understanding the inner dimension of the self. For Thurman, the term "inner life" or "inner awareness" refers to more than the mere formal discursive activity of the mind, rather it includes the entire range of self-awareness of the individual.\textsuperscript{33} "Inner life" means:

\ldots the awareness of the individual's responsiveness to realities that are transcendent in character, emanating from a core of Reality which the individual is aware and of which the individual is also aware that he is a part. The inner life, therefore, is activity that takes place within consciousness, but

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\textsuperscript{31}Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", pp. 111-13.

\textsuperscript{32}Thurman, The Creative Encounter, p. 19; Thurman, Disciplines, p. 57; and Thurman, Search, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{33}"The Inner Life and World Consciousness," Thurman Papers, Boston University, n.d., p. 3.
does not originate there and is a part of a Reality central to all life and is at once the ground of all awareness. It is there that man becomes conscious of his meaning and destiny as a child, an offspring of God.\footnote{Ibid., p. 3.}

The cultivation of the inner life is the basis for the development of a genuine sense of self and authentic existence in the world.\footnote{Thurman is acutely aware of the danger of subjectivism and privatization of meaning implied in the emphasis on the development of inner consciousness. He tries to guard against this tendency by accentuating the need for external empirical verification of what one experiences in his inner life. He writes, "The real questions at issue here are, how may a man know he is not being deceived? Is there any way by which he may know beyond doubt, and therefore with verification, that what he experiences is authentic and genuine?", Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 57. Rational coherence between the inner experience of self and the external world is the methodology employed to test for self-deception. He argues that "Whatever seems to deny a fundamental structure of orderliness upon which rationality seems to depend cannot be countenanced." Ibid., pp. 57-58.}

Human Freedom and Responsibility

Thurman's distinction between the inner and outer modes of self-existence is helpful in understanding his notion of human freedom and responsibility. Human freedom is a key concept in Thurman's anthropology and the individual's role in creating community. In defining freedom, Thurman utilizes the inner and outer dimensions of the
self to contrast the notions of "liberty" and "freedom." Liberty refers to the external prerogatives, privileges, and grants that a particular social arrangement or context confers upon the individual. "Its locus is outside of the individual and can be given or withheld in accordance to the judgment and the will and behavior of those external to oneself who grant it."\(^{36}\) Freedom, unlike liberty, is located within the very being of the individual. It is a quality of being and spirit; it is what the individual becomes aware of in the development of a sense of self. Although the external environment may deny the individual's liberty, it cannot deny the fundamental fact of freedom which is the individual's birthright as a child of God. Likewise, the individual cannot deny the fact of his freedom. In a Sartrean sense, Thurman would maintain that one is "condemned to be free."

Thurman utilizes a two part working definition for freedom. Freedom, for Thurman, is first "the will and the ability to act at any moment in time as to influence or determine the future."\(^{37}\)


of freedom is the autonomy of the individual in the midst of social, physical and natural forces. The individual is ultimately never the victim of these forces.

Secondly, freedom is "the sense of options or alternatives." Freedom as a sense of options or alternatives is to be differentiated from freedom as an exercise of options. There are instances, says Thurman, when the exercise of options is impossible, e.g., against natural, impersonal forces. Freedom as a sense of options or alternatives refers to the experience of the inner self located in the will, in the personal place where only the individual as individual can effect. He illustrates this view of freedom with a story from childhood in which he cornered a snake and placed his foot on it to hold it still. He says that even under the weight of his foot, he could still feel the small creature resisting by wiggling his tiny body. Thurman says that even though the snake could not escape, he kept alive a sense of option. This sense of option that the individual possesses as a part of his being is fundamental to freedom "and wherever this dies, wherever elements in the environment are internalized by ____________________________

38 Thurman, "America In Search," p. 10.
people so as to paralyze this sense, then all the lights go out and the soul of the people begins to rot. "39

Freedom, then, for Thurman, is a quality of being; it is part of the "giveness" of the individual. It is the will and the ability so to act at any moment in time as to influence or determine the future; it is a sense of options or alternatives. The key to remember for Thurman is that the locus of freedom is within. Liberty refers to external prerogatives and privileges which are granted by an authority outside of the self and therefore can be taken away, but freedom is the individual's birthright as a child of God which cannot be denied by any external force or arrangement. Ultimately, even the individual herself/himself cannot deny her/his freedom. Thurman believed that freedom understood in this way, enables the individual to experience a proper sense of self despite the ravages and insults heaped upon one by society and the world. 40

39 Ibid., p. 10.

40 Freedom is the individual's birthright as a child of God. Thurman writes: "'Freedom under God' means the recognition of the essential dignity of the human spirit; therefore it is inherent in man's experience with life and is a basic ingredient in personality. This is so universal that it is the key to the intrinsic worthfulness which every man ascribes, at long last, to himself. There
Freedom also entails responsibility.\(^{41}\) The individual who is aware of her/his freedom is responsible not only for her/his actions, but also for her/his reactions. The individual is responsible for her/his actions because s/he is free. Therefore, one can never place the blame for what one does on forces outside of oneself. Thurman suggests that responsibility is a corollary of freedom because when the individual assumes responsibility for her/his actions, s/he confirms the grounds of her/his own self and authenticity. Therefore, one can never unshoulder responsibility for her/his actions without forfeiting one's own being.\(^{42}\) Despite a person's history and the external forces which shape and mold her/his fate and story, the individual remains responsible for her/his action. This emphasis on responsibility has profound implications for

\(^{41}\)See Luther Smith's "Community: Partnership of Freedom and Responsibility," in God and Human Freedom, ed., Young, pp. 23-31. Here Smith indicates that responsibility in Thurman means both "response-ability" and "accountability."

\(^{42}\)Thurman says, "The moment I transfer responsibility for my own actions, I relinquish my own free initiative. I become an instrument in another's hands. This
the moral imperatives to love and to be sincere ("truth-telling") in all encounters and situations. For the oppressed, claiming responsibility for one's own destiny is the initial act of freedom and selfhood. Thurman writes, "If I let anyone take responsibility for my own actions, then I give them power of veto and certification over my life." 43

The other side of responsibility is the individual's reaction to the events of her/his life. Thurman maintains that there is no escape or rationalization which releases us from the responsibility entailed in the individual's free being. At all times, the individual maintains the right of veto and certification over how s/he responds to the circumstances of her/his life, even those s/he cannot control.

I can become a prisoner of events, I can cry aloud at the miscarriage of justice in the universe. I can do a whole range of things, but when I get through all my exhortations, my protestations, my agonizing, I am still left with the tight logic of my personal responsibility to say "yes" or "no" to my situation. Yes or no and make it stick. This is the freedom

is the iniquity of all forms of human slavery. The slave is not a responsible person and the result of slavery is the destruction, finally, of any sense of alternatives." Thurman, "Freedom Under God," p. 2.

man has. He does not have to say "yes" even to events he cannot control. 44

Responsibility exists at both personal and social levels of existence for Thurman. Responsibility is always a shared experience. The prerogative which the individual ascribes to her/himself must be carried over into relations with others. The individual is responsible as a member of the group and/or society in which s/he lives and functions. The privatization of responsibility is a denial of freedom. "Free men must be responsible to themselves and to each other for the personal and collective life which marks their days." 45

Finally, responsibility is ultimately to God, the ground and guarantor of the individual's freedom. The individual, therefore, is ultimately responsible to God for all her/his actions and reactions. "God is the Creator of life," says Thurman, "and the ultimate responsibility of life is to God. Man's responsibility to God is personal and solitary, but it is not experienced in isolation or detachment." 46 Society is not exempt from responsibility

46 Ibid.
to God. As societies participate in the dynamics and ends of life, they are also accountable to the God of life. America as nation is morally responsible for its actions toward its citizens of color and the disinherited.\textsuperscript{47}

In summary, the individual is the point of departure for Thurman in his thought regarding the dynamic character of community. Thurman's anthropology stresses the centrality of personality and the inherent worth of the individual as a child of God. Developing a sense of self, which is the primary project of the individual, involves maintaining a healthy balance between one's self-fact and self-image. Thurman also makes a distinction between the inner and outer dimensions of the self. The individual is a child of nature and a child of spirit. While the outer world of relations informs the inner life, the latter is the place where the commitment to community is made and the realization of harmony, integration, and wholeness begins. At the core of Thurman's anthropology is his interpretation of human freedom and responsibility. Freedom is part of the "givenness" of being; it is neither conferred upon the individual from authorities or sources external to her/him, nor can it be ultimately denied by

\textsuperscript{47} Ibd.; see also, Thurman, "America in Search of a Soul."
the individual her/himself. It is the individual's birthright as a child of God. Responsibility is entailed in the notion of freedom. The individual is both responsible for her/his actions and reactions. To relinquish responsibility for one's actions or reactions, according to Thurman, is to forfeit one's being and freedom. Individuals and societies are ultimately accountable to God, who is the Creator of Life.

God

The second principal in the triadic relationship which is involved in the actualization of community is God. In this part of the discussion, we shall be in Thurman concerned with: 1) the nature of God, 2) community as the will of God, and 3) the immanence of God and the power of God's love to create the basis and the method for the actualization of community within the individual and the world.

For Thurman, God is the sovereign Lord of human history and the universe. Nothing is outside of the divine

48 Although Thurman begins with the individual, his understanding of community remains theocentric. Thurman believes that the individual personality is the medium through which God realizes Himself in the world. Thurman, **Deep is the Hunger**, p. 94.
context, God's power is absolute, and God's love is omnipresent. 49 God is the creator and sustainer of life and existence. God is not merely the Creator of creatures, but is the "Bottomer of existence," i.e., transcendent, all-inclusive, all-comprehending, and universal. 50 God is the subject of which all living things are predicates. This "subject quality of life," writes Thurman, "seems always to be previous in time to all particular living things or all particular manifestations." 51

God is related to all existence as Mind in a way similar to the human mind in its relation to time-space existence. The Mind of God seeks to realize Itself in time-space manifestations, therefore, existence itself is understood as divine activity. The divine activity is the basis for the rational order which is observable in life. 52 This inherent logic in existence provides the


50 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 28; Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 146.

51 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 29. See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 62-64.

52 Thurman, Search, p. 5.
framework for the individual’s interpretation of the will of God.  

53 He says:

I am interpreting all manifestations of order or process or plan as an expression of the Will of God coming to Itself in time and space. The order in creation, thought of as a rational principle on the basis of which all man’s study of the external world is projected is the will of God in nature and the external world. What is observed as a structure of orderliness or dependability in any and all experiences of life, from the simplest to the most complex, is seen most dramatically in the ability of man to create, plan, to function purposefully, and to implement in time and space what is idea and thought in the mind.  

54 Secondly, for Thurman, God is also personal and immanent. One of the crucial demands of the religious experience, according to Thurman, is that the individual is addressed by God at a personal and intimate level. God can never be understood abstractly, but must be experienced as Presence.  

55 The Presence of God can be encountered

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53 There seems to be a discernible, rational order in life, according to Thurman, which discloses the "intent of the Creator." He argues, therefore, that it is reasonable to assume that "wherever life is found, evidence of creative intent must also exist in that which is being experienced, reacted to, observed or studied. One such sign, and the most crucial one, is the way life seeks always to realize itself in wholeness, harmony, and integration within the potential that characterizes the particular experience of life." Thurman, Search, p. 7.  

54 Mendenhall Lectures, p. 2.  

at any level of experience, in the common place or through religious discipline and preparation. God is immanent in the world of nature, persons, and things. The divine imprimatur is on all of creation. In persons, God is resident within the human mind and spirit. Thurman believes that within the individual there is an "uncreated element" which is the basis for the person's identification with God as a child of God. This "uncreated element" is the seat of intuition and the meeting place between God and the individual.

According to Thurman, the life and ministry of Jesus is the great example of the immanence of God operative in the human personality. Jesus, according to Thurman:


57 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 46.

58 He writes, "Man and God do communicate ... Eckhart insists that there is in the soul of man an apex, a spark which is God, the Godhead. This is the very ground of the soul. It is in and of itself the Godhead." Ibid., p. 43. See also, Thurman, "Our Spirits Remember God," The Inward Journey, p. 133.

59 Thurman sees Jesus as an historical personage and a fellow-worker in the actualization of human community. Jesus is not God, nor does he deserve worship; worship
erected a pyramid out of the funded insights of all the prophets, scaled its heights and brought God down out of the clouds, and found him to be an intimate part of the warp and woof of human experience and human struggle. 60

Thirdly, for Thurman, the love of God is the basis and the assurance of the actualization of community in the individual and society. 61 According to Thurman, there is within the individual a basic need to be cared for and understood in a relationship with another at a point which is beyond all good and evil. Much of an individual's time and energy, he suggests, is spent trying to fulfill this need and to guarantee that s/he is not alone. He maintains that in the religious experience this inner necessity of love is fulfilled by the love of God. In the Presence of God, the person is affirmed and becomes aware of being dealt with totally.

Whether he is a good person or a bad person, he is being dealt with at a point beyond all that is limiting, is reserved for God alone. He does recognize Jesus, however, as the revelation of how the committed individual creates community through the transforming power of love and truth. For a thorough outline of Thurman's interpretation of Jesus, see Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 54-62.

60 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 147.

61 To be loved, according to Thurman, is "to have a sense of being dealt with at a point in one's self that is beyond all good and evil." "We Believe Television Series," p. 91; Thurman, "The Experience of Love," The Inward Journey, p. 35.
and all that is creative within him. He is dealt with at the core of his being, and at that core he is touched and released.62

Consequently, the individual is enabled to deal honestly and lovingly with her/himself and in her/his relationships with others. What is experienced in encounter with the love of God becomes the basis for her/his relating to others. "What is disclosed in his religious experience he must define in community."63 When the individual experiences the love of God, s/he finds the basis and the method for authenticating the vision of community within her/himself and in the world.

In summary, Thurman's vision of reality is radically theocentric.64 God is the sovereign Lord of human history and the universe. Nothing is outside of the divine context; God's power is absolute, and His love is omnipresent. God is also the Creator and sustainer of life and existence. The divine activity in life, which is expressed in a rational and intelligible order, discloses the "intent"

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63 Thurman, *Creative Encounter*, p. 124.

64 It will be shown in Chapter IV how Thurman's theocentric vision of reality is the basis for the moral life and the creation of human community.
or the will of God for harmony, wholeness, and integration, in fine, community. The immanence of God is in nature, persons, and things; the divine signature is upon all of life. Within the individual, God exists as the ground of his/her being, the "uncreated element" which transcends time-space manifestations and creaturely concerns. This is the meeting place between the Infinite and the finite, the ground of the religious encounter between God and the individual. It is here that the love of God both enables and requires the individual to seek community within her/himself and in the world.

The World

The third element in the triadic relationship which is involved in the creation of community is the world. The idea of world, in Thurman, includes the universe, nature, human society, and the state. The universe is the vast immensity of life manifesting itself in the totality. Here the creative act of God is understood as the all-pervasive quality of life with an infinite number of configurations and forms. The universe is dynamic and evolving; it expresses itself in creative order as life seeks to come to itself in time and space. In this dimension, there is no origin or end. Such notions are introduced by the
human mind in order to give meaning and coherence to the vast totality of life in which it exists. 65

Secondly, the notion of world in Thurman includes nature. Nature is part of the creative activity of God in which life manifests itself in interrelated structures of dependability. Nature is characterized by an impersonal order which operates without consciousness or values. 66 Nature, however, is involved in the movement of life towards community. 67 The human person, as a physical being, is part of nature, and is therefore subject to natural laws. 68 Yet, the individual is capable of self-transcendence and is able to stand over and against nature to manipulate it to her/his own ends. This power over nature has had both positive and negative consequences. Positively, the human race has been able to implement technology which has brought us closer to community; the world is now a veritable neighborhood. But, negatively, modern science has created weapons of destruction which threaten to annihilate human life on the planet. Thurman suggests that

65 Thurman, Search, p. 5.
66 Ibid., p. 31.
67 Ibid., p. 34.
the essential problem between human beings and nature is spiritual. He believed that it is possible for humanity to restore the lost harmony or sense of community with nature. The restored community would include harmonious relationships with animals as well.69

Thurman's notion of the world also includes human society. Human society is a manifestation of the movement of life towards community. He writes, "In human society, the experience of community, or realized potential, is rooted in life itself because the intuitive human urge for community reflects a characteristic of life."70 Society finds its basis in the individual's need to be cared for and assured that he is not isolated from others.71 All social arrangements which individuals live by are predicated on a common need for "self-nourishment" so that the organism (body, mind, and spirit) can grow and develop.

The family is the basic social unit where the process of self-nourishment and acculturation begins;72 it

69 Mendenhall Lectures, p. 8.
70 Thurman, Search, p. 5.
71 Ibid., p. 3; see also, Thurman, Disciplines, p. 57.
72 Thurman, Disciplines, pp. 41ff; see also discussion in Creative Encounter, "The Inner Need for Love," where Thurman analogizes "mother-love" with God's love
is a microcosm of the larger society. The family is but part of a larger social unit which insures the sense of belonging and identity for the individual. The state, according to Thurman, provides for the affirmation and care of the individual at a greater level. The nature and the function of the state in Thurman is remarkably positive. The state is responsible for the affirmation and care of the individual and the creation of a healthy social environment in which the human personality can fulfill its potential. The modern state, according to Thurman, has tremendous power over the individuals who make up the common life. It manifests this power in three important ways: 1) the state assumes a transcendent role and becomes an object of religious devotion; 2) it gives the individual citizen an integrated basis for her/his behavior so that there is always a normative standard as being the basis of the individual's assurance of being cared for at a personal and intimate level. He writes, "... the need for love is an essential element in the structure of personality. It is responsible for the establishing of a pattern of response to other human beings that makes possible all forms of community and relatedness between human beings in society" (pp. 105-06).

73 Thurman, Search, pp. 81-82; see also, Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", pp. 111-12.

which enables her/him to determine when s/he is out of community; and 3) the notion of the state inspires a sense of participating in a collective destiny, thus reaffirming in crisis experiences, a sense of belonging to a transcendent entity which gives the individual a sense of participating in something greater than her/himself.75 According to Thurman, the transcendent character of the state and the religious loyalty which it inspires and demands has been a major problem for the American Christian church. The unreconciled conflict between loyalty to God and loyalty to the state is responsible for the American church's silence on issues of racism, segregation, and war. This thesis has serious implications for the American civil religion debate.76

75 Thurman, Search, pp. 84-85.

A critical concern for the state, according to Thurman, is the presence of minorities who exist as "outsiders" in the midst of "insiders." Minorities are required to honor the same demands of sovereignty, but are denied the basic rewards of that allegiance. This creates two pressing problems for the state: 1) it creates a condition of guilt in the collective consciousness of the society which threatens the vitality of the body politic; and 2) it fosters an environment of power politics between world states which compete for the loyalties of minority groups.77 The greatest challenge for the state, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union, is to create a social environment in which the individual and minorities have an authentic sense of belonging to the society. Such a climate would be one in which each person has the opportunity to actualize his/her potential "thereby experiencing community within himself as part and parcel of the experience of community within the State."78

77 Thurman, Search, p. 87.
78 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
The idea of world, in Thurman, includes the universe, nature, human society, and the state. In his discussion of the world, his primary thesis that life is itself alive and seeks to manifest itself in a qualitative pattern of order that makes for wholeness, harmony and integration is central. Of particular interest, for the purpose of this study, is his understanding of society and the state. The historic struggle of black Americans within the context of American society as the objects of racism and segregation sanctioned by the state is a major concern for Thurman in his thinking regarding the meaning and potential of human community.

The Totality

The three elements which comprise the triadic nature of community, the individual, God, and the world, have been examined separately for purposes of analysis. In Thurman's understanding of community, however, the three principals are dynamically interrelated. Each interacts with the other in a creative unity which proceeds for a common ground and purpose which he understands to be the Mind of God coming to Itself in time and space.\footnote{Ibid., p. 5.} The totality of the interaction between the individual, God
and the world is seen most clearly in the religious experience which Thurman refers to as "the creative encounter." In the religious experience, the individual and God are the primary principals, while the world is secondary. As we have seen, the world is not illusory for Thurman, but is positive and reflects the same qualitative urge towards community as the rest of life. Its secondary status, therefore, does not reflect its significance or value, rather it proceeds from Thurman's emphasis on the primary relationship between God and the individual.

In his book, entitled The Creative Encounter, Thurman treats the nature of religious experience. Following the distinctions between the inner and outer dimensions of experience, he examines "the inwardness of religion" and "outwardness of religion." The former categorization refers to the encounter between the individual and God, the latter, to the individual's encounter with the world. This distinction is essential for Thurman because he believes that one cannot authentically move toward the actualization of community in his external environment until harmony and integration are sought within. It is in the creative encounter that the individual discovers the integral relationship between the inner life and "world-mindedness."
The concept of world-mindedness has to do with the development of the logic of the primary discoveries of the inner life in the external relationships between the multiple manifestations of life... world-mindedness is the outer expression among men of an awareness of the individual's sense of being a child of God, being rooted and grounded in the life of God. In the religious experience, therefore, although the individual and God are primary, the world is not a separate, insignificant element, but a salient and dynamic part of the total experience.

The Religious Experience

Thurman defines religious experience as "the conscious and direct exposure of the individual to God." He says, "Such an exposure seems to the individual to be inclusive of all the meaning of his life--there is nothing that is not involved." The encounter between God and the individual is a cooperative affair; it is a double search: "Religious experience in its profoundest dimension is the finding of man by God and the finding of God by man." 

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80 Thurman, "The Inner Life and World-Mindedness," pp. 3-4.
81 See Robert Carroll Williams's very informative discussion of "Self, God, and Existence," in God and Human Freedom, pp. 44-56.
82 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 20.
83 Ibid., p. 39.
For the individual, there are two demands of the religious experience. The experience must first give the individual a sense of ultimate security. This sense of being ultimately cared for and confirmed identifies the individual with all of existence as one created being among many others and establishes an ultimate or transcendent point of reference. The second demand of the religious experience is that the encounter with God must give the individual personal assurance, i.e., she/he is dealt with at her/his most private and intimate center. This gives the individual a basis for understanding his/her own value and inherent worth as a child of God. 84

The nature of the religious experience, according to Thurman, is not casual, rather there is always a volitional element involved in it. The self actively and consciously participates in the experience. 85 The context of the experience may be casual or random, but the individual must make a conscious decision to participate in the encounter with God. This is part of an individual's freedom and serves as the ground for the moral quality of the will. 86

84 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
85 Ibid., p. 33.
86 Ibid.
Disciplines for Preparation

Religious experience, therefore, involves preparation or spiritual discipline by the individual for the creative encounter. The central discipline is prayer. Prayer, in this sense, is a method by which the individual prepares or "readies" her/his spirit for the divine encounter. Thurman refers to this form of prayer as meditation. In the experience of meditation, the individual quiets the stirring of the inner self so that the Presence of God which is resident within the person may come to itself. In meditation, "the self moves toward God" and "God touches the spirit and the will and a wholly new character in terms of dimension enters the experience." 87 The individual is both participant and observer in the encounter which means that s/he enters the experience with his own facticity or "residue of God-meaning." 88 It is in the Presence of God that the individual sees herself/himself as God sees her/him and it is there that s/he is both enabled and required to seek community within her/himself.

87 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

88 "Residue of God-meaning" refers to the pattern and contents of one's belief, value judgments, strengths, weaknesses, in sum, the individual's totality. Ibid., pp. 26-27.
in the world. For Thurman, this is the crux of commit-
ment.

The other discipline which may prepare the individ-
ual for encounter with God is suffering. Suffering,
according to Thurman, "is a physical pain or its equivalent
with reference to which the individual may be inspired
to protect her/himself, so that despite its effects he
may carry on the functioning of his life." There are
two spiritual problems which surface in the individual's
experience of suffering: the personalizing of the problem
of evil and hostility towards God. First, in the personal-
izing of evil, the suffering is seen as an invasion of
the individual's privacy or a violation of the orderliness
of personality; it is in essence, a denial of the good.
Thurman maintains that evil cannot be treated as a detached,

89 Ibid., p. 40.

90 Thurman also treats commitment, growth, and recon-
ciliation as disciplines of the spirit. A detailed dis-
cussion is found in Thurman, Disciplines. See especially
Thurman's discussion of "singleness of mind" at p. 19.

91 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 67. Suffering is rooted
in pain, but is distinct from the latter in that it in-
volves consciousness. Apart from the consciousness of
pain, says Thurman, there can be no suffering. Ibid.,
p. 67. Suffering is not limited to physical pain, but
it also involves moral or psychic dimensions of pain. Ibid.,
p. 72. Thus, the question of theodicy is raised in this
dimension.

92 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 50.
abstract thing but becomes a part of personal experience. The individual must, therefore, search for some rational basis for the experience as it affects her/his person. A rational explanation is sought by the sufferer in the context of ultimacy. This need, according to Thurman, often expresses itself in hostility towards God (or whatever is one's view of ultimate meaning). But in the individual's hostility and personalization of evil the inner resources of the individual are brought to an acute focus which prepares her/him for an encounter with God. He writes:

> The two spiritual problems created by suffering--the personalizing of the problem of evil, and the hostility against God that is inspired--may become handmaidens or guides in the very midst of the encounter which is at the heart of the religious experience.

In summary, the totality of the interaction between the individual, God and the world is seen most clearly in the religious experience. It is in the creative encounter that the individual discovers the integral relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of life which provide the basis for the actualization of human community. The encounter between God and the individual

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93 Thurman, *Disciplines*, p. 75.
94 Thurman, *Creative Encounter*, pp. 53-54.
is not casual, but always involves consciousness and a volitional element. Therefore, the individual can make preparations for the encounter with God. Prayer and suffering are disciplines of the spirit which may bring the individual into Presence of God where s/he is ultimately confirmed and personally assured that he is a child of God. There, the individual is both enabled and required to seek community within himself and in the world. The person who makes the commitment to community in the Presence of God "is dedicated therefore to the removing of all barriers which block or frustrate this possibility in the world." 95

Summary of the Nature of Community

In our analysis of the nature of community in the thought of Howard Thurman, we have examined his conception of community and the triadic character of community. Thurman defines community as "actualized potential" which is rooted in the dynamic, teleological nature of life. The inherent quality of community is discernible at microcosmic and macrocosmic levels of existence. The sources of his search for community include creation accounts, living structures, utopias, common consciousness, and identity.

95 Ibid., p. 124.
These sources, Thurman maintains, reveal the fundamental nature of community as an inalienable pattern in life which seeks wholeness, integration, and harmony.

The second section of this part was concerned with the triadic character of community represented in his understanding of the individual, God, and the world. These three elements are integrally related and form the basic analytical construct for the dynamic character of community. Community is a cooperative project involving all three elements. The individual and God are the primary principals, while the world, though positive and salient, remains secondary in relation to the centrality of religious experience. Thurman's vision of reality is radically theocentric and this understanding informs his thinking regarding the relationship of the individual to the world or the moral life. The basic questions raised in this chapter have been, What is the nature of community? How is it conceived? and What are its characteristics? The following chapter raises the questions of the experiential and intellectual sources of Thurman's thinking regarding community.
CHAPTER III

THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND: THE EXPERIENTIAL AND INTELLECTUAL SOURCES OF THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN

It is the purpose of this chapter to treat the experiential and intellectual sources of the ideal of community in the thought of Howard Thurman. Thurman's quest for community is the central defining category of his life and thought. In his search for "common ground," it can be seen how the development of his thinking emerged from the particularity of the black experience of community to a more universal understanding of the interrelatedness of his life. His earliest experiences with nature, his family, the black church and community of Daytona, Florida, and his education in black schools form the background for his later intellectual pursuits at Rochester Theological Seminary and Haverford College. The intellectual influences during this period of Thurman's development confirmed for him the profound truth that he had already discovered in his early years in the black community.

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A key theme in Thurman's development is his intensely personal understanding of community. In Thurman's search for common ground, he sees himself as both subject and object in a parabolic journey towards community.¹ His teaching and ministerial positions as pastor and chaplain, and later his work with the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund, served as spiritual and intellectual laboratories in which his vision of community could be tested and revised.

While it is difficult to separate the experiential dimension of his development from his intellectual formation, for the purposes of analysis this chapter is divided into two sections. First, a biographical profile is given which emphasizes significant periods and influences in his personal development. This section will follow the basic outline: 1) early years; 2) education; 3) early ministry and teaching; 4) a greater vision; and 5) the wider ministry. The following section will examine the major intellectual sources which contributed to the formal

¹Mozella Gordon Mitchell states, "I see Thurman as having unconsciously mythologized his entire life and become the hero of an epic journey of which God is the author. But he himself is the co-author and interpreter of the religious experience he undergoes." "The Dynamics of Howard Thurman's Relationship to Literature and Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1980), p. 80.
character and expression of his thought. They are respectively: 1) Morehouse College; 2) George Cross; 3) Olive Schreiner; and 4) Rufus M. Jones.

The Experiential Sources of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman

The Early Years

Affinity with Nature

Howard Thurman was born at the turn of the century on November 18, 1900 in Daytona Beach, Florida. The second child and only son, born to Saul Solomon and Alice Ambrose Thurman, young Howard was an unusual child whose closest companions were found in the world of nature. The deep, dark woods, the lonely solitude of the Florida nights, the rhythmic movement of the Halifax River, the pounding surf and majestic stillness of the Atlantic Ocean, the terrible mystery and fascination of tropical storms, and the resiliency and strength of the old oak tree in his backyard—all these early childhood experiences with nature

2Thurman had two sisters: Henrietta, the eldest and a younger sister, Madeline. In reference to Thurman’s affinity with nature, he says in his autobiography, "When I was young, I found more companionship in nature than I did among people." Thurman, With Head and Heart, p. 7; see also Lerone Bennett, "Howard Thurman: Twentieth Century Holy Man," p. 76. Bennett describes Thurman as a "loner, a brooder, a sensitive suffering spirit who sought solace in the woods and on deserted beaches and communicated with forces that are not visible and audible to other mortals."
provided Thurman with clues to the inner unity of all living things, which was to be the central concern of his life. 3

The Family

Thurman's early affinity with nature can be explained, in part, by the extreme hardships of his family environment and his inner need for security and affirmation. 4 His early years were beset by a number of adversities and tragedies which left their scars on his tender spirit. The experience which left its profoundest mark was the funeral service of his father. 5 At the funeral, a local evangelist, Reverend Sam Cromarte, seized the opportunity as an occasion to illustrate the fate of those who died "outside of Christ." Thurman says, "I listened with wonderment, then anger, and finally mounting rage as Sam Cromarte preached my father into hell." 6 In his need to find a sense of meaning and immunity against the

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3 The Life and Thought of Howard Thurman, A Documentary Film in Two Parts, The British Broadcasting Company, 1976.

4 In speaking of the assurance and immunity which his friends from nature offered, Thurman said, "I felt rooted in life, in nature, in existence," Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 8.


6 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 6.
onslaught of this devastating event, he turned to the huge oak tree in his backyard. Many years later, he was to describe it as his "windbreak against existence." As the tree was able to withstand the raging storms, he sought a similar strength. 7

While the circumstances associated with his father's death cut deeply into the developing personality of Thurman, his mother's constant struggle to provide for her family after her husband's death made a significant impact upon the sensitive young boy. Alice Thurman was a quiet, devoutly Christian woman, who, after her husband's death, went to work as a domestic for a white family in downtown Daytona. 8 Her responsibilities to her employer took away much of the valuable time which Howard and his sisters needed, and which she wanted so badly to share with them, but could not. 9

The sudden death of Thurman's father, followed closely by the death of his stepfather, and the terrible burden of his mother's work situation which separated her

8 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 12.
9 Years later, Thurman remarked that his mother worked so hard to support the family that she actually forgot the correct date of his birth. Mentioned in his Mendenhall Lectures, "Community and the Will of God, Part II." DePauw University, February 1961.
from her children, contributed greatly to his close identification with nature and his need to develop his inner world. These circumstances were compounded by his own self-perception and the absence of close childhood acquaintances.10

If there was one dominant force, outside of Thurman's companionship with nature, which was responsible for his sense of self-worth in the face of overwhelming difficulties, it was his maternal grandmother, Nancy Ambrose. She "was the first to teach Thurman that spirituality sustains one in the midst of life's many predicaments."11

10 In an unpublished manuscript, Thurman shares his loneliness and sense of rejection: "I seemed to be passed over unnoticed, my company was not welcomed by girls nor by the boys in choosing sides for games. Among my peers I seemed to be an 'extra,' but never quite so . . . I was ever haunted by a feeling of awkwardness in all my relationships, I felt clumsy. As I walked, it was as if my feet felt fearful of being together. I've told how under stress, the toe of my right foot would rub against my left heel, and that I was fat . . . I had no older brother or father to defend me, only Momma, Grandma, and my sisters. Yet somehow I did not feel I was a failure just because I did not 'belong' with boys and girls my age. The humiliations of my youth threatened me, but did not undermine my self-worth." Unpublished manuscript, concluding chapter, Head and Heart, p. 6. Thurman Papers, Mugar Memorial Library Special Collections.

11 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 32. See Jacquelyne Jackson, "Black Grandparents in the South," in The Black Family: Essays and Studies, ed., Robert Staples (Belmont,
"Grandma Nancy" came to live with her daughter and children after the death of Saul Thurman and was actually the person who raised Thurman and his sisters. He refers to her as "the anchor person in our family" who "brooded over our lives." It was his grandmother who early helped to instill in him a sense of self-worth in spite of the indignities he suffered from his peers and his painful encounters with the crushing reality of segregation in the deep South. She was able to inspire in her grandson a belief that life mattered. Thurman says that whenever his grandmother would sense that he and his sisters were experiencing a sense of loss of value, she would tell them a story of a slave preacher who once or twice a year would visit her plantation. At the close of his delivery, he would pause and tell them: "You are not niggers! You are not slaves! You are God's children!"
He says that "When my grandmother got to the part of the story there would be a slight stiffening in her spine and we sucked in our breath. When she finished, our spirits were restored." 14

Although Nancy Ambrose was illiterate, she had great appreciation for education. She had discovered early that there was something "magic" to education. 15 She assumed responsibility for seeing that Thurman and his sisters excelled in school. Grandma Nancy's concern and diligence in monitoring Howard's educational progress reaped high benefits. He was the first black student in Daytona to take and pass the eighth grade examination which qualified him for high school. 16

**The Black Church**

These formative influences from the world of nature and his family environment, especially from his grandmother, did much to kindle a growing sense of personal worth and mission in young Thurman. Another factor which played a

14 Thurman, *Head and Heart*, p. 21; see also Goodwin, p. 534.

15 When she was a slave, her mistress discovered her daughter teaching Nancy to read. This experience affected Nancy Ambrose deeply and convinced her that education was a means of liberation. Ibid., p. 533.

16 BBC Film Documentary.
prominent role in his early search for "common ground" was the black church. Both his mother and grandmother were faithful church members, and it was through their examples and tutelage that Thurman found a context through which he could pursue and actualize what he called "the hunger of the heart." 17 Although at his father's funeral he had sworn out of confusion and anger that he would never have anything to do with the church, he joined Mount Bethel Baptist Church when he was twelve years old. 18 The attendant ceremonies and rites of passage which were, and still are, integral parts of the black church tradition did much to give Thurman a strong sense of "somebodiness." Thurman's experience of baptism and later of being discipled by a "sponsor" in the church had an inestimable impact upon his sense of self by belonging to a community of people who cared for him. The significance of being in a community which genuinely supported one's personal worth against the ravages of a larger and hostile society found a special place in the developing personality of Thurman. He explains the meaning of these early church experiences:


18 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 6.
In the fellowship of the church, particularly in the experience of worship, there was a feeling of sharing in primary community. Not only did church membership seem to bear heavily upon one's ultimate destiny beyond death and the grave; more than all the communal ties, it also undergirded one's sense of personal identity. It was summed up in the familiar phrase "If God is for you, who can prevail against you?".

The Black Community of Daytona

Finally, there was the black community of Daytona, Florida. The Thurmans lived in a section called Waycross, one of the three population pockets for Negroes in those days. Thurman described his neighborhood as an "extended family." According to him, in Waycross all children were under the general supervision of the adults:

... any child belonged to the whole immediate community, so that if an adult saw me and wanted me to

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19 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 17. For Thurman's description of his baptism and catechism, see Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 17-20 and BBC Film Documentary.

20 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 9.

an errand, I did not have to go home and ask my mother's permission. I would simply do it because Mrs. Thomas told me and that was all that was necessary.  

Despite the extreme hardships which were endured by the people of Waycross because of segregation, they were enabled to transcend their situation through caring and sharing in community. Thurman highlights the community's response to his father's death as one example of this genuine sense of community in which the black people of Waycross lived and worked. He says:

My father's death was only one of many experiences I recall that bore the aura of the caring of all, the sharing of all, during times of illness or suffering. The sick were cared for at home for no hospitals were open to us (black people) other than the "pesthouse" on the outskirts of town, where small pox victims were isolated. In every aspect of the common life, there was a sense of shared responsibility.

There were three individuals in the black community of Daytona, outside the family context, who served as outstanding models for Thurman during his early years. They were Thornton Smith, Dr. Stockings, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Thurman refers to Smith and Stockings as his "masculine idols in these early years." Mary McLeod Bethune, one

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22 BBC Film Documentary
23 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 11. Parentheses and underline mine.
24 Ibid., p. 21.
of the outstanding personages of the twentieth century and the founder of Bethune Cookman College in Daytona, was another important model of excellence and community for Thurman. Thurman was aware of her struggles in starting the school and knew of her unrelenting faith which enabled her to realize the vision of creating a center of quality education for young Negro women in the South. He and his family knew Mrs. Bethune personally and often attended commencement exercises of the school. He would hear her speak of her trials and victories at his church on fifth Sunday nights which were undoubtedly Missionary nights. He speaks of the significance of the school for local youth even though many young women in Daytona could not afford to attend. "The very presence of the school, and the inner strength and authority of Mrs. Bethune, gave boys like me a view of possibilities to be realized in some distant future." 25

Experiences of Non-Community

These experiences of primary community in the contexts of the family, church and the black community of Waycross were at least equalled by the overwhelming experiences of non-community wrought by segregation in these early years of Thurman's development. The psychological toll of these experiences, according to Thurman, could have been devastating, but he chose early to treat white people indifferently and to cast them outside of the scope of the magnetic field of his morality.

To all white persons, the category of exception applied. I did not regard them as involved in my religious reference. They were read out of the human race--they simply did not belong to it in the first place. Behavior toward them was amoral. 26

It was not until later years, particularly during his experiences in seminary, that Thurman was able to overcome his ethical indifference to white people. 27 It was these early experiences with nature, the family environment, the black church, and the black community of Waycross which served as the wellsprings for the formative years of Howard Thurman. His experiences of community and

26 Thurman, Luminous Darkness, p. 3.

non-community in these early years laid the foundations for the vision of community which was the central theme of his life and ministry. The intellectual pursuits which followed find their source in this period of his life and must be understood as emerging from this context.

Education

Early Educational Experiences

Thurman's formal education began in the local Negro school in Daytona which only extended through the seventh grade. After completing his seventh year, his grandmother appealed to the local authorities to allow Howard to take the eighth grade examination. The principal, Professor Howard, taught the promising young student on his own time and the results had revolutionary implications for education among Negroes in Daytona. As mentioned earlier, after Thurman's successful examination, the eighth grade was added to the Negro public school of Daytona.

Thurman attended high school in Jacksonville at the Florida Baptist Academy which was one of only three public high schools for Negroes in the entire state. His experience at the Academy was one of the most critical periods of his educational career. The four years at the Academy proved invaluable for Thurman, not only in respect to his immediate goal of receiving an education, but they
also provided precious opportunities for him to develop leadership skills and personal relationships which shaped his career. It was during his junior year at the Academy that Thurman met Dr. Mordecai Johnson, a man who would make a singular impact upon his professional development.28 He was also valedictorian of his senior class.29

Morehouse College

Upon graduation from Florida Baptist Academy, Thurman was awarded a tuition scholarship to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. The churning intellectual energies which began to emerge at the Academy found greater focus and maturation at Morehouse. Morehouse College, since its humble beginnings during Reconstruction, has been a veritable "candle in the dark" for generations of black men who have sought higher learning and greater visions of service to the black community.30 Morehouse men learned early a sense of personal worth and their responsibility to those in the black community less fortunate. Thurman

28See BBC Documentary Film.

29Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 28.

says, "We understood that our job was to learn so that we could go back into our communities and teach others." 31

The two men whom Thurman acknowledges as being chiefly responsible for uplifting these values before him and his classmates were President John Hope and Dean Samuel Archer. Dr. John Hope was the fourth president of Morehouse and the first black man to head that institution. His long and distinguished leadership, from 1906-1931, established Morehouse as one of the leading institutions of higher education in the United States. 32 President Hope's scholarly and genteel demeanor won the respect and admiration of young black men like Thurman who saw in him a model of black masculinity in a racist society which devalued their self-worth and mocked their manhood. Thurman says that Hope accomplished this in two outstanding ways. One was that he addressed them as "young gentlemen."

What this term of respect meant to our faltering egos can only be understood against the backdrop of the South of 1920s. We were black men in Atlanta during a period when the state of Georgia was infamous for its racial brutality. Lynchings, burnings, unspeakable cruelties were fundamentals of existence for black

31 Ibid., p. 35.

people. Our physical lives were of little value. Any encounter with a white person was inherently dangerous and frequently fatal. Those of us who managed to remain physically whole found our lives defined in less than human terms.\textsuperscript{33}

Thurman says that Hope influenced Morehouse men in another way which instilled self-confidence. Morehouse men were not graduated until they had conceived and memorized an original oration. Students were required to prepare and present an oration each year for four years before the faculty and student body. This early training in oratorical skills helped develop personal character and confidence through disciplined drills and critiques from professors and classmates. These forums gave Thurman some of his earliest opportunities to develop and sharpen his supreme oratorical gifts.\textsuperscript{34}

Samuel H. Archer was the other figure who made a lasting impression upon Thurman during his Morehouse years. Archer succeeded Hope in the presidency of Morehouse in 1931 and saw the school through the turbulent years of the Depression. Although Archer reluctantly accepted

\textsuperscript{33}Thurman, \textit{Head and Heart}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{34}He comments: "Later, during my early postgraduate years, members of the audience would frequently come up to me after one of my talks to say, 'You're one of John Hope's men, aren't you?' The Morehouse training was unmistakable." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 37.
the charge from his friend and colleague, he steered the school through one of the most difficult financial periods of its history. 35 Before assuming the presidency, Archer was Professor of Mathematics and coached the football team. His close identification with the students on both intellectual and personal levels earned him a place of high respect in the hearts of generations of young black men, chief among them being Howard Thurman. Archer was in many ways a father figure for Thurman and other Morehouse men. His wise and compassionate counsel guided Thurman through a period in his personal and intellectual pilgrimage which could have been disastrous. 36

The Morehouse years reinforced two important lessons which he had learned during his early years in Daytona: a sense of personal worth and a calling to shared responsibility for the black community. Upon graduation from Morehouse in 1923, the school offered him a faculty position in economics, but he declined. He had already decided to attend seminary. 37

35 Jones, A Candle in the Dark, pp. 123-29.
36 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 39.
37 Unpublished manuscript for Thurman, Head and Heart, Special Collections, Boston University; and BBC Documentary Film.
Rochester Theological Seminary

The Morehouse years prepared Thurman well for the intellectual and personal challenges he was to encounter at the Rochester Theological Seminary in Rochester, New York. Thurman had also applied to the Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts but his application was declined because he was a Negro.\textsuperscript{38} The Rochester Seminary had a more liberal admissions policy which allowed two Negroes to be enrolled in any given year. Also, Thurman knew two other black men who had graduated from Rochester, Dr. Charles Hubert who taught religion at Morehouse, and Dr. Mordecai Johnson whom he had met while a student at Florida Baptist Academy.

In the fall of 1923, Thurman entered Rochester Theological Seminary with feelings of uncertainty and anticipation. He describes the early days there as "the most radical period of adjustment of my life up to that moment."\textsuperscript{39} This was his first time living in a totally white environment. Unlike Morehouse, where his professors and fellow students were black men with keen interests in the hopes and aspirations of black people, here he discovered an

\textsuperscript{38}Thurman, \textit{Head and Heart}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 46.
atmosphere which "contrasted sharply with the more personal and responsive ambience of Morehouse College." At first, there was some anxiety about his own ability to intellectually compete in this strange, new world, but soon he found that he was well prepared for the academic challenges of Rochester. He was graduated at the head of his class.

The professor who made the most critical impact upon his personal and intellectual development during this stage of his development was George Cross. Cross taught Thurman during his last year and a half at Rochester (1925-1926). Thurman says that Cross "had a greater influence on my life than any other person who ever lived. Everything about me was alive when I came into his presence." The two met frequently on Saturday mornings for private conferences in which Thurman raised questions which arose from the weekly lectures. Here Thurman would air his disagreements with Cross who would listen patiently and then, according to Thurman, proceed to "reduce my arguments to ash."
Toward the end of his last year at Rochester, Thurman met with Cross to share his future plans of marriage and to pastor the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio. He also planned to study with Edward Increase Bosworth and Kemper Fullerton at Oberlin. It was at this meeting that Cross unveiled his own plans for Thurman's future which proved to be a source of encouragement and bewilderment for Thurman. He said to his brilliant young student:

You are a very sensitive Negro man, and doubtless feel under great obligation to put all the weight of your mind and spirit at the disposal of the struggle of your people for full citizenship. But let me remind you that all social questions are transitory in nature and it would be a terrible waste for you to limit your creative energy to the solution of the race problem, however insistent its nature. Give yourself to the timeless issues of the human spirit. . .. Perhaps I have no right to say this to you because as a white man I can never know what it is to be in your situation. 44

Thurman says that he "pondered the meaning of his words, and wondered what kind of response I could make to this man who did not know that a man and his black skin

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44 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 60. Thurman shared this occasion with the writer in a conversation in Evanston, Illinois, April 1978. The impact of Cross's advice, though not fully realized at that moment, became in time a driving principle for decision making in relation to social action for Thurman. Smith comments on the significance of this occasion and its relation to Thurman's baptism. See Smith, p. 24.
must face the 'timeless issues of the human spirit' together." Cross shared with Thurman that he was going to find a teacher abroad for him, but these plans were never realized. Cross died during the spring of 1929 before consummating the arrangements, even though he had found the teacher.

Another major intellectual connection in Thurman's odyssey towards community took place during his seminary tenure. In 1925, at an informal retreat in Pawling, New York, he was introduced to the writings of Olive Schreiner (1855-1920). A fellow retreatant, George Collins, read a selection entitled, "The Hunter," from Schreiner's Dreams. This was the beginning of a life-long spiritual and intellectual relationship with the South African writer.46

Early Ministry and Teaching

Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Thurman graduated from seminary in June 1926 and was married one week later to Kate Kelley of La Grange,

45 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 60.

46 From that time Thurman collected all of her available works and in 1973 he edited and published an anthology of her writings entitled, A Track to the Water's Edge: The Olive Schreiner Reader, ed., Howard Thurman (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973). Thurman says, "It seems that all my life I was being readied for such an encounter. Through the years I have secured all available works of
Georgia. Shortly after the wedding, Thurman began pastoral duties at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio. The brief one and a half years in Oberlin were to be a period of great discovery and sorrow for Thurman. While at the church, he had his first opportunity to test his religious sensibilities in an institutional setting. He discovered through the experiences of worship and pastoral care, an inner unity of fellowship which went beyond the barriers of race, class, and tradition. He says this was most acutely manifest in his inner life of prayer and meditation. Of particular significance was the response he received from a Chinese gentleman who regularly visited the worship services. His comments were, "When I close my eyes and listen to my spirit I am in a Buddhist temple experiencing the renewing of my own spirit." Thurman remarks: "I knew then what I had only sensed before. The barriers were crumbling. I was breaking new ground. Yet, it would be years before I would understand the nature of the breakthrough."
Rufus M. Jones

These new discoveries of the spirit were offset by the very sad news that his new wife had contracted tuberculosis from her days as a social worker. The doctors recommended that she return South for treatment and convalescence with her family. In the meanwhile, Thurman resigned the church and went to study with another person who would become another major influence in his spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage towards community. In January 1929, Thurman went to Haverford College to study with the mystic scholar and teacher, Rufus M. Jones.\(^{49}\) The period at Haverford with Jones came about through a personal request to the professor by Thurman after reading Jones's little book entitled, *Finding the Trail of Life*.\(^{50}\) In the book, Jones recounts his childhood experiences and

\(^{49}\) For biography on Jones, see Elizabeth Gray Vining, *Friend of Life: The Biography of Rufus M. Jones* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1958); David Hinshaw, *Rufus Jones: Master Quaker* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951); and Harry Emerson Fosdick, ed., *Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time: An Anthology* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1952). Thurman studied with Jones from January 1929 through June 1929 on a special grant from the National Council on Religion in Higher Education. This grant was primarily for doctoral students, but an exception was made for Thurman. He had considered Ph.D. work up to this point, but the opportunity to study with Jones put these plans to rest. Thurman, *Head and Heart*, p. 76.

personal religious quest. Although Thurman had never heard of Jones, the book resonated at such a deep level with the religious experiences of his own childhood that he immediately sought him as a teacher. He writes, "When I finished (reading) I knew that if this man were alive, I wanted to study with him." 51

Morehouse and Spelman Colleges

After his period of study with Jones, Thurman returned to his alma mater, Morehouse College, in the fall of 1929 to teach philosophy and religion. He also taught at Morehouse's sister college, Spelman, and served as religious adviser to the students and faculty. While at Spelman, he began to work on the religious insights of the Negro spirituals which culminated in the Ingersoll Lectures on Immortality in 1947 and was later published as Deep River in 1955.

Morehouse and Spelman, like Mt. Zion Church in Oberlin, provided Thurman with the opportunity to test his religious inclinations and training in a structured environment. Primary to teaching the substance of religion and philosophy courses Thurman felt his immediate responsibility in teaching was to inspire and encourage the

51Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 74. Parentheses added.
student in his/her own personal quest for truth.\textsuperscript{52} Of particular interest for Thurman was the development of self-esteem and confidence in the black students whom he encouraged to use education to enhance the quality of life for their people. It was during this time that he began his popular informal discussions on Saturday nights with young black men who struggled with self-realization in the midst of an intensely bitter and segregated society.\textsuperscript{53}

The last year at Morehouse was marked by great sorrow for Thurman. His wife Kate died of tuberculosis. Her death hurled him into a deep depression. Exhausted emotionally and physically, he managed to teach the second semester, but when June finally came, he took a leave of absence and traveled to Europe. He traveled to London, Scotland, Geneva, and Paris. The bulk of his time was spent in Scotland where he lived as a paid guest with a

\textsuperscript{52}Thurman, \textit{Head and Heart}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{53}He writes: "Invariably we asked, Why are we in college? What are we trying to find? How can we immunize ourselves against the destructive aspects of the environment? How manage the carking fear of the white man's power and not be defeated by our own rage and hatred?" Thurman, \textit{Head and Heart}, p. 81; see also Melvin Watson, "Howard Thurman, Teacher-Preacher," in \textit{God and Human Freedom}, pp. 161-65; and Mary Jennes, "A Leader of Students," in \textit{Twelve Negro Americans} (Free Port, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936, 1969), pp. 145-60
family. It was during his sojourn there that he experienced an inner healing that brought his shattered life and dream back into perspective. 54

Howard University

In June 1932, Thurman married again. Sue Bailey, the daughter of a Baptist minister and an Arkansas legislator, added the touch of final healing to his reviving spirit. Their common dreams and aspirations made them a unique combination for the long and productive years which lay ahead. Mrs. Thurman's background in music and the arts, her teaching experience, and skills as a national YWCA secretary blended well with the sensitive, artistic spirit of Thurman. It was this dynamic and creative partnership that went to Howard University in July 1932. At the invitation of his old friend and counselor, Mordecai Johnson, who was now President of Howard University, Thurman assumed duties as a faculty member of the School of Religion and later became Chairman of the University Committee on Religious Life. He would, in time, be given the prestigious honor of Dean of Rankin Chapel. Thurman, like many other young black scholars "... was caught up in Mordecai Johnson's vision to create the first real community

54 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 83.
of black scholars, to build an authentic university in America dedicated primarily to the education of black youth."\textsuperscript{55}

It was during his twelve years at Howard University, 1932-1944, that Thurman began to experiment more freely with what he had begun to explore in his earlier ministry. When he first assumed duties as Dean of Rankin Chapel in 1936, he completely redesigned the traditional order of service and included special music, sacred dance, poetry and prose selections, and periods of meditation. He says:

Gradually, Sunday morning service at Rankin Chapel became a watering place for a wide range of worshippers, not only from within the university community, but also from the District of Columbia. Despite the fact that the District at that time was as segregated racially as Atlanta or Jackson, the Sunday morning chapel service provided a time and place where race, sex, culture, material belongings, and earlier religious orientation became undifferentiated in the presence of God.\textsuperscript{56}

A Greater Vision

India, Burma, and Ceylon

During his early years at Howard University, Thurman also had the opportunity to experience a vision of

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 87.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p. 90.
the possibility of human community which would make a singular impact upon the rest of his life and ministry. In 1935, the national YMCA and YWCA International Committee, acting on behalf of the World Student Christian Federation, invited Thurman to serve as chairman of a delegation of black Americans on a "pilgrimage of friendship" as guests of the Student Christian Movement in India, Burma, and Ceylon. Other members of the delegation were Mrs. Thurman and The Reverend, later Bishop, and Mrs. Edward G. Carroll. This trip was crucial for Thurman because it provided him with concrete instances in an international setting in which he had to come to terms with his own commitment to the Christian faith in light of the issues of race, culture, and religion. It also gave him an opportunity to experiment further with his developing sense of the power of religious experience to create human community among diverse groups, religions, and cultures.

There were four significant events on this pilgrimage which informed and shaped his growing perspective on "common ground." One was centered around his initial reticence about accepting the invitation to go as a representative of "American Christianity." Thurman was deeply concerned that his acceptance of the invitation would relegate his role to that of an apologist for the segregated
practices of the American Christian church. He reasoned, however, that unless he was personally convinced that the essence of the Christian religion could transcend all national, international, racial, cultural, and religious boundaries—then he could not continue to be a part of it even in his own country. He resolved to go. Through-out the entire journey, the issue of segregation within the Christian church and its inability to change the color bar was raised in sharp and critical relief by many of the indigenous peoples he met. Thurman was called upon to give his interpretation of the religion of Jesus and its answer to the perennial question of the oppressed: "What does the religion of Jesus say to those whose backs are against the wall, those who are the poor, the dis-inherited, and the dispossessed?"  

Secondly, Thurman had opportunities to experiment with his developing sense of the "common ground" between different religions. Such an experience occurred while

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57 Ibid., p. 104; Thurman, Footprints, pp. 22-23.
59 He says: "I had to seek a means by which I could get to the essence of the religious experience of Hinduism"
Thurman was at Shantiniketan. He met with Dr. Singh, the head of the division of Oriental Studies in the university. Thurman says that his meeting with the Hindu professor was "the most primary, naked fusing of total religious experience with another human being of which I have ever been capable." Thurman continues:

It was as if we had stepped out of social, political frames of reference, and allowed two human spirits to unite on a ground of reality that was unmarked by separateness and differences. This was a watershed experience in my life. We had become a part of each other even as we remained essentially individual. I was able to stand secure in my place and enter into his place without diminishing myself or threatening him.60

A third event which lended to his vision of commun-

ity was the delegation's meeting with Gandhi. Two comments of Gandhi's had lasting significance for Thurman. One was Gandhi's belief that "the unadulterated message of non-violence could be delivered to men everywhere" through

as I sat or stood or walked into a Hindu temple where everything was foreign and new: the smells, the altars, the flowers, the chanting—all of it was completely outside my universe of discourse. I had to find a way to the place where I could stand side by side with a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Moslem, and know that the authenticity of his experience was identical with my own." Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 120.

60 Ibid., p. 129.
the Afro-American. The other remark was in response to a question raised by Thurman regarding the greatest obstacle to Christianity in India. Gandhi replied that Christianity as it is practiced and identified with Western culture and colonialism is the greatest enemy to Jesus Christ in India.

The final event, and the one which was to have the most profound impact, was the moment of vision that Thurman experienced at Khyber Pass. In a flash of transcendence, there was brought into clear perspective the dream of community to which Thurman and his wife would dedicate their lives. He writes:

Near the end of our journey we spent a day in Khyber Pass on the border of the northwest frontier. It was an experience of vision. We stood looking at a distance into Afghanistan, while to our right, and close at hand, passed a long camel train bringing goods and ideas to the bazaars of North India. Here was the gateway through which Roman and Mogul conquerors had come in other days bringing with them goods, new concepts, and the violence of armed might. All that we had seen and felt in India seemed to be brought miraculously into focus. We saw clearly what we must do somehow when we returned to America. We knew that we must test whether a religious fellowship could be developed in America that was capable of cutting across all racial barriers, with a carry-over into the common life, a fellowship that would alter the behavior patterns of those involved. It became imperative now.

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61 Ibid., p. 132.
62 Ibid., p. 135.
to find out if experiences of spiritual unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them.63

The Fellowship Church for All Peoples

It was this powerful revelation of the potential of community through religious experience that led Thurman to embark upon the bold adventure of establishing The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in 1944. In the fall of 1943, Thurman received a letter from Dr. Alfred G. Fisk, a Presbyterian clergyman and professor of philosophy at San Francisco State College. In the letter, Fisk related the experiences of a small group of people in the San Francisco area who were committed to the idea of creating an interracial church. He requested that Thurman recommend a young Negro man, preferably just out of seminary, to come and serve as co-pastor with him. The individual whom Thurman recommended declined the offer and to the surprise of Fisk, Thurman, who was a tenured professor and dean of the chapel at Howard, indicated interest in the part-time position which only paid $100 per month. Thurman says that "I felt the touch on my shoulder that was one with the creative encounter with the Khyber Pass dream

63 Ibid., p. 136.
of several years earlier. The idea of an interracial church in America kindled in his mind the possibility that this could be the opportunity toward which his life had been moving.

Thurman served as co-pastor with Fisk until the latter resigned a few years after the church was started. Thurman later assumed the title of Minister-In-Residence until his resignation in 1953. At the Fellowship Church, Thurman further developed his inner necessity to demonstrate that the power of religious experience can remove racial, cultural, and religious barriers which impede the actualization of human community.

Marsh Chapel, Boston University

The years at the Fellowship Church (1944-1953) prepared Thurman for what was to be another daring adventure in his search for "common ground." In 1953, at the invitation of President Harold Chase, Thurman resigned as Minister-In-Residence of the Fellowship Church to become the Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University. This pioneering move was not without great inner struggle and

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64 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 140.
65 For Thurman's full accounting of the story, see Thurman, Footprints.
66 Ibid., p. 31.
deliberation, but Thurman marveled at the opportunity to translate the idea of an inclusive fellowship which he had successfully demonstrated in San Francisco to a large university setting where the potential for greater outreach and dissemination was present. He also felt that the move had significant social implications in that he was the first black man to ever hold such a position. 67

The tenure at Marsh Chapel abounded both with successes and conflict. He continued, in essence, what he had begun at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Howard University and the Fellowship Church. The worship service at Marsh Chapel was filled with creative and artistic liturgies, special music and dance, and long periods of meditation and silence. Meditation became increasingly important to the worship service at Marsh Chapel. 68 Thurman's popularity as a pulpiteer was recognized by Life magazine and several other journals and magazines carried stories on

67 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 169. Thurman was also appointed as Professor of Spiritual Disciplines and Resources at the School of Theology and taught a course in homiletics. Thurman had some ambivalence about his role as a teacher in a structured academic setting because he felt that spirituality was not something that could be taught as an academic discipline, but it had to be "caught." Ibid., p. 178.

68 Thurman says, "The time of meditation was the heart of the total experience of worship." Ibid., p. 172.
this unusually gifted preacher.69 In a short time, his popularity reached far beyond the university setting. Thurman was heard over the university radio station, WBUR, and became a regular contributor to a local television series entitled, "We Believe."70 The chapel attendance consisted of a diverse grouping of students and faculty from the university and surrounding schools and the greater Boston community.

The experience of Marsh Chapel was for Thurman a confirmation of the power of religious experience to overcome religious, cultural, class, and racial barriers that militate against community. It was also a revelation of the problematic nature of religious freedom within an institutional arrangement. This problem surfaced with the growing vitality of the religious fellowship at Marsh Chapel and the concomitant desire by congregants to organize the chapel program for membership. The university rejected a proposal set forth by an ad hoc committee comprised of


70 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 175; Manuscripts of "We Believe" Television Series are located at Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University.
representatives of the university and community on the grounds that the autonomous nature of such an organization would set a dangerous precedent. The University felt that the chapel as an autonomous institution would in time become unmanageable and undermine the intentionality of the university charter. Thurman saw himself as the greatest stumbling block to the proposed organization. A salutary statement by Walter Meulder, who was Dean of the School of Theology during Thurman's tenure, is insightful. Referring to Thurman at a retirement celebration in his honor, he says:

I may note in passing that it is no secret to historians and sociologists of the church that mystical devotion is a very dangerous phenomenon. Mysticism is generally verging on heresy and the mystic is seldom an organization man. Those who avoid the securities of mediated grace, whether in doctrine or sacrament or institution—and insist on speaking in public—give uneasy hours to the ecclesiastical bureaucrat.

The Wider Ministry

Around the World

Thurman officially resigned from the deanship of Marsh Chapel in 1965, but before his formal resignation,

71 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 181.

he took a leave of absence in 1962. For the first two years, he was designated "Dean on Leave" and the last year he was "Minister-At-Large." During the first two years, which he refers to as his "wider ministry," he and his wife took two trips around the world. They traveled to Nigeria where he served as visiting lecturer in philosophy and religion at the University of Ibadan. They also journeyed to Israel, Japan, the Philippines, Egypt, and Hawaii. These trips abroad had a profound effect upon Thurman, particularly the trip to Africa.73

Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund

Thurman's latter years were devoted to the ministry of the Howard Thurman Educational Trust which he founded in 1965. The Trust is dedicated to the education of black youth in colleges around the country and to the enrichment of the religious and spiritual commitment of individuals who share in his vision of community. The Trust, located in San Francisco, houses Thurman's private library and over 800 tapes of meditations, sermons, addresses, lectures, and discussions which represent over forty years of his spiritual pilgrimage toward community. Through the auspices

73 Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 193-211. In "Windbreak Against Existence," pp. 7-9, Thurman talks candidly about the relationship of the believer to human suffering and oppression around the world.
of the Trust, Howard Thurman Listening Rooms have been located throughout the United States and in seventeen countries. Boston University's Special Collections Division in the Mugar Memorial Library also houses copies of Thurman's papers, tapes, and other printed materials.

The establishment of the Trust marked Thurman's last formal endeavor in creating a place where his dream of community could be realized. After a long illness, he died at his home in San Francisco where the Trust is located, during the early morning hours of April 10, 1981. His vision of a "friendly world underneath friendly skies" continues in his rich legacy of the written and oral word.74 His own words describe best the depth and significance of his life and ministry:

My testimony is that life is against all dualism. Life is One. Therefore, a way of life that is worth living must be a way worthy of life itself. Nothing less than that can abide. Always, against all that fragments and shatters and against all things that separate and divide within and without, life labors to meld together into a single harmony . . . in all these things there is a secret door which leads into the place, where the Creator of life and the God of the human heart are one and the same. I take my stand for the future and for generations who follow over the bridges we already have crossed. It is here that the meaning of the hunger of the heart is unified. The Head and the Heart at last inseparable; they are lost in wonder in the One.75

74 Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. 113.

75 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 269.
The Intellectual Sources of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman

Howard Thurman's intellectual development cannot be ultimately separated from the experiential sources which contributed to his vision of community. It is important, however, to analyze the major intellectual sources which influenced and confirmed for him what he discovered in his personal quest for community. Four major sources which shaped his intellectual formation are examined in this section. They are respectively: 1) Morehouse College; 2) George Cross; 3) Olive Schreiner; 4) and Rufus M. Jones.

Morehouse College

Thurman's tenure at Morehouse College, from 1919 to 1923, is perhaps the most crucial period of his intellectual development. Although he credits George Cross as being the most influential person in his life, his four years at Morehouse College represent his introduction into a new world of ideas which would whet his intellectual appetite and encourage him to pursue higher learning beyond the limited expectations imposed by the greater society. The rich fraternal atmosphere and the stimulating intellectual climate of Morehouse College found a willing and enthusiastic participant in the searching spirit of Thurman. Thurman was a member of the student Y.M.C.A., the Debating
Society, and was the editor of the first senior yearbook in the history of the school. It is Thurman's claim that he and his classmate, Jim Nabrit, read every book in the small, but respectable college library.  

The Morehouse faculty set high levels of expectation for their students, both academically and spiritually. Thurman was privileged to study with some of the most distinguished black scholars of his day. Among these was the noted sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, from whom Thurman took a course in Social Origins. Another noted educator whose influence and friendship was to continue throughout Thurman's life was Benjamin Mays. May's remarkable career as a teacher, preacher, social activist, and president of Morehouse College touched the lives of countless young black leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. Mays coached Thurman on the Debating Society and was responsible for kindling his interest in philosophy. Thurman maintained that the absence of formal philosophy courses in the missionary colleges of the South was not

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76 Ibid., p. 35.
77 Ibid., p. 41
79 Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 43-44.
an accident, but was systematically designed by the "shapers of our minds" to control the level of consciousness among the Black masses.\(^8^0\) It was because of May's encouragement that Thurman won scholarship monies to study philosophy at Columbia University at the end of his sophomore year. The summer at Columbia was Thurman's first formal introduction to philosophy. He refers to this summer as a very critical period in his intellectual development. In fact, he states that the course at Columbia University in reflective thinking, which was taught by E. A. Burt, was the most significant single course he ever took.\(^8^1\) Many years later, Thurman credited Mays with the foresight to create the environment whereby young black men could experience themselves as human beings with dignity and worth and their minds as their own.\(^8^2\)

These men and others, like Professor Gary Moore who taught sociology and Professor Lorimer Milton who guided Thurman through his major in economics, helped to shape

\(^{8^0}\) Ibid., p. 43.
\(^{8^1}\) Ibid., p. 44.
\(^{8^2}\) See "The Public and Private Results of Collegiate Education in the Life of Negro Americans--An Interpretation of the Significance of Education in a Segregated Society." Speech delivered by Thurman at the Centennial Banquet of Morehouse College, February 15, 1967. Thurman Papers, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University.
the intellectual and spiritual resources which would pilot him in his search for community. 83 Thurman says, "They placed over our heads a crown that for the rest of our lives we would be trying to grow tall enough to wear." 84

George Cross

George Cross

Thurman named three professors at Rochester Theological Seminary as influences in his intellectual development. They were Dr. Conrad Moehlman, Professor of the History of Christianity; Dr. Henry Robins, Professor of Religious Education and The History of Philosophy and Religion and Missions; and Dr. George Cross, Professor of Systematic Theology. In this brief discussion, attention will be given only to Professor George Cross, who, according to Thurman, made the most significant contribution to his developing thought. 85

The dominant concern of Cross's thought was the infinite worth of the individual and her/his relationship to the creation of human community. For Cross, this theme

83 Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 40-43.
84 Ibid., p. 41.
85 For a more thorough treatment of Robins's influence on Thurman, see Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 25-27; and for Thurman's own comments on Moehlman, see Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 54.
is most definitively demonstrated in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Cross, the emphasis is on the unique nature and potential of the individual, i.e., the supremacy of personality which is rooted in self-consciousness and its infinite worth. Cross writes,

The whole story of human life becomes the story of the manner in which human creative personality has wrought through the transformation of the race by seeking to impart to every member of it his or her own very selfhood in all its worth.

According to Smith, Cross's thought is rooted in evangelical liberalism which stressed "a personality-centered Christianity, reason and experience, witness to moral and social issues, theological personalism, and an evolutionary revelation of faith." Smith claims that the project of Cross's thought can be viewed in three distinct, yet interrelated ways: First, Cross endeavored to define "the essence of the Christian faith," i.e., "the basic,

86 "The Christian faith is identical with the spirit of loyalty to a historic figure of the past who is at the same time the ideal figure of the future. This figure bears the name Jesus Christ." George Cross, Creative Christianity: A Study of the Genius of Christian Faith (New York: MacMillan Co., 1922), p. 221.

87 Ibid., p. 216.

unchanging, unifying truth which characterizes and genuinely manifests the faith." 89

Second, the purpose of this essence is to lead the individual and community toward salvation. 90 Cross believed that the "perfect personality" represented in Jesus Christ is the ideal toward which humanity strives. 91 In the idealization of this perfect personality lies the ground for community. It is the key to the question of the individual's relationship to community. He writes:

By virtue of its estimate of personality the Christian faith is a radically reconstructive force in those relations of man to man we call social. For that very reason it is constitutive of the better community and works toward the permanency of human community life. 92

Third, Cross maintained that the theological understanding of the essence of Christian faith must be creative and open to truth through rational inquiry and revelation. 93

A careful reading of Cross's three books suggests that Thurman's early conceptualizations of the theological


90 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 20.

91 Ibid., pp. 219-20.

92 Cross, Christian Salvation, p. 228.

93 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 22.
themes that would nurture his understanding of the nature of community could have had their genesis during this fruitful period. These themes are the sacredness of human personality, the individual's relationship to community, the dynamic, teleological nature of revelation, the consciousness of sin, and reconciliation as love. 94

Olive Schreiner

An important source in the intellectual development of Howard Thurman was Olive Schreiner. Mozella Gordon Mitchell contends that Schreiner influenced Thurman in two vital respects: 1) through her philosophy concerning the universality of truth and the oneness of all life, and 2) through her outstanding literary form and creative expression. 95 Smith argues that though Thurman edited


95 "Howard Thurman and Olive Schreiner: Post Modern Marriage Post-Mortem," Journal of Religious Thought 38:1
and published Schreiner's writings, the stories serve more as a creative source of inspiration for him rather than a seminal intellectual influence. He notes that Schreiner's concern with the unity of all life expresses what Thurman already believes and feels, but does not add any new theological perspective to this thinking. Her influence, according to Smith, belongs in another category, namely, that of providing nourishment to the theme of the unity of all life which was already the heart of Thurman's concern.96

While this writer is inclined to agree with Smith's position in reference to the intellectual influence of Schreiner on Thurman,97 there seems to be a more profound

(Spring 1981); see also Mozella Gordon Mitchell, "The Dynamics of Howard Thurman's Relationship to Literature and Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1980), pp. 49-53.

96 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 35, footnote 1.

97 Thurman's own acknowledgment of Schreiner's contribution to his developing thought is sufficient. He says, "... she possessed what comes through to me as an innate, instinctual sense of the unity of all life. It is this emphasis in her writing that was the first external confirmation of what had always been an active ingredient in my own awareness of life. ... It was not until I read Olive Schreiner that I was able to establish sufficient psychological distance between me and the totality of such experiences to make the experience itself an object of thought. Thus it became possible for me to move from primary experience, to conceptualizing that experience, to a vision inclusive of all life. The resulting creative synthesis was to me religious rather than metaphysical, as seems to have been true in Olive Schreiner's case." Thurman, Track to the Water's Edge, pp. xxvii-xxviii.
level of influence. The fact that Olive Schreiner was a white South African woman who openly and fearlessly denounced racism and sexism had a powerful impact on Thurman. Thurman was not merely drawn to Schreiner by her articulation of the unity of life theme, but also by her identification with the radical moral implications of that theme for the black experience of racism and violence he encountered in his own life situation. A critical question for Thurman in his initial investigation of Schreiner's life and writings was, "How could a white woman born and reared in South Africa think as she thinks and feel about man as she felt?" Thurman never quite resolved this question nor the issue of Schreiner's use of derogatory language to describe black South Africans. Despite these concerns,

Mitchell makes a similar observation. "It may be thought remarkable perhaps even paradoxical, that this oppressed black man in America should be 'wedded' to the spirit of a white Englishwoman, native South African, who becomes champion of the causes of both her own oppression and that of the indigenous South Africans. Yet, it should not be surprising, however, that the oppressed who are able to transcend should teach the way to healing and wholeness, as both Schreiner and Thurman do." "Howard Thurman and Olive Schreiner," p. 65.

Thurman, *Track to Water's Edge*, p. xii. It is also informative to note Thurman's reaction to Schreiner when he discovered that though she was sensitive to the issues of indigenous South Africans, she still remained a victim of her times. He was appalled by her use of the term "nigger" in some of her writings. Ibid., p. xxix; see
Schreiner served as a fellow traveler and a fount of inspiration for Thurman in his search for "common ground."

There are two significant themes in Schreiner which can also be found in Thurman's thought and understanding of community: the unity of all life and the redemptive role of the solitary individual and his/her responsibility to lay the foundation for the collective destiny of humanity. These two pivotal ideas, as indicated, are also in Cross, but in Schreiner they receive the literary and artistic stroke which is characteristic of Thurman's own temperament and style.

Rufus M. Jones

Thurman's semester with Jones during the spring of 1929 was his first formal introduction to the study of mysticism. He attended all of Jones's lectures in philosophy and was a special student in a seminar on Meister Eckhart. He was given special reading assignments and met for weekly conferences with Jones. He also had access

also the reference to Schreiner's use of derogatory terms to describe black South Africans in Ruth First and Ann Scott's biography, Olive Schreiner (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), p. 23.

100 See Schreiner's "The Dawn of Civilization," The Nation and the Athenaeum, March 26, 1921; "The Hunter," A Track to the Water's Edge, pp. 84-95; and "From Three Dreams in the Desert," Ibid., pp. 53-56. These selections were favorites of Thurman which he often quoted.
to Jones's extensive library on mysticism which was one of the most comprehensive in America. 101 The time he spent with Jones was one of the most crucial periods of his development. He refers to it as:

... a watershed from which flowed much of the thought and endeavor to which I was to commit the rest of my working life. These months defined my deepest religious urges and framed in meaning much of what I had learned over the years. 102

While Thurman acknowledges Cross as the most important influence upon him intellectually, it is the opinion of this writer that it was Jones who provided Thurman with a methodology which did not violate the validity of spirituality and its relationship to social transformation. It should be noted here that Cross's statement that Thurman should devote himself to "the timeless issues of the human spirit" and not waste his energies on the racial problem remained a source of concern for Thurman. On the one hand, he wanted to honor the counsel of his mentor, but on the other, he felt the keen and urgent need to deal with the reality of being a black man in American society. Jones's most valuable contribution, therefore, to the development


102 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 77.
of Thurman's thinking at this critical point of his search for community, was his demonstration that one could devote oneself to the ultimate concerns of the human spirit without neglecting the pressing moral issues of society. With Jones, Thurman was able to define the relationship between the inner and outer experiences of religious life. In his opening remarks at the Rufus Jones Memorial Lectures in 1961, he shares his indebtedness to his teacher:

He gave to me the confidence in the insight that the religion of the inner life could deal with the empirical experience of man without retreating from the demands of such experience. To state what I mean categorically, the religion of the inner life at its best is life affirming rather than life denying and must forever be involved in the Master's instruction, "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect."103

Smith argues that Jones, like Cross and Robins, can be located within the theological stream of evangelical

103 Thurman, Mysticism, p. 3. A fundamental theme in Thurman's treatment of the individual and the religious experience is the mystical distinction between the "inner" and "outer." His language is remarkably similar to Jones's. Jones writes: "So, too, there is an outer way and an inner way and both are one." He adds, "There is no inner life that is not also an outer life." Rufus M. Jones, The Inner Life (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), pp. viii-ix. Compare with Thurman's line of dedication to Eleanor Lloyd Smith in Meditations of the Heart, of whom Thurman writes, "In whom the inner and outer are one"; see the chapter headings in The Creative Encounter: "The Inwardness of Religion," "The Outwardness of Religion," "The Inner Need for Love," and "The Outer Necessity for Love"; see also Massey, "Bibliographical Essay," pp. 190-93.
liberalism, and as Cross and Robins are concerned respectively with the essence of Christian faith and religion, Jones's concern is with the essence of Christian mysticism.\(^{104}\) The distinctive feature of Jones's mysticism is that it provides the basis for social transformation. Mystical consciousness, for Jones, does not call the believer to spiritual retreat but rather it reveals the Divine will for "a fellowship of mutual caring and serving, and a Divine which dwells in humanity."\(^{105}\) Jones's mysticism has deep roots in theological personalism. Jones refers to religious experience as the "conjunct life," which is the divine-human fellowship between persons and a person. Personality cannot exist without other persons, and a society of finite selves cannot exist without a consciousness which transcends the entire group of selves.\(^{106}\)

\(^{104}\) Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 27-30; Cauthen, Impact of America, p. 36.

\(^{105}\) Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 28.

\(^{106}\) See Rufus M. Jones, Social Law in the Spiritual World. Studies in Human and Divine Inter-Relationship (Philadelphia: J. C. Winston Co., 1904), where this argument is more fully developed. Also in the foreword to his The Double Search (Philadelphia: J. C. Winston Co., 1904), Jones writes: "Life as soon as it becomes rich with experience is deeply interfused with mutual and reciprocal correspondence moving both ways from Above down and from below up. Out conjunct lives can no more be sundered into separated compartments than the convex and the concave curves of a circle can be divided." P. 6.
Jones makes a distinction between two types of mystics which he refers to as "negation mystics" and "affirmation mystics." The negation mystics are those who believe that God cannot be found in finite, transitory experience, but only by a via negativa, i.e., by withdrawing from the world of senses and achieving union with God through loss of personality. 107 The affirmation mystics, on the other hand, do not make the beatific vision the end of life, but rather the beginning. For the affirmation mystic, the Infinite is found in the finite.

It is the primary fact for him (the affirmation mystic) that he partakes of God, that his personal life has come out of the life of God and that he is never beyond the reach of God who is his source. But his true being is to be wrought out in the world where he can know only finite and imperfect things. His mission on earth is to be a fellow-worker with God--contributing in a normal daily life his human powers to the divine Spirit who works in him and about him, bringing to reality a Kingdom of God. 108

Jones's rich understanding of the relationship between the inner life and social transformation is a significant element in Thurman's treatment of the committed individual's responsibility to society. As noted, Thurman

107 The fallacy of this position, according to Jones, is that "this mystic is asking for something which could not be known or attained. The Absolute is postulated as precisely the negation of all finiteness turns out to be for us mortals only an absolute zero--a limitless sum-total of negation." Jones, Social Law, p. 133.

makes a crucial distinction between the inner and outer modes of existence. Much of his understanding in this respect should be credited to the influence of Rufus M. Jones. James Massey identifies several areas of correspondence between Jones's and Thurman's thought reflected in their doctrines of God and man; their reverence for human personality; their suspicion of formal creeds as being usually divisive; their search for ultimates; and their conviction that truth is not defined by contexts of belief.109

Summary

This section has been devoted to the experiential and intellectual sources of Thurman's search for common ground. From his early years in the black community of Daytona Beach through his latter years with the Trust, there is a progressive, evolutionary line of development in his quest for community. Specifically, this biographical profile has sought to illustrate a pattern which begins with the particularity of the black American experience of segregation and oppression and emerges into a universal vision which incorporates all humanity. This should not be interpreted as a casual observation, but as a profound

insight into the development of the ideal of human community in the thinking of Howard Thurman. It should also be noted that from this brief overview of Thurman's quest for community, two significant concerns are present: the relationship of Christian faith to the color bar, and the determination to find a moral and practical method to overcome racism in American society. These two concerns are critical for a proper interpretation of Thurman's intellectual endeavors.

While the four intellectual sources (Morehouse, Cross, Schreiner, and Jones) represent major influences in his development, Thurman also drew from a wide range of philosophical, theological, and literary insights. These intellectual sources examined above are significant in that they contributed most profoundly to the conception, character, and the means of actualization of human community in the thought of Thurman. At appropriate places throughout this study, these sources will be referred to.

110 See Mitchell, "The Dynamics of Howard Thurman's Relationship to Literature and Theology."
CHAPTER IV

THE ACTUALIZATION OF COMMUNITY IN THE
THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN

The following chapter is concerned with the actualization of community in the thought of Howard Thurman. Specifically, this analysis will include Thurman's treatment of the barriers to community and his recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community. The examination of the barriers to community will be concerned with 1) evil as a barrier to community; 2) the personal and social dimensions of sin; and 3) the individual's response to the barriers of community.

The analysis of Thurman's recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community will explore 1) community as the norm and goal of the moral life; 2) the means of actualization of community: love and truth as ethical principles, overcoming the internal barriers, and nonviolence; 3) community, religion and social action; and 4) community as an empirical reality.

Barriers to Community

In considering Thurman's treatment of the actualization of community, the first question raised is, What
are the barriers to be overcome in the actualization of community? In this section, evil and sin will be examined as barriers to the actualization of community and special attention will be given to Thurman's emphasis on the individual's response to the barriers to community.

Evil as a Barrier to Community

For Thurman, evil is the positive and destructive principle inherent in life which works against harmony, wholeness and integration. Evil manifests itself "in

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1. The writer is aware that the obstacles which prevent the actualization of human community are multifarious, ranging from deep psychological perplexities to complex matrices of political, economic, and social forces. While Thurman does acknowledge the sundry and complex problems associated with the actualization of human community, his basic concern is with the practical moral question, "What is God requiring and enabling us to be and do?" The general answer, according to James Gustafson, is "We are to relate ourselves and all things in a manner appropriate to their relation to God." Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 327. Thurman's specific answer is that we are required and enabled by the love of God to remove all barriers which prevent the actualization of community in the affairs of men and women. See later discussion in this chapter under Community as Norm and Goal; see also Thurman, "The Search for God in Religion," Laymen's Movement Review 5:6 (Nov.-Dec. 1962).

2. For Thurman, evil is not an illusion, therefore it must be acknowledged and dealt with. He describes evil as being positive and negative as opposed to good being positive and creative. Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?" Typewritten manuscript, Thurman Papers, BU, p. 5. At another place, he writes, "There seems to be present in life a dramatic principle that is ever alert to choke off, to
terms of pain, suffering, and in varying degrees of frustration."\(^3\) Evil is included in life; it is rooted in the very fiber of life and feeds on the abundance of its vitality for nourishment and growth. Evil is not an intruder, but a constituent part of life. "Life is good," says Thurman, "in the sense that it contains both good and evil."\(^4\) Because evil is a part of life, it also exhibits an orderly, rational structure of cause and effect.\(^5\) This perspective of evil as being an orderly, rational principle is important for understanding Thurman's method for removing barriers that impede self-realization and the actualization of community. Analysis of a particular expression of evil provides insight into the way the phenomenon can be eradicated or transformed. "Naming" the evil thing places the individual strangle, the constructively creative." Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 51.

\(^3\)Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", p. 5; Thurman uses evil and suffering synonymously. Also see earlier discussion of pain and suffering under The Totality: Disciplines for Preparation; see Thurman, Disciplines, pp. 67, 72.

\(^4\)Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 268.

\(^5\)He says, "Things do not merely happen, they are part of some kind of rationale. If this rationale can be tracked down and understood, then the living experience, however terrible makes sense." Thurman, "Exposition to the Book of Habbakuk," The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 6, ed., George A. Buttrick, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 980.
in a new relationship to it; knowledge of its conception, growth, birth, and development gives the individual a sense of authority over evil. Such knowledge, *per se*, does not assure the defeat of evil, but it does enable the individual to maintain a sense of dignity and self-worth. Consider Thurman's respective treatments of segregation and hate in *The Luminous Darkness* and *Jesus and the Disinherited*. In each case, he first attempts to demonstrate the genesis and development of the phenomenon by formulating its anatomy. Secondly, based on the facts of a particular phenomenon, he renders his interpretation of the findings. And thirdly, he offers the solution he deems most commensurate with the religious experience. ⁶

There are three types of evil or suffering which Thurman acknowledges: natural, punitive, and moral. *Natural evil* has to do with suffering as a natural consequence of being a creature among other created beings which are a part of the impersonal, logical order of the universe. Natural evil is part of the course of existence. The human

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⁶Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", p. 5; Thurman, *Creative Encounter*, p. 139. Here Thurman refers to the genesis and development of an idea; evil as an idea follows the same pattern in his thinking; Thurman, *Disciplines*, pp. 74-75; and Thurman, "Habbakuk," pp. 986-87; Thurman, *Deep River*, pp. 92-93.
agent bears no responsibility for its reality or presence in the world. Nonetheless, the individual's experience of suffering is always private and personal.\(^7\)

Secondly, there is punitive suffering. Thurman argues that there is a retributive dimension of evil which is a consequence of the logic of reward and punishment. "The moral law," says Thurman, "is binding."\(^8\) In his exposition of Habbakuk, he suggests that the fate of Judah at the hands of the Chaldeans is indicative of the retributive judgment which comes to individuals and nations for their breach of the moral order.\(^9\)

Thirdly, there is moral evil. According to Thurman, much of the suffering present in the world is due to human initiative and persistence in evil. He writes:

It is of immeasurable comfort to remember that much of the chaos and disorder of our lives is rooted in causes that are understandable; much of the evil in life is reasonable, in the sense that the roots can be traced and it is not necessary to place blame on the devil or some blind, senseless process. The naked responsibility for human misery, you and I and ordinary human beings like us must accept.\(^10\)

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7 Thurman, *Disciplines*, p. 66; Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", p. 5.
9 Thurman, "Habbakuk," pp. 983-86.
10 Thurman, *Deep Is the Hunger*, p. 27.
Thurman suggests that evil has a purpose in the process and evolution of life. The destructive, disintegrating presence of the demonic in life is to upset the balances and to insure that the dynamic, creative quality of life does not become static and arrested. He comments on this understanding of evil:

Whenever life seems to be in any sense complete or rounded out, there is a movement that upsets and upends. Another way of saying this is, Life itself seems to be against anything that has arrived, that has established equilibrium or even maturity. Life seems always to be on the side of that which is trying to arrive at a balance, equilibrium and maturity. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why so many of the church fathers regarded pride as the chief of sins.11

The view of evil as an upender of life is helpful in understanding Thurman's theodicy. Thurman argues that since evil is a dynamic part of life, then like all of life, it must be interpreted within the divine context. The divine context refers to the sovereignty of God.12 As we have discussed earlier, for Thurman, God is transcendent and omnipotent; there is nothing outside of divine contingency. God is also immanent in history as Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer. Therefore, all events in the individual's life or in the movement of human history must be

11 Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", p. 8.
12 Thurman, "Habbakuk," pp. 980-82.
regarded as part of the divine context. God's Will is "a sovereign intent on making even the selfish and most anti-social ends of all the peoples of the earth serve his holy purpose." 13

Given Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of evil in life and its instrumentality in the purposes and ends of God, it can be inferred that all suffering is potentially redemptive. It is important to note again that evil is not an intruder in the universe, but a vital, integral part of life. 14 For Thurman, the suffering of the innocent must be viewed from this perspective. There are two ways in which the suffering of the innocent is redemptive in Thurman. One way involves the innocent person who is simply caught in the onslaught and perplexities of existence. Thurman suggests this suffering of the innocent minority is propitiatory in that it restores the balance or equilibrium in humanity which is offset by moral evil. "Their shoulders hold the sky suspended. They stand, and earth's foundations stay." 15 Although the innocent sufferer,

13 Ibid., p. 982.
14 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 268.
15 Quoted by Thurman in Disciplines, p. 80; Thurman, Inward Journey, p. 16; see also Thurman, "The Circle of Life," Cassette Recording, No. 65-8, Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund, San Francisco.
in this sense, is not conscious of her/his redemptive role, s/he still participates in the broader purposes of a creative, harmonious universe. This notion has significant implications for Thurman's understanding of America and the redemptive suffering of black people. America is more than an historical project for Thurman, it is a divine-human experiment in the evolutionary processes of life. Despite the undue ravages and unmerited suffering of black Americans, Thurman's theodicy would suggest that their affliction has been a salvific element in an otherwise destructive destiny.  

The other form of redemptive suffering of the innocent is a conscious, deliberate act on the part of the individual. Here the suffering is characterized by the

16 This thesis is present in Thurman, "America in Search of a Soul" and "Freedom under God." See earlier discussion of Thurman's understanding of the state under The Triadic Character of Community: World.

Gandhi's request to hear the delegates of the Indian pilgrimage sing the Negro Spiritual, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" carries this basic idea. Thurman quotes Gandhi as saying, "I feel that this song gets to the root of the experience of the entire human race under the spread of the healing wings of suffering." See Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 134. Thurman also suggests that the black slave redeemed the religion his slave master profaned. Thurman, Deep River, p. 40.

17 See earlier discussion of the redemptive suffering of the individual for the collective destiny of the human race under Means of Actualization: Nonviolence as Moral Imperative.
discovery of ultimate confirmation which the individual experiences in the Presence of God. In the Presence of God, the individual understands his life as being a part of the very rhythm and flow of life itself, which includes good and evil. Therefore, all the vissicitudes of existence, including death (the ultimate logic of suffering), have inherent meaning and value in the purposes of God. The fundamental experience which the individual realizes in his self-validation is love. The individual not only experiences love, but is moved to love; and it is in her/his response to the love of God that s/he is enabled to suffer willingly for others in light of a higher cause (value). Thurman says, "It is only for love of someone or something that a man knows that because of the confirmation of life in him, he can make death an instrument in his hands."18

Redemptive suffering in love, therefore, becomes the means of removing barriers which inhibit the actualization of community.19 Unlike the former dimension where

18 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 83.

19 See later discussion of nature and function of nonviolence. Redemptive suffering and nonviolence are means of creating a climate of love. Redemptive suffering used in the second sense is synonymous with nonviolence. For both, the motivation, the method, and goal is love or reconciliation. See Thurman, Disciplines, pp. 104-27.
the redemptive suffering of the innocent is unconscious, in this dimension it is a moral action which involves the will and freedom. The moral agent consciously participates in the collective destiny of the human community. S/He acknowledges the dynamic tensions and crises wrought in life by evil, but refuses to ascribe normalcy to this state of affairs. Her/His vision is set rather to an ideal of harmony, integration, and wholeness which is always in the future. S/He never accepts "the absence of community as his destiny."20 In redemptive suffering, therefore, the individual is driven by her/his identification with the movement of life towards community. For such a person, "To be confirmed in life is to make even of death a little thing."21

Unmerited suffering, in this sense, gives valuable insight into the power and miracle of love in creating human community. Thurman argued that the lives of great historical personages (Jesus, Socrates, John Brown, Galileo, etc.) attest to this fact. The loving, sacrificial death of Jesus is but one illustration of the profound truth

20Thurman, Search, p. 26; see p. 4, also.
21Thurman, Disciplines, p. 83.
that the contradictions of life are not final. 22 The contradictions of life are not final because while evil feeds on life and gains its vitality from the same source as goodness, the weight of the universe is ultimately against any on-going dualism. 23 This is the "growing edge" of hope for the individual who chooses to suffer redemptively for the actualization of human community. 24

In summary, the nature and role of evil, the question of theodicy, and the power of redemptive suffering to remove barriers of evil in the actualization of community have been examined in Thurman. The discussion now focuses on sin as a barrier to community.

Sin as a Barrier to Community

In Thurman, sin is distinguished from evil in that the latter is a constituent principle in life which works against harmony, integration, and wholeness. Sin, on the other hand, is disobedience to God's will; it is essentially human cooperation with evil. Sin is volitional


23 Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 268-69; Thurman, "Habbakuk," p. 981.

24 Thurman, Deep River, p. 64.
and involves freedom and responsibility. Although there is in Thurman's thought, a suggestion of original sin, it is not developed beyond his fundamental claim that within the human spirit there are both creative and destructive possibilities rooted in the will and human freedom.25

For Thurman, the root of sin is pride or egoism,26 which creates disharmony within the self and in relations with others. Pride is manifested as an "ill will" or a "stubborn will" which rebels against the purpose and intent of the God of life.27 Hate, deception, fear, and all forms of violence have their basis in pride. Egoism is the fatal

25 Responsibility involves accountability not only for one's action, but for one's re-action as well. See earlier discussion of freedom and responsibility under The Triadic Character of Community: The Individual.

For the notion of original sin in Thurman, see Search, Chapter 2, "The Search Into the Beginnings," pp. 8-28. Here he indicates in several places that the problematic nature of the self which is created by human potential for harmony or disharmony revolves around the will. The occasion for sin is provided by the freedom of the will and temptation to egoism or self-centeredness. See also Thurman, The Inward Journey, p. 92: "The murky motive is the common lot! Its dwelling place the human heart."


spiritual malady of all oppressors and insures their downfall because ultimately life will not support the evil enter-
prise. The greatest expression of arrogance is idolatry in which a bad thing is called "good" or a good thing is called "bad." The judgment of idolatry is in the act itself. When a person continually calls a good thing "bad" or bad thing "good," moral discrimination is eventually lost so that the arrogant cannot distinguish good from evil.

For Thurman, sin is fundamentally a private and personal affair between God and the individual, however, its consequences have profound social implications. The social dynamics of sin are manifested in political, economic, and cultural patterns and arrangements that are detrimental to the well-being or inner harmony of individuals. The person who seeks harmony within discovers that s/he cannot achieve self-realization in a society that is antithetical to her/his pursuit. Therefore, the quest for personal salvation inevitably leads to the need for social trans-


29 Thurman, "Habbakuk," p. 995; see also Thurman, "We Believe," May 2, 1958 where Thurman discusses the "dim-
ness of the soul."
sin are bound together in an inexorable relationship so that it is literally true that no man can expect to have his soul saved alone."30

Thurman maintains that an "individual-centered" or "personality-centered" culture is the most desirable form of society for the self-realization of persons. He perceives democracy as being the ideal political arrangement in this respect.31 He believes that the central concern any society must address is the intrinsic worth of the individual. Therefore, any political or economic arrangement that treats persons as means to an end and denies the fundamental equality of all persons is evil; and to cooperate with its evil policies is to commit sin.32 Racism, as it is reflected in segregated statues, is but one example of social sin which is against the self-realization of persons, in sum, against community.33


31Thurman is not as clear, however, on his economic theory. See Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 130.


33See Thurman's discussion on the anatomy of segregation in Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, especially pp. 5-12.
The Individual's Response to the Barriers to Community

Thurman's basic concern with evil and sin is where they "touch" the individual. This does not mean that the complex social implications of sin are not important. His emphasis, however, is on the individual because he believed that the will is the seat of pride or the ground for creative and constructive transformation of the self and society. Thurman insists that the barrier erected by pride in the individual's personal center must be the point of departure for the actualization of community. The internal dimensions of the self are the citadels that must be confronted before external circumstances are challenged. The operative assumption is that the individual is a microcosm of the greater society, and that the same dynamics of pride which destroy the soul of the individual are at work in society only at a greater scale. Therefore, the place to begin in removing barriers which impede the actualization of community in the world is within the self.

Sin is encountered and removed only through confession and self-surrender, which involve the inner consent of the will.34 In the act of surrender, the willful, proud

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elements of the self, which are the results of the inner need for love and self-confirmation, are transformed by the love of God. The individual is reconciled with God and is enabled and required to live authentically in the world. What s/he has discovered within propels her/him into society as an agent of reconciliation. S/He is dedicated to "the removing of all barriers which block or frustrate this possibility in the world." 

For Thurman, the crucial question in regards to overcoming evil is not the traditional formulation of theodicy. The critical concern for him rather is what the individual does with the evil that touches the personal and private places of her/his existence; and how one keeps evil from destroying all meaning in human life. The underlying rationale in this position is expressed in Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of evil as being

35 Thurman, Meditations, p. 183; Thurman, Growing Edge, pp. 67-68; Thurman, Creative Encounter, Chapter III, pp. 92-124.

36 Thurman, Creative Encounter, Chapter III, p. 124

37 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 84; see John Hick, Evil and the God of Love (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966), p. 3. The traditional formulation of the problem of evil, according to Hicks, is: "Can the presence of evil be reconciled with the existence of God who is unlimited both in goodness and power?"

38 Thurman, "What Can I Believe In?", pp. 5-6.
an essential ingredient in the dynamic and creative pattern of existence. Implied in this perspective, it could be argued that while the individual must struggle against evil, its total eradication is not the primary concern because of the overwhelming magnitude of its reality. 39 Nevertheless, the individual is called upon to do all within her/his power to arrest the development and consequence of personal and social evil. While an individual initiative may seem minuscule given the multitudinous social complexities which shape and form society, Thurman argued that when a solitary individual chooses not to cooperate with evil, but places his or her life on the side of goodness, that person anticipates community at the level of her/his functioning. 40

Thurman contends that it is not sufficient simply to remove an evil thing; it must be replaced with something good. He suggests that the dynamic nature of evil is such that it grows with greater intensity and rapidity than goodness. Although life is ultimately against evil and will sustain the good, the principle of goodness tends to be slower, less organized, and concentrated. Consequently, when evil is "plucked out" it grows back unless

40 Ibid.
good is cultivated in its stead. This tends to be true in nature, in personality, and in human relations. In society, says Thurman, those who are involved in evil designs tend to proceed on a basis of a clearly defined plan and a structure of orderliness which draws upon all the available resources to fulfill their diabolical schemes. He suggests that in a sense, there is an understanding that the directiveness of life is against their designs, therefore they work with greater effort and concentration. It is paramount, therefore, that those who work towards community realize that goodness must be achieved through careful planning, deliberate effort, and hard work. He writes, "It is not enough to evict the devil; but something else must be put in his place and maintained there, or else he returns, refreshed and recharged, to deliver greater tyranny." The replacement of evil with good begins with the internalization of the virtues of love and truth at the

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41 "The orderly process seems ever to be at the mercy of the disorderly. Weeds do not have to be cultivated, but vegetables must be." Thurman, "Habbakuk," p. 981.


43 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 52.
personal level and working nonviolently for their actualization in the greater society. 44 Conflict between good and evil is inevitable. For Thurman, conflict is an essential part of the experience of growth and maturity for the individual and the basis for the transformation of society. In the individual's spiritual growth, there is a dialectical tension at work. There is a force which "pushes forward" to the new and an opposing force which "pulls back" toward the old. The resolution of these two forces is a creative synthesis in the dynamic development of personality. Personality, as such, is always an unfinished project. 45 The dialectical tension which undergirds conflict in personality is also apparent in cellular behavior in the organism. Cellular activity, Thurman suggests, illustrates an aggressive tendency which is reflected in human personality. The aggressive urges to maintain and to change are the dialectical elements which lead to conflict and to transformation. He writes:

Aggression cannot be separated from the urge for and to community. It may be that we get a grand and awesome preview of these two in the incipient ground of human behavior in what has been discovered about the behavior of the cell in seeking its own nourishment

44 See later discussion of love and truth as ethical principles in the Actualization of Community.
45 Thurman, Disciplines, pp. 48-55.
and rejecting, by an uncanny directed spontaneity, any intruder that is sensed as a threat to the inner cohesiveness of the structure of the cell. No understanding of the significance of community can escape the place and significance of aggression.46

The individual who is committed to the actualization of community must acknowledge the role of conflict as an essential element in the creation of a just and loving society. The ground of resolution for conflict begins with the presupposition that life is on the side of goodness, and that the contradictions of life are not final. Because the one devoted to community refuses to accept the contradictions of life as ultimate, this does not mean that s/he acquieses or retreats from struggle or conflict. To the contrary, s/he anticipates protest and indignation because the structures of experience guarantee their presence in any creative adventure. Again, Thurman writes:

The structure of human experience consists of tensions and releases, of veritable contradictions and paradoxes, of trial balances between affirmations and negations; in time, there seems to be a de-focused but conscious dialectic at the very core of experience which may have only a secondary reference to reflective thought. It is a salutary fact, however, that the human spirit is reluctant to give to this tension an ultimate significance of reality.47

The struggle against evil is always directed towards a higher synthesis which approximates the good,

46 Thurman, Search, p. 90. Underline mine.
community. This creative synthesis, however, is not a compromise with evil. The individual is under an absolute moral imperative to say "no" to evil. The synthesis is achieved only when good is victorious over evil. Embodied in the synthesis is a greater revelation of love and truth, in essence, a greater understanding of God. The individual who seeks to remove the barriers of evil and sin which militate against community discovers that s/he has divine companionship, and is assured of ultimate victory. Thurman says, "He who places his life completely at the disposal of the highest ethical end, God, to him will not be denied the wine of creative livingness." For the work of community is the work of God coming to God's Self in the world. The human-divine interrelatedness is tightly interwoven in such a way that the oppressed's struggle for liberation against evil systems of dominance, is also God's struggle. Thurman comments:

As a religious man, I feel that God cannot be what God is destined to be in the world as long as any man is held back and held down. I think that whenever

48 "To say 'Yes' to evil, as if it were ultimate, is to be overcome by evil." Thurman, "Habbakuk," p. 987.
a man is in prison, God is in prison. And in the things that work for his release, life is on their side. The things that work to hold them there, life is against . . . It doesn't matter how high the odds are, because the things that work for bigotry and discrimination—all these things—life is against and they cannot abide. With absolute confidence I work, and knowing that my responsibility is to do everything I can not to be the one to keep the key in the lock of the prison house. That is my job!\textsuperscript{50}

In this analysis of evil and sin as barriers to community, Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of evil in life, and his treatment of the question of theodicy have been examined. Thurman's primary concern in his treatment of evil is its significance for the individual. Thurman's understanding of sin and its relationship to the individual is similar. However, for Thurman, sin is not simply an individualistic affair between the individual and God, rather sin has profound social consequences which demand self-surrender on the part of the individual and a commitment to social transformation. Conflict is an inevitable product of the work of community; it is indigenous to the structure of human existence. The creative resolution of good and evil is guaranteed by the logic of life. For Thurman, the contradictions of life are not final. This is the ground of hope for the person who works to overcome the barriers of evil and sin in her/himself.

\textsuperscript{50} Thurman, "Wind Break Against Existence," p. 9.
and the world. While this discussion has, at points, anticipated Thurman's recommendations for overcoming the barriers, the next section of the chapter will deal more extensively with this important element.

**Overcoming the Barriers**

This section will explore the Thurman recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community. The discussion will involve: 1) community as the norm and goal of the moral life; 2) the means of actualization of community: love and truth as ethical principles, overcoming the internal barriers, and nonviolence; 3) community, religion and social action; and 4) community as an empirical reality.

**Community as the Norm and Goal of the Moral Life**

It has been stated that the ideal of community refers to community as the norm for ethical reflection and the goal toward which all life strives.\(^{51}\) It is important to note that for Thurman the normative character of community is not an external imposition upon life, but a disclosure of what life is about as it seeks to realize itself in myriad time-space manifestations. Community

\(^{51}\)See Introduction.
is inherent in the process of life and is the expression of the will or "intent" of God who is Creator of all existence. Therefore, community as the norm for the moral life proceeds from an ethical theory that is theocentric. 52 Thurman's construal of the world begins with the God of life who is intimately and actively engaged in all of existence. 53 According to James Gustafson, theocentric

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52 Theocentric ethics refers to Gustafson's treatment in Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Here Gustafson argues that traditional Western theology and ethics have been anthropocentric in their focus rather than theocentric. Consequently, the anthropocentric focus has prevented us from understanding significant things about "the ultimate power and ordering of life, about the majesty and glory of all that sustains us and about the threats to life over which we have no definite control" (p. 99). He contends that the ultimate power is not the guarantor of human benefits as presupposed in our anthropocentric interpretation of God and the cosmos. Gustafson maintains that a theocentric construal of the world provides the moral agent with a relational ethical framework whereby we can "morally discern" the creative activity of God in nature, culture, society, and the self. See also Gustafson's "Moral Discernment in the Christian Life," in Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, eds., Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 17-36.

53 Walter Meulder identifies Thurman's philosophical ethical position as theonomous. He writes, "This means that the imperatives are not imposed from external sources, nor completely devised by inner personal mandates, but express at the deepest level a metaphysical divine moral order which is also the rational law of a person's own being. There is a meeting place for communication between God and the person, a place for yielding private, personal will to transcendent purposes that are at the same time common ground. Here revelation and intuition meet, a place
ethics raises the practical moral question, "What is God enabling and requiring us to be and do?" His general answer to the question is that we are to relate ourselves and all things in a manner appropriate to their relation to God.\textsuperscript{54}

Thurman's answer to the theocentric moral question is found in his exposition of the nature of religious experience. As it has been presented, in the creative encounter with God the individual is enabled and required to realize harmony within her/himself and to actualize community in the world.\textsuperscript{55} For Thurman, therefore, faith precedes morality. The content and structure of the moral life is founded upon the individual's experience of God, who is conceived in terms of supreme worthfulness. God is the source and goal of the moral life. He argued that "the guarantee of the ethical demand is to be found in the underlying vitality of the universe as expressed in

\textsuperscript{54}Gustafson, \textit{Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective} p. 327.

\textsuperscript{55}See earlier discussion on the nature of the religious experience.
the aliveness of life, which in turn, is sustained by the God of life." 56

Fundamental to the moral life is the act of commitment. Commitment is an act of volition which may be a radical self-conscious yielding on the part of the individual or a systematic disciplined effort over a period of time. 57 The result of the commitment of the individual is a new, integrated basis for moral action; a new value content and center of loyalty inform his actions in the world. 58 The person's loyalty to God, which proceeds from the personal assurance of being loved by God, forms the ground of the moral life. What is discovered in private must be witnessed to in the world. Thurman comments on the nature of the individual's religious experience and its relationship to moral action:

His experience is personal, private but in no sense exclusive. All of the vision of God and holiness which he experiences, he must achieve in the context of the social situation by which day-to-day life is defined. What is disclosed in his religious experience he must define in community. That which God shareth with

57 Thurman, Creative Encounter, pp. 67-71, 121.
58 Ibid., p. 81.
him, he must inspire his fellows to seek for themselves. He is dedicated therefore to the removing of all barriers which block or frustrate this possibility in the world.59

The ideal of community serves as the norm and the goal of the moral life. Thurman's ethical theory is theocentric in respect to his understanding of the relation of the individual and the world to God. The triadic character of community, as it is conceived by Thurman, issues forth in a relational framework for the moral life which demonstrates the genius and the goal of life, which is community. The commitment of the individual to the God of life creates a new, integrated basis for the moral life. The individual's loyalty to God informs her/his moral action in the world.

The Means of Actualization

Love and Truth

For Thurman, the two ethical principles which undergird the moral life and serve as the means for the actualization of community are love and truth. Love is the sentient power of God in the creation of community and truth is its cognitive counterpart. The two principles are integrally related and provide the basis for ethical reflection

59 Ibid., p. 124.
and praxis.\textsuperscript{60} Love and truth, as ethical principles, arise from a theocentric perspective which is decidedly relational. Unlike prescriptive or descriptive ethical formulations, the basis for moral judgment is relational. Thurman's relational ethics, however, differs from the contextualist or situationalist stance which emphasizes principle in relation to context.\textsuperscript{61} He is more properly located within the relational motif which accentuates "virtue" or what Edward Long terms "response to divine initiative."\textsuperscript{62} The emphasis in this position is on the internalization of moral truth discovered in divine encounter (in this case, love and truth), which disposes the moral agent to make the "fitting decision."\textsuperscript{63} The disciplines of the spirit which Thurman emphasizes

\textsuperscript{60}See Carlyle Stewart, Chapter 1, "The Structure of Ethical Method in the Theology of Howard Thurman," p. 362.


\textsuperscript{63}See Frederick S. Carney, "Deciding What Is Required?", in Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, eds., Gene Outka and Paul Ramsey, pp. 3-16.
(commitment, growth, prayer, suffering, and reconciliation) are means of creating virtue. Careful disciplining of the moral life through the internalization of love and truth, disposes the individual to discernment of proper moral action and realization of the good. The good deed is done, consequently, without hypothetical motives or deontological decrees, but because the virtuous individual deems it good. He writes:

The virtuous act may or may not pay dividends. In the last analysis, men cannot be persuaded to be good because of reward either here or beyond this "vale of tears." Men must finally come to the place in their maturity which makes them do the good because it is good. Not because it is a command, even a divine command, but because the good deed . . . is itself good.65

The ethical principle of love is central for understanding Thurman's method for the actualization of community. Thurman believed that all love is of God, and therefore, to love is the profoundest act of life and that only in a secondary sense is it an act of religion or morality.66 Love is the fruit of the presence of God and is the power which overcomes barriers which divide and separate

64 See Thurman, Disciplines of the Spirit.
65 Thurman, Meditations of the Heart, p. 105.
66 Greer, An Examination and Analysis of Thurman's Idea of Community, p. 23.
individuals, groups, and nations from one another. Thurman defines love as "the experience through which an individual passes when he is able to deal with another human being at a point in that human being beyond all good and evil." The experience of being loved "is to have the sense of being dealt with at a point in one's self that is beyond all good and beyond all evil."

First, Thurman makes a distinction between love as interest in another person and love as intrinsic interest. Love as interest is an expression of interest in another person for ulterior motives, and as such the other person is not addressed as a subject, but is seen as an object to be manipulated. Love as intrinsic interest in another person goes beyond all of the dimensions and aspects of the personality and moves to the central core of the individual. There the person is dealt with intimately and personally, concretely, as a subject. "To love," says Thurman, "means dealing with persons in the concrete

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67 Thurman, Inward Journey, p. 36.
68 "We Believe" Television Series, September 25, 1959, Thurman Papers, BU, p. 91.
69 Ibid.
rather than the abstract. In the presence of love, there are no types or stereotypes, no classes and no masses."70

Secondly, love also includes truth.71 Truth is intuitively discerned. He maintained that at the core of love there is a real body of facts which must be dealt with. Love is always seasoned with intelligence and understanding.72 Love devoid of rationality becomes sentimental and potentially destructive. He illustrates the relationship between love and reason with the case of a person who gives chocolate to a friend who is allergic to it. Such an act, he suggests, is unloving because it disregards the facts of the situation, and is therefore potentially destructive.73

Thirdly, love transcends justice for Thurman. Justice, according to Thurman, is normally understood as "the artificial equalization of unequals--the restoration of balance, of equilibrium, in a situation in which the balance


71 The distinction between love and truth are made for purposes of analysis, but ultimately they are one. The continuing discussion should justify this important distinction.

72 Thurman, "We Believe," October 23, 1959, pp. 97-98.

73 Ibid., December 11, 1959.
has been upset." Thurman, The Growing Edge, p. 79.
74 Thurman, The Growing Edge, p. 79.
75 Ibid., pp. 81-84.
of her/his "private, autonomous existence" and reduces her/him to a thing. But if the individual who has the advantage refrains from exercising her/his power over the other, s/he establishes voluntary distance between his/her ability and will. In this instance, the idea of justice is not external to the individual, but internal. When one refrains from executing power over the other in such a context, s/he shows mercy or love. Thurman argues that love in this sense fulfills justice by recognizing the inherent worth and equality of the other as a child of God.

Love and justice,\textsuperscript{76} according to Thurman, are part of the moral integrity of life. The moral order operates on the logic of cause and effect, deed and consequence. Therefore, the unrighteous deed will not go unpunished, but the wronged individual is never the avenger. Judgment for the evil deed is inherent in life itself. He writes, "The moral law is binding. There is no escape from the relentless logic of antecedent and consequence."\textsuperscript{77} The individual, therefore, who shows mercy or love, even to her/his enemy will ultimately be vindicated. But the

\textsuperscript{76}Thurman uses the word "mercy," but in this context the meaning is synonymous.

\textsuperscript{77}Thurman, "Freedom Under God," p. 3.
exercise of vengeance or retaliation is not his, but God's. This is true for Thurman at both personal and social levels. Thurman comments:

There is a judgment which presides over the private and collective destiny of man. It is a judgment that establishes itself in human history as well as in human character. God is the Creator of life, and the ultimate responsibility of life is to God. If there be any government or social institution... that operates among men in a manner that makes for human misery... to the extent that it is so, it cannot survive, because it is against life and carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction.78

Fourthly, love includes imagination. Imagination, according to Thurman, is a constituent part of the individual's nature as a self-transcendent being. Imagination can be used as the angelos, the messenger of God, when the individual through self-transcendence puts her/himself in another's place. Imagination, in this sense, is synonymous with "sympathy." Through the use of imagination, the individual is enabled to transcend her/himself and reach the other at the core of their being, at the seat of "common consciousness." In doing so, the other is addressed at a place which is beyond all good and evil. This, according to Thurman, is the experience of love. When an individual is addressed at the centermost place of

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78 Ibid.
personality, s/he experiences wholeness and harmony with the one who loves him/her. This is the "common ground" of our relations with others:

I see you where you are striving and struggling and in light of the highest possibility of your personality, I deal with you there. My religious faith is insistent that this can be done only out of a life of devotion. I must cultivate the inner spiritual resources of my life to such a point that I can bring you to my sanctuary before his presence, until, at last, I do not know you from myself.79

Fifthly, the experience of love involves redemptive suffering. To love one another, according to Thurman, is to expose ourselves in such a way that the other may have free access to our inner self. This involves vulnerability and the potential for suffering, but it is only through our willingness to risk suffering that redemption of the other is achieved. Redemption occurs when one person becomes for the other what is needed at the time when the need is most urgent and acutely felt.80 The act of love as redemptive suffering is not contingent on the other's response, love rather is unsolicited and self-giving; it transcends merit and demerit, it simply loves. Ultimately, love is victorious over any defenses, even hate, because

80 Thurman, Inward Journey, p. 121; Thurman, Mysticism and the Experience of Love, p. 21.
it is the creative power of God creating community, the very essence and vitality of all being. 81

Finally, love is synonymous with reconciliation. 82 Reconciliation occurs within the individual when her/his inner need to be cared for and understood is met in encounter with God. The experience of reconciliation with God becomes the ground and moral mandate for sharing one's experience in relations with others and in society. Whatever impedes the actualization of community at either personal or social levels must be confronted. Thurman believed that the way to the reconciliation of society is through redemptive suffering which is rooted in love. This is accomplished through meaningful experiences of love shared among individuals. He believed that "Experiences of meaning which people share are more compelling than the barriers that separate them" and "If such experiences can be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration, then any barrier between men, whatever kind, can be undermined." 83

81 Thurman, Inward Journey, p. 29.
82 See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 46; see also in Smith, Thurman's treatment of "reconciliation," Chapter 5, pp. 104-27.
83 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 120.
him, this was the central ethical imperative of religion, to love and to be reconciled.\textsuperscript{84}

In summary, love, for Thurman, is the experience through which one passes when s/he is able to deal with another human being at a point in that person beyond all good and evil. To be loved is to have the sense of being dealt with in one's self at a point beyond all good and evil. Love is intrinsic interest in the other, it goes beyond abstract generalizations and expresses itself \textit{in concreto}. Love and reason are not opposed, but the head and the heart, for Thurman, must work together in the actualization of community. Love transcends and fulfills justice. Included in the experience of love is the role of the imagination which allows the individual to identify with the other at the centermost place of their being. Finally, through the exposure of one's self to the other, love issues forth in redemptive suffering which is the creative power that reconciles and restores community.

The other ethical principle which is operative in the actualization of community, for Thurman, is truth. Truth is the rational element that is always present in love. It is his insistence throughout his writings and

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., p. 122.
meditations, that the head and the heart are one.  

The rational nature of truth is predicated upon the inherent order or logic in life. There is a natural affinity between the order in life and the activity of the human mind which makes knowledge of the world possible.  

As stated, Thurman uses life as a hermeneutical principle. He claims that an empirical analysis of the movement and activity of life will yield principles of interpretation which are helpful in understanding human experience. An example of his method is found in his interpretation of Negro spirituals as sources of reflection for universal human experience. In his analysis of the spiritual, "Wade in the Water," he suggests that the slave's experience of the troubled waters discloses a more profound meaning of God's activity in human suffering. The following illustrates his method:

Here is an insistence that one must look deep within the churning waters to find the clue to their meaning. . . . Let us examine as an illustration one phase of human experience, human illness or sickness. Consider the study of cancer. . . . With great versatility, men apply in myriad ways the scientific method to the malignant growth of cells in hope that the rational principle in man may make contact with the rational

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85 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 269.
86 Thurman, Search, p. 5.
87 "Wade in the water/Wade in the water, children/God is going to trouble the waters."
principle in malignancy, and result in understanding, insight and healing. All the research says that inherently cancer has a logic and rational principle operative within it. When one discovers what the rational principle is, then the resources of knowledge and wisdom and techniques can be put at the disposal of the immunizing of the organism against the ravages of the malignancy, or reduce the malignancy to manageable units of control and understanding. . . . The aim is to make available to the sufferer the deep inner resources of an ordered organism at the point of the malignancy. . . . God is troubling the waters when we are sick. Not in the sense that he causes illness, not in punishing us with sickness; but rather God is troubling the waters in human illness because inherent in the illness something rational is active, and if it is understood, its secret can be revealed so that all the overtones and creative possibilities that result from the radical interruption of one's normal processes can be turned into glorious and redemptive account.88

Thurman's conception of truth is also sentient; it incorporates and transcends rationality. He emphasizes the intuitive nature of truth. Thurman defines intuitive knowledge as "immediate, direct, and not an inference from logic. . . . It is an awareness of literal truth directly perceived."89 Intuition is a constituent part of personality. It is not spontaneous, but always deeply rooted in the data with reference to which the process of intuition

88 Thurman, Deep River, pp. 92-93; Muelder comments on Thurman's strong insistence on the rationality inherent in life: "This intention of rationality corresponds to the rationality of the universe and points to the scientific method." Muelder, "Howard Thurman's Religious Social Ethics," p. 10.

89 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 46.
is related. Thurman compares intuition to doing a broad jump. He says the runner dashes down the path until he comes to the threshold of the pit, and he is carried forward by the momentum created by the speed and drive which are in his path. Intuition, says Thurman, is similar:

There is in all intuition the element of revelation which may be characterized as the leaping element. This aspect of intuition makes it throw light on known materials; and the thing that makes it an intuition is the fact that it establishes clearly and definitively what was known peripherally, vaguely, or merely dimly sensed. The intuition says that I bring you knowledge which has been there and in you all along.90

Intuition is involved in moral judgment.91 Through intuitive understanding, the individual becomes aware of her/his proper moral response to given situation. In an

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90 Ibid., p. 47.
91 In his analysis of Thurman's ethical method, Carlyle Stewart claims that Thurman's use of intuition in moral decision making is founded upon two ethical paradigms: "natural law" and what Henry Sidgwick calls "perceptive intuitionism." Stewart, "The Structure of Ethical Method in the Theology of Howard Thurman," p. 365. Natural law is defined as ". . . the inherent and universal structures of human existence which can be discerned by the unaided reason and which form the basis for judgments of conscience about the good (that which realizes the natural end and goal of being) and the evil (that which thwarts the natural end and goal of being)." Van Harvey, A Handbook for Theological Terms (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 157. And for Sidgwick "conduct is right when conformed to certain precepts or principles of duty intuitively known to be unconditionally binding." The Method of Ethics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 3. Quoted in Stewart, "The Structure of Ethical Method in the Theology
article, entitled, "Mysticism and Ethics," Thurman illustrates the intuitive nature of moral decision making. He refers to Leo Tolstoy's response to an execution at the Public Square. He quotes Tolstoy:

> When I saw the head separate from the body and how they both thumped into the box at the same moment, I understood, not with my mind, but with my whole being, that no theory of reasonableness of any present progress can justify this deed; and that though everybody from the creation of the world, on whatever theory, had held it to be necessary, I knew it to be unnecessary and bad.92

For Thurman, as truth is found in the external world, it is also resident within the individual. It is "the quality or dimension of personality which has an element in it beyond thought and interpretation."93 It is part of the "giveness of God" which is available to the individual by virtue of being a child of God. Yet truth or "the inner light" is autonomous and is not the distinct property of any person. The inner light is discovered

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both through encounter with the external world and in the inner sanctuary of the self.\textsuperscript{94}

Thurman acknowledges the inherent danger of subjectivism and privatization of the truth in this regard. He maintains, however, that the community provides a safeguard against this temptation. In the gathering of the community, as in worship or common prayer, the common ground of truth becomes available to all. In the act of "centering down," that which is indigenous to all moves from a common being and the truth is given.\textsuperscript{95} The individual is also responsible for guarding against self-deception. This is a major concern for Thurman and the theme arises throughout his writings. Always the individual is called upon to test her/his perspective against the facts of her/his own experience and the experiences of others.\textsuperscript{96} He says, "You may have a glass of water out of the ocean, but all the water in your glass is not the ocean."\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{94}See Thurman, "The Inward Sanctuary," Meditations, pp. 173-74.

\textsuperscript{95}Thurman, "The Inner Light." Taped lecture.

\textsuperscript{96}Thurman, Creative Encounter, pp. 57-65; Thurman, "I Seek Truth and Light," p. 189.

\textsuperscript{97}Thurman, "Inner Light," Deep Is the Hunger, p. 93.
Finally, Thurman's view of the truth as an ethical principle is theonomous and absolutist. In all circumstances or situations, truth-telling is the only proper response. He quotes Jesus, "Let your conversation be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Honesty and sincerity are demanded in relation to self, to God, and others. Truth-telling underscores the fundamental dignity and worth of human persons. It highlights the equality of all persons regardless of color, class, status or social advantage. This is an important observation which embodies radical implications for the oppressed's understanding of themselves and their relationship to oppressors. Deception or lying are never viable moral alternatives because they destroy the value structure of the one who deceives and lies. Thurman suggests that "The penalty of deception is to become a deception, with all sense of moral discrimination vitiated." But if the disinheritd individual adheres to the truth, s/he equalizes the relationship between her/himself and the

99 Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, p. 71.
100 Ibid., p. 72.
101 Ibid., p. 65.
one who has the advantage. Deception perpetuates the relationship of the powerful and the powerless.\textsuperscript{102} Truth understood thusly liberates the individual from any form of external bondage. For within the person who internalizes the truth, there is an inner authority which allows her/him to say "no" even at the threat of violence and death. This is the essence of the freedom of the individual and her/his birthright as a child of God.\textsuperscript{103}

In Thurman, truth is intuitively discerned. Intuition involves a process of "knowing" which includes both sentience and reason. Truth, understood in this manner, informs moral judgments and demands honesty and sincerity in all contexts. It is the rational/cognitive counterpart of love, but in its transcendence of rationality it is indistinguishable from love. Truth, like love, is "that which makes for wholeness, for integration, for inner togetherness, for a sense of being present and accounted for in one's life."\textsuperscript{104} It is autonomous in the sense that it is not the distinct property of any individual,

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., p. 73.
\textsuperscript{103}Thurman, \textit{Deep Is the Hunger}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{104}Thurman, \textit{The Growing Edge}, p. 157.
it is ultimately the common ground our being, which is God. The individual is called to be a "high priest of truth," an agent in the creation of community. 105

In summary, the internalization of love and truth enables the individual to work for harmonious relations in the world. The realization of love and truth at the core of the individual's being creates an awareness of the need to work for the actualization of community in the world. Thurman says, "Neither a man nor an institution can embrace an ethical imperative without either becoming more and more expressive of it in the common life or developing a kind of enmity to it." 106 The work of community in the world involves volition, the disciplining and tutoring of the will. Thurman believes that when the will is yielded to the divine initiative and purpose, the individual becomes a participant in the realization of community.

Overcoming the Internal Barriers to Community

For Thurman, there are internal barriers that must be overcome before the work of community can be actualized in the world. These obstacles are fear, deception and

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105 Thurman, Meditations, p. 51.
106 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 124.
hatred. Since deception has already been referred to we shall limit this discussion to fear and hate. 107

Fear, according to Thurman, is rooted in violence or the threat of violence to which the individual is exposed. Violence, physical and psychological, is an attack against the victim's sense of self. Fear, therefore, is a defense mechanism of the weak and powerless. In order to maintain self-respect and self-worth, the individual develops behavior patterns which minimize the onslaught of violence. 108 But when fear is internalized, it becomes a spiritual strait-jacket which destroys the creative potential of the self. That which originally served as a means of self-protection from a hostile environment becomes destructive to the personality. The result is death to the personality. "The power that saves becomes the executioner." 109

The individual, according to Thurman, is enabled to overcome the power of fear through the realization that

107 Thurman discusses fear, hate, and deception in Jesus and the Disinherited. Although we have examined sin and evil as barriers to community, here the emphasis is on internal barriers, particularly as they relate to the internalization of love, truth and nonviolence.

108 Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, p. 40.

109 Ibid., p. 48.
s/he is a child of God. To know that one is a child of
God assures oneself of her/his inherent self-worth and
fulfills the inner need for love. Once a person comes
to this realization, fear loses its power over her/him.
The love of God, according to Thurman, gives the oppressed
"the faith and the awareness that overcome fear and trans-
forms it into the power to strive, to achieve, and not
to yield." 110

Hate is another internal barrier that must be over-
come by the person who seeks community within himself and
the world. Hate is born in unsympathetic climates which
are characterized by "contact without fellowship," where
the individual is not recognized as a subject, but as an
object which does not belong in a "magnetic field of moral-
ity." 111 Hate, according to Thurman, ultimately manifests
itself as "ill will" toward others, which in time grows
into a willing of the other's non-existence. In the case
of the oppressed, hatred is

... born out of great bitterness—a bitterness that
is made possible by sustained resentment which is
bottled up until it distills an essence of vitality,

110 Ibid., p. 57.
111 Thurman, Luminous Darkness, p. 3.
giving to the individual in whom this is happening a radical and fundamental basis for self-realization.\textsuperscript{112}

Hate, however, like deception and fear, ultimately destroys the one who hates. Jesus, says Thurman, rejected hatred because it "meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, death to communion with the Father."\textsuperscript{113}

Deception, fear, and hate are internal barriers to the actualization of community within the self. Truth and love, as internalized ethical principles, create the value content and inner authority which allow the individual to overcome these personal obstacles and to perform the work of community in the world. The emphasis, again, is on the individual and what s/he discovers in her/his encounter with God as the center of her/his loyalty. There can be no genuine commitment to harmonious relations in the external world until there is a surrender of the self to the God of life who both requires and enables the individual to realize wholeness and integration within himself and the world. The discussion which follows shows how these ethical principles are employed in encounter with forces that are antithetical to community. The method

\footnote{112}Thurman, \textit{Jesus and the Disinherited}, p. 79.

\footnote{113}Thurman writes, "The logic of development of hatred is death to the spirit and disintegration of ethical and moral values." Ibid., p. 88.
of nonviolence will be discussed as an ethical imperative in the actualization of community.

Nonviolence as Ethical Imperative in the Actualization of Community

For Thurman, central to the religious experience is the ethical imperative to be reconciled; to create the kind of nurturing and caring environment in which the individual can realize her/his innate potential. Thurman refers to this quality of existence as "the climate of love."114 The creation of a climate of love in society involves more than a situation of practical equality imposed from without by the state which reserves the right to inflict violence upon perpetrators. Rather, a truly just society is one in which mercy or love predominates.115 The method by which such a society is created and ordered is nonviolence. Nonviolence is an expression of truth and love, and is synonymous with reconciliation.116

114 Thurman, Disciplines, pp. 114, 121. A society in which the climate of love is actualized is also a "personality-centered" society. Such a society is democratic in principle, e.g., United States. See Thurman, The Creative Encounter, pp. 129-34; see also Thurman, "America in Search of a Soul" and "Freedom Under God" where this thesis is elaborated.


116 Nonviolence is discussed in this context as it relates to the actualization of human community. Thurman
Nonviolence, according to Thurman, is a creative, life-affirming response to a violent act towards oneself in a manner that meets the need of the perpetrator to be cared for, to be understood—in sum, to be loved. Violence, on the other hand, "is the imperious demand of a person to be cared for, to be understood." Violence, says Thurman, is quick and seemingly efficient; it inspires panic in the human spirit so that it makes capitulation possible without moral compromise; its purpose is to force one's will upon another. Ultimately, it is a need to be cared for, to be loved. It fails though in its real intention because it succeeds only in driving the victim's will underground where it waits for a more propitious moment to retaliate. A climate of violence is therefore created which is characterized by fear, deception, and hate.

is understood by several scholars to be the chief architect of nonviolent resistance for Black American predating its practical implementation by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Civil Rights Movement. Luther Smith gives a summary of the development of the idea among Black Americans. Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 118-19.

117 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 112.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., p. 118.
As we have seen, these are internal barriers which impede the actualization of community.

Thurman contends that the only viable way to overcome the destructive quality of the climate of violence is through nonviolence. According to Thurman:

There is but one place for refuge for any man on this planet and that is another man's heart. And what the nonviolent man does, he makes his heart a swinging door and the violent man seals his door against intrusion and thereby becomes a prisoner in his own house.121

Nonviolence not only creates a climate in which harmony can exist between individuals, it is also a technique or discipline which seeks to confront the violent person or system in such a way that effects change in attitudes and social policies which work against human community, e.g., through sit-ins, boycotts, pray-ins, etc. For Thurman, this is accomplished through spiritual discipline and commitment to God. It is important to note that nonviolence, for Thurman, is not simply a tool of tactical significance, but it is primarily a moral demand which arises from religious commitment. Nonviolent resistance as a method divorced from spiritual and moral substance can be used as a weapon of violence. Nonviolence used

in this way is counterproductive and ultimately destructive because it fails to address the opponent at the level of personal worth and to call for a change in values. The locus of nonviolent encounter is the human will. Unlike violence,

nonviolence insulates itself into the will. It is often slow--its most creative dimension is the way in which it activates the imagination of the individual or individuals so that it makes it possible for them to project themselves into another man's place and thereby opens the way for him to do something for them.\textsuperscript{122}

Therefore, according to Thurman, nonviolence rejects violence in both its physical and non-physical expressions. To refrain from physical violence and to employ psychological means of violence is inconsistent with the logic of nonviolence. \textbf{The purpose of nonviolence is always the redemption of the other.} It seeks to create the conditions in which opponents may realize their personal worth and dignity as children of God. Thurman says that this demands that "nonphysical tools" of nonviolence be used: 1) always to refrain from automatic response to violence, i.e., to fight or flee; and 2) the spirit of retaliation must be overcome.\textsuperscript{123} The source of the individual's power to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{122}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123}Thurman, \textit{Disciplines}, pp. 118-19.
\end{flushright}
fulfill these requirements is found in life itself. "When a man is able to bring to bear upon a single purpose all the powers of his being, his whole life is energized and vitalized." 124

For Thurman, the ultimate goal of nonviolence is the creation of human community, based on truth and love. Nonviolence is not an end in itself, but the means by which community is actualized. As a means it must be consistent with its goal. Violence, on the other hand, can never bring about wholeness and harmony. It is antithetical to the genius of community. Only love and truth can ultimately overcome the forces that work against the creation of "a world of friendly men underneath a friendly sky." 125

Luther Smith criticizes Thurman's understanding of love and the concomitant role of nonviolence as means of effecting social change. He suggests that Thurman's vision of nonviolence as a means of social transformation is noble, but unrealistic. Using the Niebuhrian analysis of love and justice, Smith argues that Thurman's ethical theory fails to take into account the moral impotency of

124 Ibid., p. 19.
125 Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. 113.
love in the creation and ordering of society. Smith argues that, in Thurman, the efficacy of the nonviolent method as a means for social change is predicated on Thurman's understanding of redemption. Smith says that Thurman believes that nonviolence is moral when it is redemptive, i.e., when it is able to "find a way to honor what is deepest in one person and to have that person honor what is deepest in the other." The key issue, therefore, that Thurman fails to resolve, according to Smith, is whether violence can ever be redemptive. Smith suggests that there are instances when perhaps nonviolence is immoral and non-redemptive in confronting exploitive systems which lack the cultural values to support nonviolent resistance. Oppressive situations like pre-Maoist China and the present conditions in South Africa, according to Smith, are convincing examples for the alternative of revolutionary violence as a means of social change. He insists, however, that revolutionary violence is not an end itself, but sometimes it is the only means to achieve justice.

126 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 121-24.
127 Ibid., p. 124.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., p. 125.
Although, as Smith indicates, there are instances in which Thurman is unclear as to his own actions in life-threatening situations, he still embraces nonviolence as his fundamental philosophy of action. The temptation to compromise ethical ideals is acknowledged by Thurman, but there are some issues where compromise is inappropriate and where the individual "must draw the line." In such instances, compromise is a denial of the ideal. Nonviolence, as an ethical ideal, is non-negotiable for Thurman because it is rooted in the very nature of love and truth. To deny it in praxis, therefore, is to deny the redemptive possibilities of life itself. Therefore, those instances in which Thurman was or would be tempted to use violent means, must be viewed as personal conflicts of loyalties between the God of life and himself. Thurman did not

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130 Ibid., p. 122; see also Thurman's Lawrence Lectures on Religion and Society, "Mysticism and Social Action," October 13, 1978, First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, CA, pp. 22-23.

131 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, pp. 11-14, 68.


133 Ibid., p. 28.

134 "One of the tragedies of the modern liberal," says Thurman, "is the illusion that theory and practice, the ideal and the real can be separated from each other." Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 28.
consider them as grounds for establishing violence as a viable alternative for social change.

Smith's major contention revolves around Thurman's synonymy of nonviolence and redemption and whether violence can ever be an expression of redemptive love. As we have indicated, for Thurman, violence and redemption are antithetical and cannot work in concert in creating a nurturing and caring society. Nonviolence, for Thurman, is the only viable method of creating harmonious relations among persons and actualizing world community. Three important facets of Thurman's thought are crucial for understanding his view of the relationship between nonviolence and redemption. They are, respectively: 1) his theocentric vision of reality; 2) the role of the creative individual as a redemptive sufferer in the collective destiny of the human race; and 3) patience and social change.

In respect to Thurman's theocentric vision of reality, it is important to note that divine activity is not concerned primarily with human initiative or human benefits as it is presupposed in an anthropocentric construal of reality. The emphasis rather is on the sovereign and cosmic purposes of God. The moral life is a response to the divine initiative. Human freedom, according to Thurman, means that humankind can choose to cooperate
with or reject God's will for community. He remarks that even if human beings were to destroy themselves through their own devices, God is infinitely more resourceful and creative than any expression of life. He agrees with Toynbee, that "if we are so foolish to destroy our entire civilization and our own lives, then the creator of life could very easily make an ideal culture out of the ant."

Although the individual is free to participate in or to reject God's plan for community, God has chosen to entrust the Kingdom with human beings.

Secondly, as it was mentioned, the theme of the role of the creative individual in the collective destiny of the human race is persistent in Thurman's works. For Thurman, throughout history the committed individual as a creative agent has had far-reaching redemptive significance. The solitary individual who works for community is not a lone voice, rather her/his voice is the voice of God. The good deed or the redemptive act carries

135 Ibid., p. 38.
136 Ibid., p. 94.
137 See discussion of George Cross and Olive Schreiner as intellectual sources for the thought of Thurman.
138 Thurman often quoted from Petrarch's Letters of Old Age: "When a word must be spoken to further a good
within itself its own creative seed which bears fruit beyond its time. "All of life," says Thurman, "is a planting and harvesting. No man gathers merely the crop that he himself has planted." Therefore, when an individual places her/his life at the disposal of divine purposes, s/he becomes a veritable incarnation of the Presence of God in history. Her/His life becomes a pedagogical instrument in the hands of God to show the way of community. The great challenge and genius of redemptive suffering for the individual is to demonstrate in her/his own life the "community-making" power of suffering love so that others might follow the path s/he has shown. Thurman firmly believed that if these experiences could be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration they would cause, and those whom it behooves to speak remain silent, anybody ought to raise his voice, and break the silence fraught with evil... Many a time a few simple words have helped further the welfare of the nation, no matter who uttered them; the voice itself displaying the latent powers, sufficed to move the hearts of men." See his "Exposition on Zephaniah," The Interpreter's Bible, p. 1002; Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 25.

139 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 49.

140 Thurman would argue that this was true for Jesus and the Buddha; to some extent, Judas Maccabeus (Ibid., pp. 49-50); Albert Schweitzer (Ibid., pp. 57-58); Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Search, p. 95; Head and Heart, p. 223), among others.
be able to undermine all barriers that separate and divide individuals, groups, and nations from one another.\footnote{Thurman, \textit{Footprints}, p. 21.} He says:

\begin{quote}
\ldots when the ideal is brought into focus in the mind of the individual or the people of a state and held there with sufficient intensity over a time interval of sufficient duration, the ideal tends to realize itself in the very life of the people.\footnote{Thurman, \textit{Deep Is the Hunger}, p. 21.}
\end{quote}

This is the essential message in \textit{A Track to the Water's Edge}.\footnote{See especially Thurman, \textit{A Track to the Water's Edge}, pp. 53-56.} In an excerpt from Olive Schreiner's "Three Dreams in the Desert," the story is told of a woman who is seeking the land of freedom. In her quest, she meets an aged man who personifies Reason. Reason points her to the land of freedom which is beyond a "dark, flowing river." He informs her that the journey will involve great suffering and sacrifice. The woman has to sacrifice her child whom she has concealed beneath her clothing before she makes her "track to the water's edge." Finally when she reaches the bank of the river, she says to Reason:

"For what do I go to this far land which no one has ever reached? Oh, I am alone! I am utterly alone!"

And Reason, that old man, said to her, "Silence! what do you hear?"

And she listened intently, and she said, "I hear a
sound of feet, a thousand times ten thousands, and they beat this way!"
He said, "They are the feet of those that shall follow you. Lead on! Make a track to the water's edge! Where you stand now, the ground will be beaten flat by ten thousand times ten thousand feet."
And he said, "Have you seen the locusts how they cross a stream? First one comes down the water-edge, and it is swept away, and then another comes and then another, and then another, and at last with their bodies piled up a bridge is built and the rest pass over."
She said, "And, of those that come first, some are swept away, and are heard of no more; their bodies do not even build the bridge?"
"And are swept away, and are heard of no more--and what of that?" he said.
"And what of that--" she said.
"They make a track to the water's edge."
"They make a track to the water's edge--" And she said, "Over that bridge which shall be built without bodies, who will pass?"
He said, "The entire human race."
And the woman grasped her staff.
And I saw her turn down that dark path to the river.144

Again, it is important to remember that for Thurman, God in divine sovereignty wills to actualize community through individuals who freely choose to cooperate with the divine purposes. Redemptive suffering or suffering love, is the means through which community is achieved. This is fundamental to the dignity and worth inherent in human personality. For Thurman, redemption must of necessity be nonviolent for violence merely perpetuates the climate of violence which is characterized by deception, hate, and fear. The purpose of nonviolence is to demonstrate

144 Ibid., p. 56.
the power of love and reconciliation in human relations. Redemptive suffering, Thurman would argue, has its own creative power to reach the inner dimensions of personality where society has its basis. The key to the problem is "a time interval of sufficient duration" in which the multiplication of spiritual experiences of unity have opportunity to undermine the barriers which separate and divide. This demands what Dorothee Soelle calls "revolutionary patience." 145

The third consideration is patience and social change. According to Thurman, the need for patience at all levels of one's existence is fundamental for growth. 146 Patience, according to Thurman, does not mean inactivity or resignation. It is a dynamic process which is only partially concerned with time or waiting, it also includes a quality of steadfastness. 147 While Thurman is not unaware of the potentially negative implications of such a doctrine for the oppressed who must struggle against evil, exploitation, poverty, etc., he insists that there are some things,


146 See Thurman's treatment of "waiting" as part of the discipline of growth in Disciplines, pp. 39-46.

147 Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger, p. 54.
including social change, which demand patience. "Sometimes things cannot be forced but they must unfold, sending their tendrils deep into the heart of life, gathering strength and power with the unfolding days."  

While there are some situations in which radical change through swift and concise action is possible, others demand a slower process of constant resistance. "Some things can be removed only by allowing them to soak." The reason why individuals, groups and nations opt for violence as a means for social change is because violence tends to be quick, decisive, and efficient, whereas nonviolence tends to be slow and creative as it seeks to insulate itself into the other's will and perform the redemptive work of love. Nonviolence demands "revolutionary patience," a patience which does not simply accept or tolerate evil, but which adopts a method of creative change rooted in the very processes of life as they work toward community. This, says Thurman, is a point of crucial identification with the Mind and Will of God. "Sometimes I think that patience is one of

148 Ibid., p. 53.
149 Ibid., p. 67.
150 Thurman, Disciplines, p. 112.
the great characteristics that distinguishes God from man. God knows how to wait, dynamically; everybody else is in a hurry."\textsuperscript{152}

In summary, nonviolence, therefore, is the only viable moral method for bringing about the social transformation of society. Revolutionary violence, as a temporary solution or as a means of confronting and changing exploitive systems, is not acceptable as a philosophy of action for Thurman, because it perpetuates the very reality it seeks to destroy. A climate of love is the basis of a just and merciful society. Its actualization is brought about through the internalization of truth and love. The role of the creative individual as a redemptive sufferer is primary in the actualization of a society in which truth and love are operative. This ideal state of existence can become a reality only if spiritual experiences of unity can be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration so that the barriers which separate and divide can be undermined. This requires "revolutionary patience" which is an expression of a theocentric perspective of time and

\textsuperscript{152}Thurman, \textit{Deep Is the Hunger}, p. 53. For Thurman, the redemptive and creative role of the individual in social change also involves a view of time and history which is radically theocentric. See his "Expositon of Zephaniah," \textit{The Interpreter's Bible}, pp. 1015-19.
history. In the next part of this discussion on the role of religion and the church in the actualization of community, it will be seen how Thurman perceives the church as a center where spiritual experiences of unity occur.

Community, Religion, and Social Action

Thus far, this examination of Thurman's understanding of the actualization of community has dealt with community as the norm and goal of the moral life, love and truth as ethical principles which serve as the means for actualization of community, overcoming internal barriers, and the role of nonviolence in the actualization of community. Two other important elements in Thurman's thinking regarding the actualization of community remain to be discussed: Thurman's understanding of the role of religion and the church in social action, and community as an empirical reality.

The discussion of Thurman's view of religion and social action involves two foci: 1) the individual and social action; and 2) the nature and role of the church in the creation of community.

Thurman's treatment of the individual and social action is informed by his mystical interpretation of life. Although Thurman seldom referred to himself as a "mystic,"
he was deeply rooted in the American mystical tradition. His early experiences as a boy growing up in Daytona Beach were mystical in the profoundest sense. Later as part of his formal education, he studied with Rufus Jones who made a singular impact upon his formulation of mysticism and its relatedness to social action. Thurman defines mysticism in the manner of his former teacher. Mysticism, 153

153 Luther Smith states that "Thurman's primary identity was that of a mystic; a mystic who recognized the necessity of social activism for enabling and responding to religious experience." Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 9. Martin E. Marty places Thurman in the tradition of Meister Eckhart because of his emphasis on the potentiality of the self and his fusion of the idea of love with divine freedom and mystical union. For Eckhart and Thurman, according to Marty, "'the unifying of the will with the Will of the highest' issues forth in fresh action . . . 'Being precedes work.'" Marty, "Mysticism and the Religious Quest for Freedom," in God and Human Freedom, p. 7. Muelder places Thurman's ethical theory in the Troeltschian mystical typology, differing however with emphasis on the evangelical Jesus as opposed to Troeltsch's "Christ of mysticism." Muelder, "Howard Thurman's Religious Social Ethics," p. 7.

Thurman's reluctance to being labeled a "mystic," is probably attributable to his insistence that religious experience is non-exclusive and accessible to any person who prepares for the encounter. For him, any individual who surrenders her/himself to God is a candidate for a mystical encounter. He defines mysticism in another place simply as "the response of the individual to a personal encounter with God within his own soul." Thurman, The Lawrence Lectures, "Mysticism and Social Action," p. 18.

154 In the Lawrence Lectures, he says, "Long before I was acquainted with the term "mysticism, and before such a category provided any frame of reference for my mind and thought, the line between the inner and the outer in my own experience was not closely drawn" (p. 17); see earlier discussion in biographical profile regarding his early childhood and the influence of Rufus Jones.
says Thurman, is "the type of religion which puts the emphasis on the immediate awareness of the relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of . . . 'divine presence.'" He adds, "this definition includes not only a personal attitude toward God, but a recognition of the primary experience of God with the inner core of the individual."155 For Thurman and Jones, it is key to the mystic's claim that in the creative encounter, s/he experiences that which is perceived as "vital, total, and absolute" at a profoundly personal level while s/he remains a creature involved in all the perplexities of finitude and limitation.156 Also with Jones, Thurman makes the distinction between "the negation mystic" and "the affirmation mystic."157 The affirmation mystic's raison d'etre is the transformation of society because society as s/he experiences it "ensnares the human spirit in a maze of particulars so that the One cannot be sensed or the good realized."158

156 Thurman, Mysticism and the Experience of Love, p. 10.
157 See discussion of Jones's distinction of "affirmation mystic" and "negation mystic" in Chapter III.
Mysticism is not "life-denying," in the sense of detachment and withdrawal from the world, rather it is "life-affirming." That which the mystic discovers within is also inherent in all of life. The outer world, like the inner world, is pregnant with truth and meaning. The Infinite is discoverable in the finite, transitory world of nature, people, and other living things. Therefore, engagement with the world is not opposed to union with God, but the beatific vision, ultimate meaning and truth are found in all dimensions of life.

Thurman maintains that the person who experiences God in personal encounter must seek to share her/his experience of the love of God in community with others. The committed individual is dedicated to the removal of all barriers which impede the possibility of becoming whole in the world. "He is under judgment," Thurman writes, "to make a highway for the Lord in the hearts and market place of his fellows."\(^{159}\) This involves creative confrontation and transformation of the cultural pattern in which s/he finds her/himself.\(^ {160}\) While the basic ethical significance of mysticism is individualistic, the vision

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\(^{159}\) Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 124.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., p. 126.
of unity which is experienced in the divine Presence impels the individual into the world.

Thurman recognizes that the overwhelming problems of human relations cannot be solved by the radical transformation of individuals in society.\(^{161}\) His contention, however, is that two personal concerns demand the involvement of the mystic in society. One is the concern which grows out of the individual's own limitations and corruptions which are due to the fact that s/he belongs to a community of people and interests which perpetuate the barriers which prevent her/him from achieving union with God. Secondly, in her/his effort to realize the good s/he finds that s/he must be responsive to human needs by which her/his life is surrounded.\(^ {162}\) The mystic, therefore, is driven to service in society among her/his fellows, primarily because of her/his religious commitment. While economic and political arrangements are significant variables in her/his quest for the actualization of community, religious and moral grounds are the bases for her/his creative engagement with the world. Personal piety, in such an endeavor, according to Thurman, is central, but it is

\(^{161}\)Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," p. 5.

\(^{162}\)Ibid., p. 3.
not an end in itself. Piety must be expressed in positive and life-affirming service in society. ¹⁶³

In summary, for Thurman, the mystic is one who has a personal encounter with God within her/his own soul. The mystical experience demands that the individual authentically in the world what s/he has received in the divine Presence. Her/His personal piety is not grounds for detachment from her/his society which is shaped and molded by political and economic forces, rather it is the basis for creative confrontation and transformation of any social barrier which impedes her/his personal quest and the quests of her/his fellows for community.

For Thurman, the church is the social institution which is entrusted with "the Jesus idea." ¹⁶⁴ It is an inclusive religious fellowship in which the committed individual seeks communion with those who share the common

¹⁶³ Smith argues that though Thurman can be rightly identified within the pietistic tradition because of his insistence on self-awareness and inner transformation, he had "just as an intense commitment to community, and his mystical experiences were the basis for this commitment." Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 10; Martin Marty, speaking of Thurman's contribution in this respect, writes: "He . . . has shown us how the path of holiness and enlightenment is not merely parallel to but links up with the path of community and action." Marty, "Mysticism and the Religious Quest for Freedom," Christian Century 100:8 (March 16, 1983): 246.

¹⁶⁴ Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 137.
encounter with divine Presence. Moreover, it is "the organism fed by the springs of individual and collective religious experience through which the Christian works in society." For Thurman, the ministry of the church is two-fold: it should provide for an environment of worship in which experiences of spiritual unity are achieved; and it serves a pedagogical function by teaching and interpreting the religious and ethical implications of political, economic, and social arrangements in which the church finds itself.

Thurman's belief that experiences of unity and fellowship are more compelling than the fears, dogmas, and prejudices that separate people, is a basic theme of his ecclesiology. As noted, Thurman believed that if spiritual experiences of unity could be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration, they should be able to undermine any barrier that separates one person from the other. The collective worship of God is the primary locus where experiences of inner unity are achieved. In

165Ibid., p. 135.

166Thurman, Footprints, p. 21; Thurman, Disciplines, p. 120; see earlier discussion of Olive Schreiner as a source of Thurman's intellectual development and the ethical imperative of nonviolence.
worship, Thurman held, individuals are stripped to their literal substance and enabled to realize their "common ground" as children of God. Worship, therefore, is central in Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of the church. He writes:

In the act of worship, one sees himself as being in the presence of God. In His presence the worshipper is neither male nor female, black nor white, Protestant nor Catholic nor Buddhist nor Hindu, but a human spirit laid bare, stripped to whatever there is that is literal and irreducible. This kind of worship inspires a quality of life that makes barriers of separateness among men increasingly and finally untenable. Worship, therefore, is central in the church.167

Jesus is the central figure of the Christian church.168 According to Thurman, Jesus placed before humankind three great truths with which the church is entrusted.169 First, Jesus gave to humankind the vision of a great creative ideal, community. The ideal of community affirmed that the normal characterization of all human relations is in terms of inclusiveness. It maintains that the family of humankind is the family of God,

167 Thurman, Footprints, pp. 69-70.
168 See Smith's discussion on the place of Jesus in Thurman's theology in Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 70-72, 54-62.
169 See Thurman, "We Believe," December 12, 1958; and Thurman, Creative Encounter, pp. 135-36.
and therefore, all persons are inextricably bound to one another. Jesus proclaimed community to be the Will of God, the intent of life at its most profound level—the kingdom of God which is coming to itself in the world.

Secondly, Jesus taught that the method by which community is achieved is love. For Jesus, according to Thurman, love transcended and gave meaning to all organic relationships and is the only means available to overcome divisions between human beings. The love of the enemy is the ultimate test of love. The ethic of love is the modus operandi for the ideal of community.

Thirdly, Jesus gave the resource by which men and women can achieve community and are empowered to love. Jesus called the resource, God. The life of Jesus, according to Thurman, is an example of unrelenting loyalty and dependence upon God. He demonstrated in his living that the love of God is present as "an immediate available resource upon which man may draw in order to implement the ideal which is set before man." 170

These three great truths form the essential construct of "the Jesus idea." The church, as a social institution, is the custodian of this idea and has the moral

170 Thurman, "We Believe," December 12, 1958, pp. 54-55.
responsibility to practice the message embodied in its revelation within its own fellowship and in society. A major difficulty for the church, however, is its parochial character as a religious institution. The truth that the church is called to practice is universal, but its institutional arrangements are ultimately separatist and divisive. Thurman argues poignantly that a parochial religious institution cannot sustain the demand of a universal ethic. He maintains that this indictment against the institutionalized church has implications for understanding its impotency in relation to the problems which plague society in general, and which prevent the actualization of community within the church itself.

The inclusive nature of the church demands that the "Jesus idea" be practiced within its own fellowship. The greatest obstacle to Christianity, according to Thurman, is its tragic identification with the cultural norms and practices which work against harmonious relations among people in society. Racism and classism within the church are flagrant contradictions to the ideal of community which Jesus lived and taught. Unless the barriers are addressed

and eradicated within the institutional church, its social witness will continue to be severely limited. The church stands under the same judgment of God as other social institutions that are against the will and intent of life. Any institution that is against the goal and purpose of life is "evil and a diabolical perversion" and carries within itself its own seeds of destruction. The eradication of racism and classism within the Christian fellowship is primary to its social witness.

The church must also transcend denominationalism. Thurman contends that the "adjectival" character of Christian institutions ("Baptist" church, "Methodist" church, etc.) tends to work against the performance of the ethical mandate of inclusiveness. Denominationalism is inconsistent

173 Thurman, "Freedom Under God," p. 3; see also Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. 102.
174 In his discussion of "denominationalism," Thurman shows striking similarities to H. R. Niebuhr's analysis in Niebuhr's The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: The New American Library, 1929, 1957, 1975). See especially Chapter I, "The Ethical Failure of the Divided Church." Niebuhr says, "Denominationalism ... represents the moral failure of Christianity. And unless the ethics of brotherhood can gain the victory over this divisiveness within the body of Christ it is useless to expect it to be victorious in the world." P. 25.
with the genius of "the Jesus idea." He says "the separate vision of a denomination tends to give the one who embraces it an ultimate particularized status, even before God."¹⁷⁵ This assertion against denominationalism, however, does not mean that Thurman sees no merit in different views and approaches to God. In fact, the ecumenical nature of the church is celebrated by Thurman.¹⁷⁶ His concern rather is with hardened and calcified creeds and dogma which prevent mutual dialogue and exchange.¹⁷⁷ When a denominational perspective is viewed as ultimate, it contradicts the dynamic and creative nature of truth which is inherent in life.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, when dogmatists and denominationalists argue for the sole truth of one perspective against another, they behave "like dogs that fight

¹⁷⁵ Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 140.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 72. This appreciation of ecumenicism is also seen in his respective ministries at Mt. Zion Church, Rankin Chapel, Fellowship Church, and Marsh Chapel.

¹⁷⁷ Religious experience is the final authority for Thurman's theological construction. The Bible and Jesus are secondary to experience. See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 71-77; and Mozella Mitchell, pp. 29-30, 222-227.

¹⁷⁸ He writes, ". . . it must not be thought that life is static, something that is set, fixed, determined. The key word to remember always is potential; that which has not yet come to pass. It is only the potential, the undisclosed that has a future." Thurman, Search, p. 4.
over bones in the backyard." Creeds and dogma are but frames of reference through which God is perceived; they can never claim ultimate truth.

Finally, the "Jesus idea" with which the church is entrusted is universal, and therefore demands an inclusiveness that is open to intimate fellowship with others of different religious faiths. Religious loyalties are primarily accidents of birth and culture. For Thurman, God, not Jesus, is the primary principal involved in the religious experience of the individual. Thurman argues that if Jesus is considered the primary principal in the religious experience, then the ground is set for the exclusiveness and superiority of the Christian faith. But if in a religious fellowship the worship of God is central, different orientations and cultural loyalties are transcended. In such an inclusive fellowship, religious claims and perspectives need not serve as bases for division,

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179 This was a comment made by Thurman in a classroom setting at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta Georgia, November 1978 which this writer attended.

180 Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 141.

181 Thurman says "that what is true in any religion is to be found there because it is true, it is not true because it is found in that religion. The ethical insight which makes for the most healthy and creative human relations is not the unique possession of any religion, however inspired it may be." Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. 112.
but can be complementary in ascertaining greater truth. A common, universal faith which embraces truth in any religious expression can become the leaven which redeems and transforms society.\textsuperscript{182}

The church also has a social pedagogical function. The Christian minister is responsible for teaching and interpreting the significance of various political, economic, and social arrangements as they impinge upon the spirituality of individuals.\textsuperscript{183} Thurman does not counsel the church as an institution to confront unjust social structures. His primary emphasis remains the spiritual cultivation of individuals who are enabled through the worship/teaching ministry of the church to confront the powers that oppose the realization of community. This does not mean that the individual \textit{per se} is left alone to challenge injustice in society; he or she may represent other organizations or institutions within society that

\textsuperscript{182} Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 77; Thurman, Creative Encounter, p. 135.

struggle for social change. Thurman, however, perceived his role as minister and the role of the church as a spiritual facilitator and enabler. He writes:

It was my conviction and determination that the church would be a resource for activists—a mission fundamentally perceived. To me it was important that individuals who were in the thick of the struggle for social change would be able to find renewal and fresh courage in the spiritual resources of the church. There must be provided a place, a moment, when a person could declare, "I choose!"

In summary, the church, as the social institution which is entrusted with "the Jesus idea," is called to actualize the vision of community within its own fellowship and in the world. Any division within the church (racism, classism, sexism, denominationalism, religious exclusivism, etc.) that militates against inclusiveness is also against

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184 Thurman was counselor to civil rights leaders, politicians, artists, civic leaders, and other individuals who were committed to organizations and institutions concerned about the welfare of society. Among the many Black social activists who were beneficiaries of his ministry were Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Vernon Jordan, and Whitney Young. See Debate and Understanding, ed., Ricardo Millett, Spring Edition, 1982, pp. 71-88; Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 254-55; and The Listening Ear: A Newsletter of the Howard Thurman Educational Trust 16:2 (Summer 1985). His ministry at the Fellowship Church included such notable personalities as Alan Paton, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Josephine Baker. See Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 144-45; Thurman, Footprints, pp. 32-33; see also Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 129-35.

185 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 160.
the will and intent of life, and comes under the judgment of God. The ministry of the church is two-fold: it should provide for an environment for worship in which experiences of spiritual unity are achieved; and it serves a pedagogical function by teaching and interpreting the religious and ethical implications of political, economic, and social arrangements in which the church finds itself. The church as an institution is not counseled to confront unjust systems and practices. The emphasis in Thurman is on the church as a spiritual facilitator and enabler of the individual who works for community in the world.

Community as an Empirical Reality

Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of the church is a product of both theory and practice. His pastoral experience which embraced a time span of over thirty-six years gave him empirical bases for his theoretical claims. His parishes and university chaplaincies served as laboratories where he had unique opportunities to experiment with his ideas in concrete situations and to test his major hypothesis: that the worship of God is the central and most significant act of the human spirit, and that in the presence of God, all classifications

\[186\textit{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 119-20.}\]
by which human beings define themselves, though meaningful, are ultimately artificial.\textsuperscript{187}

The Fellowship Church is perhaps the best model of his experiments in community building. He served the church for over nine years, 1944-53. It was there that Thurman experimented with the power of religious experience to remove racial, cultural, and religious barriers which impede the actualization of human community. The church began with less than fifty members of various denominational, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, primarily Caucasian, Black, and Asian America. Before he resigned in 1953, the congregation had grown to over 200 resident members and over 1,000 members-at-large.\textsuperscript{188}

Thurman incorporated the arts, special music, sacred dance, and meditation into the worship services as he had done in earlier settings. At the Fellowship Church, however, meditation and prayer became more prominent in the worship experience.\textsuperscript{189} The church's religious education

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid., pp. 144; Thurman, Footprints, p. 21.
\item \textsuperscript{188} "Resident members" refers to members who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area and "members-at-large" are those who lived outside this area.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Thurman, Footprints, pp. 76-78; Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 159.
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program stressed intercultural and interreligious understanding, with particular interest on the development of common grounds of unity. The church's role in society was not the primary focus of the fellowship. The social mission of the Fellowship Church was one of an exemplar of community and a resource for those engaged in the creation of a loving and just society. Thurman says that

   . . . the true genius of the church was revealed by what it symbolized as a beachhead in society in terms of community, and as an inspiration to the solitary individual to put his weight on the side of a society in which no man need be afraid.\textsuperscript{190}

One incident which illustrates the social witness of the church grew out of Thurman's indignation at a window display in a prominent downtown department store in San Francisco. It was a display of a black woman and children which expressed the stereotype of "Black Mammy and Pickaninnies." Thurman, without describing the scene or sharing his feelings, asked members to view the display. He says that by noon on the following Monday, the entire display had been removed.\textsuperscript{191}

Smith suggests that Thurman's ecclesiology can be interpreted as providing a "lemonade stand" where

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
individual parishioners are refreshed and empowered to do battle with unjust forces in society, while the church as an institution wields no power in the social arena. Smith says though this argument is not without merit, it fails to address the real issue which concerned Thurman. It was not Thurman's intention, Smith argues, to build a model for social action involvement, rather he was concerned with the creation of a model for inclusive religious fellowship. The church, like Thurman, "made a specific witness which fit its character and mission for its time and place." 192

While it cannot be denied that the time and context of Thurman's ministry in the San Francisco area, as throughout the country, must be considered in any accounting of his ministry there, it is instructive to challenge his position on the social witness of the church. 193 Smith's response to the criticism fails to deal with the central issue involved in the question of the church's role as an institution in the affairs of society. The fundamental issue which the criticism raises is not the distinction

192 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 133.
193 Thurman describes the climate of race relations in San Francisco during 1944 in Footprints, pp. 11-14.
between religious inclusiveness or social involvement of the church as an institution. These ideas are not mutually exclusive, rather the latter follows from the former as a logical corollary. The quest for religious inclusiveness in Thurman necessarily leads one into engagement with society and demands that the church as a social institution which is entrusted with "the Jesus idea" make a formal stand against what it perceives as being antithetical to its witness in the world. Therefore, the question that must be raised with Thurman's understanding of the church's social witness is whether the church can afford not to become engaged as an institution in the affairs of society. Or is the "lemonade stand" approach sufficient for the type of witness which he suggests must be effected in society to combat the evils which operate against human community?

Summary

This chapter has been concerned with the actualization of community in the thought of Howard Thurman. Thurman's treatment of the barriers to community and his recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community were examined. The analysis of the barriers to community focused on evil as a barrier to community, the personal and social dimensions of sin, and the individual's response
to the barriers of community. The analysis of Thurman's recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community included Thurman's understanding of community as the norm and goal of the moral life, the means of actualization of community; community, religion and social action, and community as an empirical reality.
PART II

THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT
OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The ideal of community was the defining motif of the life and thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. Human community ordered by love (agape) is the central category of King's thinking and provides a basis for understanding his view of persons, God, and the world. For King, the ideal of community, which he called "the beloved community," was also the Christian social ideal which served as the ground and the norm for ethical judgment. In the following chapter, the nature of community in the thought of Martin Luther King is examined in reference to his conception of community and his interpretation of the triadic character of community.

The Conception of Community

The conception of community in King refers primarily to the Christian social eschatological ideal. This ideal is rooted in the interrelatedness of all life and in the unity of human existence under the guidance of a personal God of love and reason who works for universal
wholeness. King referred to his conception of community as "the beloved community." The beloved community was the single, organizing principle of his life and thought. King's conception of the beloved community draws upon several significant theological and philosophical sources, and the black American religious experience. Most notable among the intellectual sources are the personal idealism of Edgar S. Brightman and Harold DeWolf, and protestant liberalism as represented by Walter Rauschenbusch.

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3 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 119

4 Ansbro contends that "While several thinkers contributed to King's conception of the beloved community, Personalism emerged as the dominant influence in his thoughts about this community which was the goal of all his endeavors." Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 187. Smith and Zepp, on the other hand, maintain that both liberalism and personalism provided the theological and philosophical foundations of the concept. P. 119.
The term, the "beloved community," has its origins in the philosophical writings of Josiah Royce and R. H. Lotze, both of whom were influential in the development of the philosophy of "personal idealism" or "personalism," King's basic philosophical position. For King, God is disclosed as Person in history. Human relations have their grounding and validity in the Person of God, manifested in love for the neighbor. King's positive view of the potentialities of human persons, and consequently, human history, is a fundamental theme in personal idealism. E. S. Brightman, perhaps its most articulate spokesman, observed:

The world of shared values can reach such levels of cooperation that man is liberated from his selfishness

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5 Royce writes "All morality, namely, is, from this point of view, to be judged by the Beloved Community, of the ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven. Concretely stated, this means that you are to test every course of action not by the question: What can we find in the parables of the Sermon on the Mount which seems to us more or less directly to bear upon this special matter? The central doctrine of the Master was: 'So act that the Kingdom of Heaven may come.' This means: So act as to help, however you can, and wherever 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 love of individuals in so far as they can be raised to communion with this spiritual community itself." Josiah Royce, The Religious Philosophy of Josiah Royce (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1952), p. 6; quoted in Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," p. 172.

6 King, Stride, p. 82; Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," p. 172.
and is empowered to give himself to his neighbor. On the level of cooperation the Kingdom of God is realized--where "all races and creeds meet, learn, and respect each other in religious liberty." 7

For King, the beloved community was synonymous with the Kingdom of God, and his understanding of the latter was deeply influenced by Walter Rauschenbusch. John Cartwright has shown that Rauschenbusch is indebted to Josiah Royce who introduced the term "beloved community" as a solidaristic view of human society. 8 The Kingdom of God, for Rauschenbusch, was the central theological theme around which all other doctrines found their meaning. 9 In A Theology for the Social Gospel, he writes:

> If theology is to offer an adequate doctrinal basis for the social gospel, it must not only make room for the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, but give it a central place and revise all other doctrines so that they will articulate organically with it. 10

The Kingdom of God for King, like Rauschenbusch, referred to a transformed and regenerated human society:

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8 Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," p. 172; see later discussion of Rauschenbusch's influence upon King in the next chapter.

9 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, pp. 43-45.

The Kingdom of God will be a society in which men and women live as children of God should live. It will be a kingdom controlled by the law of love. . . . Many have attempted to say that the ideal of a better world will be worked out in the next world. But Jesus taught men to say, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Although the world seems to be in bad shape today, we must never lose faith in the power of God to achieve his purpose.  

Concretely expressed, for King, the beloved community is "the mutually cooperative and voluntary venture" of persons in which they realize the solidarity of the human family by assuming responsibility for one another as children of God.  

This is the basis for King's ethical argument for integration.  

King contends that civilization, the development of human community, began when the Cro-magnon man put aside his stone ax and decided mutually to cooperate with his neighbor. He believed that this . . .

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13 According to King, in order to achieve integration within American society and the world, there must be a conscious, deliberate decision to cooperate with others. Integration, is not an enforceable demand, while desegregation is. Ibid., pp. 121-23.
critical moment in the development of human community marked the most creative turn of events in human existence. King maintained that:

The universe is so structured that things do not quite work out rightly if men are not diligent in their concern for others. The self cannot be self without other selves. I cannot reach fulfillment without thou... All life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.14

King's early development and active participation in the black church experience was also a major force in his conception and articulation of the beloved community.15 Lawrence Jones, in an article entitled "Black Christians in Antebellum America: In Quest of the Beloved Community," writes, "ever since blacks have been in America, they have been in search of 'the beloved community'”, a community which is grounded in an unshakeable confidence in a theology

14 Ibid., p. 122.

15 Lewis Baldwin, in an unpublished manuscript, suggests that "King's firm belief in the 'Beloved Community' idea, and his optimism regarding its realization, were deeply rooted in the black church tradition." "Understanding Martin Luther King, Jr. Within the Context of Southern Black Religious History," p. 19; see also p. 18. See also Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 12:1-2 (Fall 1984/Spring 1985): 1.

of history. Jones argues that black churches sought to actualize on earth the vision of the "beloved community" which was embodied in the Declaration of Independence and explicit in the Bible. They longed to see the kingdom made concrete in history. The intellectual influences of protestant liberalism and personalism which contributed to King's conception of the beloved community found their practical application in the black religious experience of which King was a most noble heir.

Finally, the influence of Thurman on King's conception of community is suggested by Lewis V. Baldwin, Larry Murphy, Vincent Harding, and Ansbro. Murphy in an interview with Harding, a co-laborer with King in the civil rights movement, reports that Harding claims that Thurman's writings, particularly, Jesus and the Disinherited, had a substantial impact on the kinds of ideas that had been germinating in King's mind. Baldwin suggests that the

17 Ibid., pp. 12, 19.
19 Larry Murphy, "Howard Thurman and Social Activism," in God and Human Freedom, pp. 154-55.
20 Ibid., pp. 27-29.
21 The original source of this claim was the historian Lerone Bennett. See Lerone Bennett, What Manner of Man,
themes of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation in Thurman are powerful expressions of what King came to believe after reading the writings of Thurman. This influence is apparent, according to Baldwin, from sermons King preached in black churches. Ansbro also refers to Thurman's treatment of forgiveness as having a significant influence on King.

While this writer does not dismiss the influence of Thurman on King's conception of community, it is difficult to make a case for Thurman as a primary influence on King since, 1) neither thinker acknowledges any direct exchange of philosophies; and 2) King was a highly eclectic thinker who appropriated ideas from a variety of sources, including Thurman. King does not mention the influence of Thurman upon his thinking at any place in his writings, sermons, speeches, etc., although, there are places, particularly in extemporaneous preaching, where he clearly appropriates ideas and even entire statements from Thurman's

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See also Thurman's remarks in respect to this influence in Thurman, *Head and Heart*, p. 255.

22 Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, the Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," pp. 103-04.

23 Ansbro, *Making of a Mind*, p. 29.
While for some this could suggest the influence of Thurman upon King, it is the view of this writer, that a better case could be made for his creative synthesis of the parallel themes in the respective traditions of protestant liberal theology, personal idealism and the black church experience in America. Thurman and King were influenced by these traditions, and though the complementarity between the two thinkers could possibly suggest definite influence of the former on the latter, this is not necessarily the most fruitful interpretation for our purposes. It seems that a more productive method of interpretation would be to explore the continuities between these traditions and their contributions to the conception, character, and actualization of community and their impact upon both Thurman and King.

As stated, the black experience of community is fundamental in understanding the conception of community

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24 See King, "The Meaning of Hope," Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, October 10, 1967, pp. 16-17, King Archives, Atlanta, GA and King, "Is the Universe Friendly?" Ebenezer Baptist Church, December 12, 1965, pp. 5-6, King Archives, Atlanta, GA and compare with Thurman, Head and Heart, pp. 20-21; see King, "Antidotes for Fear," in Strength to Love, p. 115 and compare with Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, p. 36. Only at one place in his writings does he make a bibliographic reference of Thurman. See King, "Knock at Midnight," in Strength to Love, pp. 65-66.
in both Thurman and King. However, it is equally important to see how this common experience of the struggle to achieve universal community out of the particularity of the black religious experience found creative affinity in the intellectual traditions of liberal protestant theology and personal idealism. Thurman's mentors, Cross, Moelhman, Robins, and Jones were located squarely within the American protestant liberal tradition. Cross, in particular, was influenced by the evangelical liberal tradition which had roots in personal idealism. Smith also indicates that Rufus Jones, like Cross and Robins, can be located within the theological stream of evangelical liberalism, and as Cross and Robins were concerned respectively with the essence of Christian faith and religion, Jones's concern is with the essence of Christian mysticism. Smith places


26 For Jones's indebtedness to evangelical liberalism see, Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 27-30; Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, p. 36. There are important differences, however, in Thurman and his evangelical liberal mentors in respect to their views on the source of authority (the Bible and Jesus) and the ultimate vision of community. See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 73-77.
Thurman within the modernistic liberal tradition under the heading of "metaphysical or rationalistic modernism" which is the same designation which Kenneth Cauthen gives to E. S. Brightman. 27

King acknowledged his indebtedness to the protestant liberal theology of Rauschenbusch and personal idealism of Boston University. King's vision of the beloved community, however, was also bred and nurtured in the black church tradition which has historically seen its particular struggle for the liberation of black people through the prism of universal liberation of all peoples. The universal themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope which characterized King's vision of the beloved community have always been fundamental to the black community in general, and the black church in particular. 28 Timothy Smith writes, "The touchstones of the personal religious experience of Black Christians in nineteenth-century America . . . seem to me to have been first, forgiveness, awe and

27 Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, pp. 36-37; Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 75.

ecstasy, then self-respect, ethical awareness and hope."^29

This is not to suggest that his studies in personalism with Brightman, DeWolf, Bertocci, and Muelder were not of equal significance in influencing his understanding of community, but his initial problematic was rooted in the black experience of oppression and segregation in the deep South and the historical struggle of the black Americans to create and fashion a human community despite the overwhelming opposition of the dominant culture. In fact, evangelical liberalism and personalism bear striking continuities which easily accommodated the developing thought of King in his "serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil."^30 Smith and Zepp state that evangelical liberalism as it was represented by George Davis, was the most impactful of the two in terms of King. They insist that "Most of the major themes of Martin Luther King were the themes of evangelical liberalism."^31 It should be noted, however, that in King's rendering of his intellectual odyssey, he does not refer directly to

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^30 King, Stride, p. 73.

^31 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 29.
evangelical liberalism as a primary molder of his thought (though he does mention the influence of Rauschenbusch during his studies at Crozer). 32 Personalism, however, receives a notable treatment and is expressed as his basic philosophical position. 33 It is also significant that Smith and Zepp make the statement that "the personalism of Brightman was by far the single most important philosophical influence upon Davis's theology." 34 It can be argued that while evangelical liberalism provided the theological content and personalism, the coherent methodology and philosophical formulation for King, the black church tradition of protest for equality and justice provided the source and the social context in which he worked out his conception of community and the method for its actualization. 35

Summary

In summary, King's conception of the beloved community is the Christian eschatological ideal which is the

32 King, Stride, p. 73.
33 Ibid., p. 82.
34 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 99.
35 See discussion of the impact of the black community and black church upon King's development in the next chapter.
goal of human existence and the norm for ethical judgment. Concretely expressed, it is "the mutually cooperative and voluntary venture" of persons in which they realize the solidarity of the human family by assuming responsibility for one another as children of God. For King, the beloved community is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. King draws upon several significant sources for his understanding of community. Most notable among these are personal idealism, evangelical liberal theology, and the black church experience.

The Triadic Character of Community

In King's understanding of the nature of community, there is a triadic relationship between persons, God, and the world. For King, these three elements are integrally related and form the basic analytical construct for the dynamic character of community. For the purpose of later comparison, this discussion shall follow basically the same pattern utilized in the analysis of Thurman's understanding of the character of community: 1) the nature of persons: the sacredness of human personality, human freedom and responsibility, the moral law, the rational nature of persons, the dialectical nature of persons, and the communitarian nature of persons; 2) the nature of God: the personal God of reason and love, and God as creator
and sustainer of community; 3) the world: the moral order of the universe, the theological theme of creation, human history, nature, human society, and the state; and 4) the totality: God and persons, God and the world, persons and the world.

The Nature of Persons

For King, the sacredness of human personality is the central theme of his anthropology. According to King, all persons are created in the image of God and, therefore, have inherent worth and dignity. Philosophically, this view is rooted in his personalistic interpretation of human persons. Personalism claims that personality is the clue to reality. Brightman wrote, "personalism is the belief that conscious personality is both the supreme value and the supreme reality in the universe." 36

For personalists, personality is not only the key to reality but it has ontological status, i.e., the process that creates persons is also personal. God is the Supreme Person and the Supreme Valuer in the universe. The sacredness

36Brightman, Nature and Values, p. 113; quoted in Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 100.
of human personality, therefore, has its ground and being in the Person of God. 37

King's understanding of the sacredness of human personality also had deep theological roots in the Biblical theme of creation. 38 King's emphasis on the creation motif had strong implications for his treatment of sin, reconciliation, and his understanding of the potential goodness of all human beings. The basis for King's admonition to love one's enemy is rooted in his belief in the sacredness of personality and the potential goodness of persons. 39

According to King, the sacredness of human personality demands that "All men must be treated as ends and never as means." 40 The evils of segregation, economic injustice, and war fail to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of persons which is their birthright as children of God. 41

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38 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 130.


40 Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 97.

41 Ibid., pp. 97-101.
King also credits the black religious experience with uplifting the sacredness of human personality. This belief, he maintained, was the basis for self-respect and the bedrock of the spirit of protest in the black struggle for civil rights. In reflection on the "New Negro" involved in the Montgomery campaign, King wrote:

Once plagued with a tragic sense of inferiority resulting from the crippling effects of slavery and segregation, the Negro has now been driven to re-evaluate himself. He has come to feel that he is somebody. His religion reveals to him that God loves all His children and that the important thing about a man is not "his specificity but his fundamentum"—not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin but his eternal worth to God.42

King also maintained that because persons are created in the image of God, they are free. He understood freedom to be the very essence of human personality. Freedom, however, is always within destiny, i.e., it is not limitless nor is it the mere function of the will. Rather freedom, properly understood, includes the whole person.

The very phrase, 'freedom of the will,' abstracts freedom from the person to make it an object; and an object by definition is not free. But freedom cannot thus be abstracted from the person, who is always subject as well as object and who himself still does the abstracting. So I am speaking of the freedom

42King, Stride, p. 167.
of man, the whole man, and not the freedom of a function called the will. 43

King defines freedom in three ways: 1) freedom is the capacity to deliberate or weigh alternatives; 2) freedom expresses itself in decision; and 3) freedom is always wedded to responsibility. 44 "The immorality of segregation," King argues, "is that it is a selfishly contrived system which cuts off one's capacity to deliberate, decide and respond." 45 The denial of freedom relegates the person to a level of a thing by treating her/him as a means and not an end.

King's understanding of freedom is essential for understanding the nature and role of the moral agent. Moral choice cannot be postulated without the capacity of deliberation, decision, and responsibility. Closely related to his conception of human persons as being free is the rational nature of persons and King's belief in the moral law. The moral law is a key doctrine in his anthropology. For King, the moral law is rooted in the nature of God and can be objectively known. 46

43 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 98.
44 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
philosophical treatment of the moral law, King is indebted to personalism. However, as Ansbro correctly notes, King did not need personalism to provide him with the passion to oppose segregation, but it did help him to formulate principles for his attack on this and other injustices.

King's belief in the moral law enabled him to maintain an optimism in the ultimate victory of good over evil as persons ultimately chose to become co-workers with God in fulfilling his purposes in human history. King believed that God "has placed within the very structure of the universe certain absolute moral laws. We can neither defy them nor break them. If we disobey them, they will break us." This belief in the moral law was


49 King, "Our God Is Able," Strength to Love, p. 110. King writes, "There is a law in the moral world--a
King's basis for his attack upon unjust structures and laws that desacralized human personality. Segregation and other forms of oppression should be abolished not only because they are against the principles of democracy, but because they are ultimately against the moral law of the cosmos. An unjust law, according to King, is a human code that is out of harmony with the moral law. Therefore, it is the person's moral responsibility to break unjust laws. Just laws, on the other hand, are laws which uplift human personality and should be obeyed because they are in harmony with the moral law. 50

Another theme for King in his understanding of persons is his view of the dialectical nature of the self. The dialectical nature of persons is rooted in their spiritual and physical existences. While we share our physical existence with other forms of nature, persons are also rational beings. For King, this is our crucial link with

silent, invisible imperative, akin to the laws of the physical world--which reminds us that life will only work in a certain way. The Hitlers and the Mussolinis have their day, and for a period they may wield great power, spreading themselves like a green bay tree, but soon they are cut down like grass and wither as the green herb." Ibid., p. 109.

God. Human beings are not only biological creatures, they are also spiritual beings with the capacity for reason and self-transcendence. Rationality, says King, distinguishes persons from the lower animals for

... somehow man is in nature, and yet he is above nature; he is in time, and yet he is above time; he is in space, and yet he is above space. This means that man can do things lower animals could never do. He can think a poem and write it; he can think a symphony and compose it; he can think up a great civilization and create it.51

The person is both a child of nature and a child of spirit, s/he lives in two realms, the internal and external.

The internal is that realm of spiritual ends expressed in art, literature, morals, and religion. The external is that complex of devices, techniques, mechanisms, and instrumentalities by means of which we live.52

The existential problem of persons, according to King, is the struggle to live a balanced existence in which the means by which we live do not out distance the ends for which we live. For King, this is the ongoing struggle for each person and whenever one allows the "means" to predominate the "ends," the occasion for sin is present.53


52 King, Where Do we Go from Here?, pp. 171-72.

53 Ibid.; King, "Unfulfilled Dreams," Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA, March 3, 1968, King Archives,
This creates a "persistent civil war" within, "a tragic schizophrenic personality divided against ourselves." 54

The resolution of this inner conflict is affected by the grace of God. The inherent potential for goodness within persons and the intervening grace of God were the basis for King's optimism in respect to the actualization of human community. 55

Finally, King's view of the nature of persons is decidedly communitarian. King maintained that by definition a person is a social being whose ground of existence is rooted in the sociability of the cosmos which is ultimately personal. 56 King said, "God has a great plan for this world. His purpose is to achieve a world where all men live together as brothers, and where everyman recognizes

Atlanta, GA; pp. 3-5; King, "Thou Fool," Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Chicago, August 27, 1967, pp. 4-5, King Archives, Atlanta, GA; and King, "What Is Man?" p. 11.

54 King, "Loving Your Enemies," in Strength to Love, p. 49.

55 See King, "An Answer to a Perplexing Question," King Archives, Atlanta, GA, p. 11.

56 God is a Person who both creates and enjoys other persons. Although God's existence is not predicated on the existence of other persons, the nature of God is love, and love requires companionship. According to Brightman, God is not a solitary, self-enjoying mind, but the "Great Companion," Brightman, Nature and Values, p. 117; quoted in Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 113.
the dignity and worth of all personality." To be a self (person) means to live in a spiritual society of mutual cooperation and responsibility with other selves.

An inclusive human community, in which persons are able to develop and realize their potential, is the goal of life. As political and economic systems reflect the social nature of persons and their interdependency, they contribute to the development of human personality. As they work against the enhancement of spiritual values of cooperation and responsibility, they impede the development of human personality, and hence the actualization

57 Quoted in Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 66.

58 Although, King used the terms "person" and "self" interchangeably, his philosophical grounding in personalism certainly would have led him to agree with Brightman's distinction between persons and selves. Brightman wrote, "A person is a self that is potentially self-conscious, rational, and ideal. That is to say, when a self is able at times to reflect on itself as a self, to reason, and to acknowledge ideal goals by which it can judge actual achievements, then we call it a person." Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, p. 350. In another place, Brightman writes: "A self is given; a personality is achieved." Ibid., p. 363.


60 See King's critique of communism as a political-economic system which depersonalizes human being in King, "How Should a Christian View Communism," in Strength to Love, pp. 98-99; also, King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 188-90.
of human community.\textsuperscript{61} In his sermon, "On Being a Good Neighbor," he raises the questions of interdependency and interrelatedness of persons to a spiritual level. "Neighborliness," according to King, transcends racial, national, and religious boundaries in loyalty to a spiritual goal of inclusiveness.\textsuperscript{62}

In summary, the nature of persons in the thinking of King includes the sacredness of human personality, human freedom and responsibility, the moral law, the dialectical nature of persons, and the communitarian nature of persons. This understanding of persons is important for the following discussion of his view of God and the world.

\textbf{God}

For King, the second principal in the triadic relationship which is involved in the actualization of community is God. This part of the discussion is concerned with the following foci: the personal God of reason and love; and God as the creator and sustainer of community.  

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p. 180.  

For King, God is disclosed as Person in history. Human relations have their grounding and being in the Person of God who manifested in love (agape) and reason (logos). His doctrines of the sacredness of human personality, the moral law, and the ultimate goodness of the universe are based on his belief that God is both loving and rational. Love is not simply an attribute of God, but is fundamental to God’s nature, and the only way to know and experience God is through love for one another. King’s understanding of God as rational refers to God as a Purposer. For King, God’s rational nature is manifested in the orderliness and purposefulness of the cosmos.

As noted, this understanding of God is a direct inheritance from personalism. Both Brightman and DeWolf maintained the nature of God is rooted in his love and reason. This personalistic understanding of the nature

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64 King, "Loving Your Enemies," in Strength to Love, p. 53.


of God was the basis upon which King rejected the "impersonal" conceptions of God in Henry Nelson Wieman and Paul Tillich in his doctoral dissertation at Boston University. In what is perhaps his most definitive statement regarding his conception of God, King writes:

I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say that this God is personal is not to make him a finite object besides other objects or attribute to him the limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him. It is certainly true that human personality is limited, but personality as such involves no necessary limitations. It means simply self-consciousness and self-direction. So in the truest sense of the word, God is a living God. In him there is feeling and will responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart: this God both evokes and answers prayer.

The personal God of love and reason is the creator of existence; all life has its origin and purpose in the creative activity of God. For King, God is not like the Aristotelian "unmoved mover," but a creative force who is intimately engaged in history and in the lives of persons working to bring about universal wholeness.

67 See Ansbro on King's critique of Wieman and Tillich, Making of a Mind, pp. 60-63.
ultimate goal of God's creativity in persons and the world is the realization of community ordered by love.  

God is also the sustainer of community. God sustains community through God's loving purposes in cooperation with persons. The concepts of the power of God and the justice of God are important for understanding God's relationship to persons and the world. King was an absolutist in respect to his understanding of the power of God. He rejected Brightman's conception of a finite God and maintained, along with DeWolf, the traditional theological doctrine of omnipotence.  

The power of God, for King, refers to God's ability to achieve purpose. King understood the power of God in reference to God's ability to sustain the vastness of the physical universe. He wrote:

When we behold the illimitable expanse of space, in which we are compelled to measure stellar distance in light years and in which heavenly bodies travel at incredible speeds, we are forced to look beyond man and affirm anew that God is able.

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70 King, Stride, p. 87.

71 See discussion on the influence of Brightman and DeWolf in the next chapter.

72 "Religion's Answer to the Problem of Evil," King Collection, Boston University, pp, 12-13.

God's power is also manifested in the divine ability to overcome the forces of evil within human history and individuals. History is replete, King argued, with the wreckages of civilizations that wielded great power, but were ultimately defeated by the forces of good that work for universal wholeness. The invisible, silent moral law of the cosmos ultimately triumphs over evil because it is rooted in the being and purposes of God. Human beings are not able to subdue evil by their own ingenuity and powers, but as they willingly cooperate with the divine purposes for creation, they are granted the inner resources to overcome any obstacle that impedes community.

Finally, for King, God is a God of justice. Although King perceived the primary nature of God to be in God's goodness expressed in agape, he made a critical distinction between the love of God and the justice of God. In a sermon, entitled "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," he holds the two concepts in dialectical tension. God's relationship to persons is presented as a creative synthesis between the wrath and justice of God and God's love and

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74 Ibid., p. 109.

75 Ibid., pp. 111-12; see also King, "Answer to a Perplexing Question," King Archives, Atlanta, GA, pp. 4-6.
grace. King claims that "God has two outstretched arms. One is strong enough to surround us with justice, and one is gentle enough to embrace us with grace."\(^7^6\) The justice of God is manifested in the moral law of the cosmos which is an imperative for persons to struggle against all forms of injustice which work against the actualization of human community. The power of God furnishes those who struggle for justice with the inner resources to bring about creative change that leads to loving human relations.\(^7^7\)

As stated, King's philosophical and theological ideas about the nature of God were confirmed in the context of religious experience.\(^7^8\) In the heart of the Civil Rights struggle, King found the personal God of love and reason to be a dear companion and guide and the source of power to work for the realization of the beloved

\(^{76}\)In King, *Strength to Love*, p. 15.


community against insurmountable odds. The interrelated concepts of the love, power, and justice of God, therefore were not simply abstract notions from his intellectual explorations about God, but they were tested by the experience of faith and struggle.

In summary, King understood God as Person disclosed in history, who works through human agency to achieve his loving purpose for creation. The personal God of love and reason is also creator and sustainer of community. The power and the justice of God are two central concepts in King's formulation of the nature of God and God's relationship to persons and the world.

The World

The third element in which the triadic relationship is involved in the creation of community for King is the world. For King, the world refers to the vast totality of the cosmos, nature, human history, human society, and the state.

King's view of the world is sacramental, i.e., the world is the creation of God and a manifestation of divine handiwork. For King, all reality is sacred and therefore bears the indelible signature of God and divine attributes. In this view, God's relationship to creation is not to be confused with pantheism where "God is all,"
but God is understood to be ontologically distinct, yet intimately related to all of life, perhaps similar to the way an artist is related to his/her creation, but more. For King, since God is irreducibly personal, God is not a cosmic force diffused throughout creation, but God's Presence in nature and human history is characterized by loving, reasoned, and totally self-determined activity. God continually sustains and creates the world; the world has its being in God who is the ultimate ground of all being. King believed that the universe was a manifestation of the creative activity of the Mind of God coming to itself in time. In his sermons, King often referred to the magnificent orderliness of the universe as evidence for the existence of God. While he


80 King, Strength to Love, p. 97.

81 This, too, is an inheritance from personal theism. DeWolf wrote, "The relation between the great system of ideas which we know as causal law and the events of the physical universe becomes intelligible only when we conceive of the ideas as occurring, long before men discovered them in a cosmic Mind in which idea and will are perpetually and intimately conjoined." Quoted in Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 40; see Harold DeWolf, A Theology for the Living Church (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), pp. 49-50.

acknowledged the marvelous human achievements through science and technology, he contrasted the limited ability of human efforts against the matchless power of God to create and sustain the universe.\textsuperscript{83} The world, because it is the creation of God, is fundamentally benevolent and rational. King affirmed that the universe is friendly because God is love and that "at the heart of the universe, there is a Heart."\textsuperscript{84} The orderliness of the universe allows persons to live and create in accordance with universal truths or principles which are discoverable by the human mind. However, the inherent order or rationality in the universe ultimately points to the moral law of the cosmos. "Reality," according to King, "hinges on moral foundations."\textsuperscript{85} This suggests the inadequacy of science and human thought alone to create community. Science and religion, according to King share a complementary relationship.\textsuperscript{86} Only as persons choose to become co-workers


\textsuperscript{86}King, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," in \textit{Strength to Love}, pp. 11-12.
with God can the realization of the order in the universe come to fruition.\(^87\)

King believed that human history is the arena of the dramatic interaction between God and persons in the creation of the beloved community. A major theme of King's sacramentalistic view of the world is that of creation. Because of his strong conviction of the centrality of the divine creative act, King refused to equate creation with the fall.\(^88\) King rather, in the language of H. R. Niebuhr, "distinguishes the fall very sharply from creation, interpreting the former as humanity's good nature becoming corrupted."\(^89\) He does not allow his understanding of the sacredness of human personality and the sacramental character of the world to overpower nor to be overpowered by the act of atonement. This distinction is most essential for understanding King's view of human persons as unique creations of God and their place in the realization of human community. This is not to suggest, in the least, that the estrangement of

\(^{87}\) King, "The Answer to a Perplexing Question," in *Strength to Love*, p. 134.

\(^{88}\) Smith and Zepp, *Search for Beloved*, p. 105.

persons from God is not of significance for King. King was well aware that all human progress is precarious and that the struggle within history to achieve the ideal of community is perpetually confronted with new and more formidable obstacles. His notion of human progress, therefore, is not to be understood as a type of social Darwinism. For King, "human progress is never automatic or inevitable." 90 The glaring reality of evil and human sin qualified his optimism in the redemption of history through human efforts alone. In several places he acknowledges that the realization of the Kingdom ideal is proleptic. 91 He insists, however, that the goal of community must be continuously pursued in cooperation with God. He wrote, "Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God." 92

King's conception of the world also includes human society. Human society, for King, is rooted in personalism's

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92 King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 86.
recognition of the solidarity of the human family. Personalism affirms that the universe is a society of persons in which God is the Supreme Person. All persons have their ground and being in the nature of the Divine Person. Although God does not need persons for his existence, God's "moral nature is love, and love needs comradeship. God is not a solitary, self-enjoying mind. He is love; He is . . . the Great Companion."93 Human society is a response to the person's need to be cared for and fulfilled in community.94 For King, such a society is necessarily inclusive and is rooted in neighborly concern for others. King saw the integration of blacks into the mainstream of American society as an expression of the becoming of human community. His understanding of integration, however, went beyond national, racial, and religious boundaries. True human society for King is pluralistic and international in scope and is based ultimately on moral foundations.95 He, therefore, makes a distinction between

93 Quoted in Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 113; see Brightman, Nature and Values, p. 117.
94 King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," p. 122.
integration and desegregation in reference to the actualization of authentic human society. Desegregation is essentially negative because it only eliminates discrimination in those areas of social life that can be regulated by law. It is an enforceable demand. Integration, on the other hand, cannot be enforced or legislated, rather it demands a moral commitment. Desegregation will only create:

A society where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts are apart. It gives us special togetherness and spiritual apartness. It leaves us with a stagnant equality of sameness rather than a constructive equality of oneness.\(^6\)

King's conception of the state is closely related to his view of society. The two, however, are analytically distinct. For King, the state represents the politico-economic entity which maintains human society. His view of the state was decidedly positive. King constantly called upon the state to fulfill its moral obligation to intervene on behalf of the powerless and oppressed of society. King's political recommendations can be categorized as following: recommendations to increase the political power and participation of black Americans; recommendations for blacks to form more intra-political

\(^6\)King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," in Washington, p. 118.
alliances and more effective coalitions with other oppressed groups within society; recommendations for a greater role for the federal government on the side of the poor and minorities seeking basic constitutional and human rights; and recommendations of international cooperation in which America would take a leading role. 97

King's understanding of the nature and the role of the state is rooted in his belief in the universal, democratic ideal which upholds the dignity and worth of human personality and the solidarity of human existence. 98 King's view of the state evolved into a type of democratic socialism which maintained the primacy of the individual while advocating the abolition of poverty through the redistribution of wealth. 99 His critique of American

97 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 135-202; see also Frank L. Morris, "A Dream Unfulfilled: The Economic and Political Policies of Martin Luther King, Jr.," presented at the Annual Celebration Commemorating the Birth of Martin Luther King at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, January 1977.


capitalism called for radical reforms. King believed that it is possible to "work within the framework of democracy to bring about a better distribution of wealth." 100 During the latter years of his life, King called for a guaranteed income for all citizens. He recommended that the relationships between production, distribution and consumer be given more careful attention in order to avoid national catastrophe. 101 King wrote:

The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity. It is not only moral, but it is also intelligent. We are wasting and degrading human life by clinging to archaic thinking. 102

King was keenly aware of the tendency to ascribe to the state a transcendent character which creates a conflict of loyalties between God and human institutions. In his sermon, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," he cautioned the church to maintain its dual citizenry as a people of faith and citizens of the state. 103

101 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 163.
102 Ibid., p. 165.
103 King, Strength to Love, pp. 139-40.
Although King was acutely aware of the potential conflict between loyalty to God and loyalty to the state, he still insisted that there is an intricate relationship between responsible citizenship (devotion to the democratic principles inherent in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) and responsibility to God. For King, America is essentially a "dream unfulfilled." It is an idea in the mind of God which is manifesting itself in time. The principles of democracy (inherent worth of the individual and equality of persons) were for King the basis of this loyalty to America. Despite the "schizophrenic character" of the American experiment in democracy which resulted in slavery and segregation, the nation has a unique destiny in the history of human civilization. Loyalty to God, therefore, demands that persons uplift the noble principles of democracy and work in cooperation with the purposes of God in fulfilling this destiny. The black American, though victimized by the shameful atrocities and blatant contradictions of the dream,

105 Ibid.
106 See King, "Excerpts from Address by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Public Meeting of Charlotte, North Carolina Branch, NAACP," September 25, 1960, King Archives, Atlanta, GA.
must assume a responsible role in calling upon the nation to live out "the true meaning of its creed." For King, the civil rights movement is a manifestation of the love and justice of God operative within American society; its mission is to prick the conscience of America and to call it to repentance. King believed that the struggle of American blacks to fulfill the promises of democracy may be God's instrument to save the soul of America. In this sense, King was perhaps the most articulate spokesperson for Robert Bellah's description of American civil religion as "the transcendent universal religion of the nation." The idea of world, in King, includes the universe, nature, human history, human society, and the state. In his discussion of the world, his primary emphases are on the sacredness of human personality and the social nature

of human existence. The Biblical theme of creation informs his sacramentalistic cosmology. Of particular interest is his understanding of society and the state. The historical struggle of black Americans as the objects of racism and segregation sanctioned by the state is a major concern for King. This is a central theme which will receive further treatment at relevant points throughout this discussion.

The Totality

The three elements which comprise the triadic nature of community, persons, God, and the world, have been examined separately for purposes of analysis. In King's understanding of community, the three principals are integrally and dynamically interrelated. Each interacts with the other in a creative network of mutuality and cooperation. Persons cooperate with God as self-conscious, self-directed, and free participants in the creation of community; and God, as the Supreme Person and World Ground, makes the divine purposes known in the created order and in human personality. In the following we shall discuss the totality of this interaction as follows: 1) God and persons; 2) God and the world; and 3) persons, the world, and God.
King understood God as Person disclosed in history, who works through human agency to achieve the divine purposes for creation. The personal God of love and reason is also creator and sustainer of community. God wills that persons cooperate with Godself in the creation of community. King contends that it is neither God nor persons alone who will bring about the world's salvation, but persons working with God. He gives three ways in which persons can work with God: through work, intelligence, and prayer. The key ingredient, however, which undergirds these three ways of cooperating with God and which unleashes the power of God in the life of the person, is faith. King makes a distinction between two types of faith, "mind faith" and "heart faith." "Mind faith," according to King is giving intellectual assent to the belief that God exists. Such faith is inadequate by itself. "Heart faith," on the other hand, is the type of faith which allows the person truly to know God and to become a co-worker with God in the achievement of divine

110 King, "Answer to a Perplexing Question," King Archives, Atlanta, GA, p. 12.
111 Ibid., p. 10.
purpose. "Heart faith," is the spiritual substance that is essential for the eradication of racism and other social ills that plague human society:

This is the meaning of faith. If we want to solve the race problem, this is it. We can't do it alone. God will not do it alone. But let's go out and test a little bit and he will change this thing and make America a better nation. Do you want peace in this world? Man cannot do it by himself. And God is not going to do it by himself. But let us cooperate with him and we will be able to build a world where men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and nations will not study war anymore.  

God and the World

God is immanently involved in the world as creator and sustainer; all life has its origin and purpose in the creative activity of God. The rational order of the world makes possible the role of persons as co-creators and purposers with God. For King, there is no strict dichotomy between fact and value or science and religion; rather both are complementary. Therefore the achievements of science and technology are not necessarily in conflict with the purposes of God as long as they are in harmony with the moral order of the universe. When persons

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112 Ibid., pp. 10-20.
113 Ibid., p. 20.
114 King, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," in Strength to Love, pp. 11-12.
choose to become co-workers with God, the realization of the harmonious, creative order in the universe can come to fruition.115

King's understanding of the immanence of God is Christocentric. For King, Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God in the world. Christ is "the language of eternity translated into time." "the New Being," and "a rock in a weary land."116 In Christ, we see the Person of God manifested in history as a loving Father who requires of his children the same self-giving love.117 In Christ, according to King, we are called to the difficult task of loving even our enemies in order to realize a unique relationship with God. Like Christ, we are "potential sons of God. Through love that potentiality becomes actuality."118 Christ is the source and norm of the beloved community and the Cross is the symbol of God's redemptive love for humanity.119

116 King, "Is the Universe Friendly?" p. 9.
117 King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," in Strength To Love, p. 35.
118 King, "Loving Your Enemies," in Strength to Love, p. 35.
King's Christology is largely indebted to the personal theism of Harold DeWolf.\textsuperscript{120} DeWolf understood Jesus to be the supreme manifestation of the will and purposes of God in the world. He believes that through Jesus's life, teachings and his redemptive suffering on the cross, the love, power, and forgiveness of God are demonstrated as the act of reconciliation between persons and God. In DeWolf's book, \textit{A Theology for the Living Church}, he devotes a chapter to Christology, entitled "The Son of God: Christological Reconstruction." Here he argues against the identification of Jesus as God, the explanation of Jesus as a religious genius or saint, and the Bultmannian and Barthian claims of "the Christ of faith." DeWolf outlines the basic elements to be included in what he perceives as essential to an adequate Christological reconstruction. He begins with the unique moral authority of Jesus. He says, "Other man of history may shame us in this or that particular aspect of life, but only Jesus has stood the test of being the norm of life itself, from its very center."\textsuperscript{121} DeWolf claims that

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\textsuperscript{120}King, \textit{Stride}, p. 82. In a telephone interview, February 3, 1986, DeWolf shared with the author his understanding of his influence on King's Christological perspective.

\textsuperscript{121}DeWolf, \textit{A Theology for the Living Church}, p. 246.
\end{small}
Jesus's filial God-consciousness, his wisdom and power, and the finding of God in Jesus Christ by other men and women recommend him as the unique ideal of human personality. He suggests that while Jesus was indeed human, bearing in his physical, social existence all the marks and weaknesses of human imperfection, his mission as the supreme revelation of the purposes of God in history sets him apart as the archetype of human personality toward which all humanity strives.

A lengthy, but informative quote captures the basic thrust and import of DeWolf's argument for the claim of Jesus's uniqueness as the Son of God:

While everyone is called to take a special, individual place in God's kingdom, Jesus was called to perform a particular task in one time and place and for certain people around him—though he did that as a carpenter of Nazareth and as friend and minister to certain individuals. He was also to perform the universal task for all peoples who were yet to be in any age or nation, the task of living the total purpose and meaning of the reign of God. Jesus was called to be not only, before God, the subject to that reign, but also to be, before men, Lord of the Kingdom. He was to show in word and life the purpose, spirit and power of God issuing forth in human life. He was thus not only to teach, but to be the highest of all teachers. He was not only to heal but to be the norm of true health. He was not only to lead in worship but to show in his own person, as no words nor ritual nor any impersonal symbol could possibly show, Him

\[122\] Ibid., pp. 243-47.
who is alone worthy of worship. He was not only to speak words concerning God, but to be the Word spoken of God. 123

The redemptive love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is King's answer to the possibility of achieving community within history. While he did not believe that human efforts alone could bring the Kingdom of God into realization, he strongly believed that the power of God was sufficient to accomplish the eternal purposes. For King, this is a fact accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. King interpreted the three Christian symbols of the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Holy Spirit as a trinitarian expression of God's immanence in the world. 124

King found his Christocentric vision of community revealed in the Christian Scriptures. While he was a highly eclectic thinker, drawing upon a variety of intellectual sources for truth, the Scriptures served as the fount of revelation for him in which the person and work of Jesus Christ became the chief hermeneutical principle

123 Ibid., pp. 248-49. DeWolf also indicates that he is deeply indebted to Donald M. Baillie's treatment of Christology. Donald M. Baillie, God Was in Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948). See DeWolf, A Theology for the Living Church, p. 241.

124 King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 87.
in translating the purposes of God in the creation of human community into the contemporary context of the black struggle for liberation. Carl H. Marbury makes this claim in an article entitled, "An Excursus on the Biblical and Theological Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr." Marbury writes,

The main question for any student with more than purely historical and/or objective concerns is, how does Jesus come to be contemporary with us, as early Christians believed him to be? The principle is basic for understanding the Biblical theology of Martin Luther King.125

In a number of King's published and unpublished sermons, this principle is operative.126

For King, the reality of evil in the world and of human sin makes salvation a human impossibility. This was the basis of his critique of communism, humanism, secularism, and all anthropocentric efforts to redeem

125 In Cartwright, Essays in Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., p. 19.

history without the intervention of grace. 127 This truth is illustrated most dramatically in the redemptive work of Christ. 128 "Christianity affirms," says King,

that at the heart of reality is a Heart, a loving Father who works through history for the salvation of his children. Man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of all things and humanity is not God. Bound by the chains of his own sin and finiteness, man needs a Saviour. 129

Persons, the World, and God

It has been stated that the totality represents the creative interaction of the three principals (persons, the world, and God) in a harmonious relationship that issues forth in the beloved community. At the beginning of this discussion, the question of John Cartwright regarding King's notion of the beloved community as a Christian eschatological ideal was utilized. He asked, "From a Christian perspective, what kind of society must human

127 King argued, "The trouble with Communism is that it has neither a theology nor a Christology: therefore it emerges with a mixed-up anthropology. Confused about God, it is also confused about man." "How Should a Christian View Communism?," in Strength to Love, p. 99.

128 King, "Love in Action," in Strength to Love, p. 45; see discussion on the influence of Niebuhr and the contribution of Muelder in respect to King's understanding of redemption in history in the next chapter.

society be when human society truly becomes?"\textsuperscript{130} In his favorite sermon, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," King answers this question by stating that the ideal human society is the correlation of these three interrelated elements. The vision of the New Jerusalem which John sees on the isle of Patmos, according to King, is the "city of ideal humanity." It "is not an unbalanced entity but it is complete on all sides."\textsuperscript{131} He suggests that life is like a great triangle: at one angle there is the individual person, at the other angle there are other persons, and at the top is the Supreme, Infinite Person, God. All three dimensions of life are fulfilled in love. The individual person represents the \textbf{length of life}. Here the primary concern is the cultivation of the internal life of the person; it is that dimension of life in which the person pursues personal ends and ambitions. Self-love and inner harmony between ends and means are essential for a proper understanding of the length of life. At the next angle, there is the \textbf{breadth of life}. This dimension represents social existence and is characterized by love for others and the broader concerns of all humanity.

\textsuperscript{130} Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," p. 171.

This is a horizontal relationship between persons. King uses the analogy of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the altruism which is essential to fulfill the social goal of human existence. Finally, there is the third and final dimension which King refers to as the height of life. The height of life refers to the vertical relationship between persons and God. The other two dimensions of life, according to King, are incomplete without the vertical pole. King encourages the individual person to:

Love yourself, if that means rational, healthy and moral self-interest. You are commanded to do that. That is the length of life. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. You are commanded to do that. That is the breadth of life. But never forget the first and even greater commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all they heart and all thy soul and all thy mind." This is the height of life.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{Summary on the Nature of Community in Martin Luther King, Jr.}

In the discussion of the nature of community in King, the conception of community and the triadic character of community have been examined. The conception of community in the thought of King is rooted in his understanding of the interrelatedness of life, the sacredness of human personality, the moral order of the universe, the personal God of love and reason who is revealed in

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 33.
power, and the social nature of human existence. The
beloved community, as it is articulated by King, is the
social, eschatological Christian ideal which draws upon
several significant theological and philosophical sources:
the Protestant liberal tradition represented by Rauschen-
busch, the personal idealism of E. S. Brightman and Harold
DeWolf, and the black church experience. The influence
of Thurman on King's conception of community has been
noted, but with an important caveat, that the two thinkers
are products of the black American religious experience
and that the ideal of community which was inherited from
this tradition found creative affinity with the respective
traditions of protestant liberal theology and personal
idealism. These three interrelated traditions emphasize
the ideal of human community ordered by love which pro-
vides a basis for understanding their respective views
of persons, God, and the world.

     King's conception of community is triadic in char-
acter. The three elements which comprise the triadic
nature of community (persons, God, and the world) have
been examined separately for purposes of analysis and
viewed in relationship with one another as a totality.
In King's understanding of community, the three principals
are integrally and dynamically interrelated. King's
anthropology accentuates the social nature of the self. This emphasis in King has major implications for his understanding of the moral life and society's responsibility to the individual.
CHAPTER VI


The search for community was the defining motif of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and thought. From his early childhood until his death, there is a progression in his personal and intellectual understanding of the nature and goal of human existence, which he refers to as "the beloved community." King's search for community was characterized by an insatiable thirst for truth and a deep-seated religious faith which began in his early years in the intimate context of his family, the black church community, and the larger black community of Atlanta, Georgia. The development of the ideal of community in King is discernible in his educational pursuits at Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, and later at Boston University. After his formal education and training, his experiences as pastor and spokesman for

1Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, pp. 119-40.
the black community in Montgomery served as a "proving ground" for his embryonic, theoretical formulation of community which would be refined in the praxis of the Civil Rights Movement. The early development of the ideal of community in King reaches its zenith in the March on Washington in 1963, but the four and half years following proved to be a period in which his vision of community received its severest criticisms and challenges. These final years of King's life and ministry, though beleaguered with controversy and sabotage, are the most crucial in understanding the maturation of his personal and intellectual growth in respect to community. It is in this period that one sees most clearly King's wrestling with nonviolence as a means of achieving human community, his increased realization of the international implications of his vision of community, and his understanding of the nature and role of conflict in the realization of human community.

The first part of this chapter will follow the unfolding pattern of King's search for "the beloved community": 1) early years; 2) education; 3) Montgomery; 4) the American Dream; and 5) the World House. The latter part will examine the intellectual sources of his ideal of community.
The Experiential Sources of Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Early Years

The Family Context

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s earliest understanding of community began in the contexts of his family environment, the fellowship of the black church community, and in the larger context of the black community of Atlanta, Georgia. It is in these interrelated environs that one sees most clearly the genesis of his search for community and the developing sense of mission which accompanied his vision.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born into a family heritage that was deeply steeped in the tradition of black protest and struggle against the ravages of white racism. He was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia and was the second child of the Reverend and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Sr. (the former Alberta Christine Williams). His maternal grandfather, the Reverend A. D. Williams, who was pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church from 1894 to 1931, was well known for his valiant campaigns against racial injustice.²

Martin Luther King, Sr., who succeeded his father-in-law as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1931, continued the legacy of protest against segregation in Atlanta. He led boycotts, a voting rights march, and fought for full arrest rights of black policemen. The young King, an inquisitive and sensitive child, was deeply affected by his father's struggle against the segregationist policies in Atlanta. In his book, Stride Toward Freedom, he comments on his father's legacy of protest:

From before I was born, my father refused to ride the city buses, after witnessing a brutal attack on a load of Negro passengers. He had led the fight in Atlanta to equalize teachers' salaries, and had been instrumental in the elimination of Jim Crow elevators in the courthouse. As pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, . . . he had wielded great influence in the Negro community, and had perhaps won the grudging respect of the whites. At any rate, they had never attacked him physically, a fact that filled my brother and sister and me with wonder as we grew up in this tension-packed atmosphere.

King, reflecting upon the examples of his father and grandfather, writes, "With this heritage, it is not surprising that I had also learned to abhor segregation, considering it both rationally inexplicable and morally unjustifiable."

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4 King, Stride, p. 6. Underline mine; see also, King, Sr., Daddy King, pp. 107-09 and 130.

5 King, Stride, p. 6.
There were also strong black women in King's family who contributed greatly to his sense of self-worth and growing sense of mission. His mother, a quiet, dignified and well-educated woman, was a source of comfort and strength for her young son who had to deal with the devastating consequences of racism at an early age. When he was six years old, he was informed by his white playmates' parents that he could no longer play with their children. Perplexed by this sudden change in relations, he questioned his mother. He remembered how she explained to him the history of slavery, emancipation and the Civil War, and the divided system of segregation. She helped him to understand that this was a social condition and not the natural order. "Then she said the words that almost every Negro hears before he can yet understand the injustice that makes them necessary: 'You are as good as anyone.'"

King was also very close to his maternal grandmother who lived with the family after the death of her husband. Grandmother Williams helped to raise the children and spent many evenings telling them interesting stories.

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6 King, Stride, p. 5.

Martin was her favorite grandchild and his love for her was so great that he attempted suicide when she died. He was twelve years old. 8

The influences of his family environment gave Martin a sense of personal worth and a basis for belief in a "friendly universe." 9 These two interrelated themes were fundamental to his emerging vision of community and in the coming years they would be given greater conceptual clarity.

The Black Church Experience

His family life was inseparable from his religious development. He was bred and nurtured in the rich and powerful religious idiom of the black church. 10 He joined Ebenezer Baptist Church when he was five years old. He never recalled having an "abrupt" conversion experience, he says rather "religion has just been something I grew up in." He comments further: "Conversion for me has

8 Biographers David Lewis and Stephen Oates note that there were two suicide attempts by King in his childhood. See Lewis, King, pp. 13-14; Stephen B. Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1982), pp. 9, 13.


10 He says, "The church has always been a second home for me." Ibid., p. 8.
been the gradual intaking of the noble ideals set forth in my family and environment, and I must admit that this intaking has been highly unconscious." ¹¹

His early religious development, however, was not without questions despite his young age. King had great difficulty accepting what he perceived as the excessive emotionalism and fundamentalism of the black church experience. When he was twelve or thirteen years old, he shocked his Sunday School teacher by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. ¹² His scepticism continued through college. In fact, he despaired of the role of the black church as a creative agent for change in society because of its emotionalism and fundamentalistic interpretation of Scriptures. It was not until he met well-educated and articulate preachers like Dr. George D. Kelsey and Dr. Benjamin E. Mays at Morehouse College that he was able to make a decision for Christian ministry. ¹³

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 9; see Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 14.

¹³King's wrestling with the emotionalism and fundamentalism of the Black church does not mean that he rejected the church nor does it suggest that it was not a major source of his religious development. To the contrary, the Black church experience and his religious family environment were the cornerstones of his developing vision
Nevertheless, it was in the black religious experience at Ebenezer Baptist Church that King first discovered the deep-rooted spirituality that sustained him in his struggles to create human community, and it is

of community. Lewis V. Baldwin, in an unpublished manuscript, argues that King "can only be understood when he is viewed within the context of a cultural heritage which stems back to his slave forbears. This is to say that the black experience and the black Christian tradition were the most important sources in the shaping of his thought, his vision, and his efforts to translate the ethical ideal of the 'Beloved Community' into practical reality." Baldwin, "Understanding Martin Luther King, Jr. within the Context of Southern Religious History," p. 1. See also, Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 12:1-2 (Fall 1984/Spring 1985): 93-108; James Cone makes a similar argument in reference to the black church experience as being the primary source for the religious development of King and the foundation of his struggle for social justice. See James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Theology-Black Church," Theology Today 40:4 (January 1984): 409-420; James M. Washington identifies King as part of a long, dissenting tradition of the Black church within the American context. He writes: "Most of us are sadly unaware however that the black church movement, King's primary spiritual and social mooring, nurtured its own dissenting tradition. For those who are unaware, it is still ironic that this tradition could so rapidly produce a world historical figure like Martin Luther King, Jr." A Testament of Hope, ed., James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), p. xii. David L. Lewis and Stephen Oates suggest that King's struggle with the powerful authoritarian figure of his father as a preacher and his identification with the culturally and intellectually sophisticated standards of Atlanta's black community were key factors in his struggle of the black church; Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 6-11; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 14. For discussion of Kelsey and Mays, see Intellectual Sources.
also where he received a sense of mission and purpose that led him to accept the call to Christian ministry at the age of seventeen. In a revealing statement in his "Autobiography of Religious Development," written while he was a student at Boston University School of Theology, King reflects on his reasons for entering ministry and their relation to his early childhood experiences with his family and the church.

At present I still feel the affects of the noble moral and ethical ideals that I grew up under. They have been real and precious to me, and even in moments of theological doubt I could never turn away from them. Even though I never had an abrupt conversion experience, religion has been real to me and closely knitted to life. In fact the two cannot be separated; religion for me is life.14

The Black Community

King's early development in the contexts of his family and the church were complemented by the larger black community of Atlanta. King, a product of the black middle-class community of Atlanta, was raised in the relative comfort of a materially successful household.15 The black community of Atlanta during King's early years boasted

14King, "Autobiography," p. 15; see also King, Statement to American Baptist Convention, August 7, 1959, King Papers, Boston University. Here King shares his call to ministry.

of a large and varied black middle-class comprised of college professors, contractors, real estate agents, insurance executives, bankers, businessmen, physicians, dentists, and morticians.\textsuperscript{16} Throughout his early years, King was surrounded by these symbols of success and progress in the black Atlanta community which reinforced the sense of self-worth and mission which he experienced in the contexts of his family and the church. Of central significance was the priority placed on education and cultural sophistication. The pioneer black sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, in his book, \textit{Black Bourgeoisie}, contended that among the Negro middle-class there is a quest for social status which has developed from an "inferiority complex" engendered by slavery and segregation. This fixation with status and prestige is manifested in the aspirations of the middle-class Negro in puritanical family and sexual mores, which set them apart from the black masses. "But the chief compensation for their inferior status in American society," argues Franklin, "was found in education."

While their racial heritage and conventional standards of morality only gave them a privileged position in the Negro community, education gave them access to a

\textsuperscript{16}See Lewis, \textit{King: A Biography}, pp. 8-10.
world of ideas that provided an intellectual escape from their physical and social segregation in American life. Therefore, they placed an exaggerated importance upon academic degrees, especially if they were secured from white colleges in the North. If one secured the degree of doctor of philosophy in a northern university, he was regarded as a sort of genius. Consequently, for the relatively small group of educated Negroes, education was an indication of their 'superior culture' and a mark of 'refinement.'

At an early age, King was attracted to the intellectual and cultural streams of the black community reflected in this analysis. King's academic accomplishments, his distaste for the emotionalism and fundamentalism of his father's church, his conversance with the arts, his expensive taste in dress, and his fondness for rich and affluent friends, which remained prominent throughout his life, tend to add credence to the claims that his middle-class orientation helped to shape and mold his theoretical and practical approaches to community. James Cone argues that King's black middle-class social origins informed his integrationist philosophy and his method of nonviolent protest. He claims that King followed in the tradition of accommodation and protest wielded by Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and the N.A.A.C.P.

which held that black progress was measured in terms of economic advance and appeals to the constitutional rights of Negroes with the ultimate aim of assimilation into the dominant white culture. 18

Early Experiences of Non-Community

However one interprets the influence of Atlanta's black middle-class community on the developing personality of King, it must also be acknowledged that class distinctions among black people did not immunize them from the indignities and impersonal logic of segregation. King's early experiences of segregation had an equal effect on shaping his understanding of community and caused him to search for a method to overcome the barriers that separate human beings from one another. In Stride Toward Freedom, he writes:

I had grown up abhorring not only segregation but also the oppressive and barbarous acts that grew out of it. I had passed spots where Negroes had been savagely lynched, and had watched Ku Klux Klan on its rides at night. I had seen police brutality with my own eyes, and watched Negroes receive the most tragic injustice in the courts. All of these things

had done something to my growing personality. I had come perilously close to resenting all white people.19

These and other atrocities which he witnessed and experienced during his early years in the deep South brought King to the realization that he must dedicate his life to the eradication of the evil system of segregation.20 It would not be until his first year at Crozer Theological Seminary in 1948, however, that he would "begin a serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil."21

In summary, the formative influences in King's early years from his family environment, the black church experience at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the black community instilled in him a sense of personal worth and a growing sense of mission. These positive influences helped to lay the groundwork for an emerging vision of unity among human beings. The negative force of segregation which opposed the communal ties and orientation which King experienced in his family, church, and the black Atlanta community, convinced him of the inner necessity to dedicate his life to the creation of a just society.

19 King, Stride, p. 72.
20 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, pp. 16, 17.
21 King, Stride, p. 73.
in which black people could live freely and with dignity among whites. While his middle-class origins may have helped to shape his developing theoretical and strategic concerns, the ever present reality of segregation and its assaults against his sense of personal dignity, also informed his developing world view and his quest for a method of creative social change.

Education

Early Educational Experience

King's formal education began in the segregated black public schools of Atlanta. In 1935 he entered the Yonge Street Elementary School and three years later transferred to the David T. Howard Colored Elementary School when he was in sixth grade. In 1941, when the family moved, King attended the Atlanta University Laboratory School which was an experiment in secondary education for gifted black youth, but at the end of his second year it closed for economic reasons. King transferred to the Booker T. Washington High School where he was allowed to skip the ninth grade. While at Booker T. Washington, King compiled a B-plus average, where his favorite subjects were history and English. His love for the English language and his sweeping breadth of history reaped high
dividends in his role as spokesman and interpreter of the history of the black struggle for freedom. In the eleventh grade, he won an oratorical context sponsored by the Negro Elks in a neighboring Georgia town. His topic was "The Negro and the Constitution," a theme that would remain a central focus of his thought throughout his life. 22

Morehouse College

In 1944, Morehouse College started a program for exceptional high school students. The program was designed, in part, to fill the depleting enrollment of students because of wartime conscription. 23 After completing a battery of entrance examinations, King again skipped a grade and entered Morehouse College when he was only fifteen years old. At Morehouse, King found a robust fraternal atmosphere which was well-tailored for his intellectual pursuits. As stated, the venerable Benjamin E. Mays continued in the rich legacy set forth by John Hope and Samuel Archer. 24 Among the other outstanding faculty were Samuel

22Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 16.

23Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 18.

24Mays was considered "a notorious modernist" in the eyes of the orthodox. He challenged the traditional educational practices as "accommodation under
Williams, professor of Philosophy, George D. Kelsey, professor of Religion and Philosophy, Gladstone L. Chandler, professor of English, and Walter Chivers, professor of Sociology.

The Morehouse experience was also beneficial for King in respect to his understanding the potential for wholesome relations with white people. King's resentment of white people, which began early in his youth, continued to grow through his college years until he reached a point where he was determined to hate all white people. It was not until he began to serve on the Atlanta Intercollegiate Council, an interracial student group, that he was able to conquer this "anti-white feeling." His professors at Morehouse also aided him in this respect by holding frank discussions about race and encouraging the young Morehouse men to seek positive solutions to the race problem.

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protest" and called for a new dimension in the education of black students in which liberation through knowledge became his paradigm. "Education," he told his students, "allowed the Negro to be intellectually free; it was an instrument of social and personal renewal." See Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 19.


26 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 20; see also Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 76.
While a student at Morehouse College, King acknowledged his call to ministry. He was licensed to preach in 1947 and became assistant to his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church. In February of the following year, he was ordained to the Baptist ministry. At the tender age of nineteen, he graduated the same year from Morehouse College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. His ordination to ministry and his graduation represented a closing chapter in the early development of his ideal of community.

The experiences of racial dialogue and exchange which began at Morehouse College prepared King for the coming years in which his faith in the inherent worth of personality, which transcends race and class, would be severely tested in the crucible of struggle in the heartlands of the deep South and in the ghettos of the urban North. The formative influences upon his intellectual development at Morehouse College also provided

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27 See earlier discussion regarding King's struggle with black church and the respective contributions of Kelsey and Mays. The idea of "the call" is an important element in the black church tradition. Henry Mitchell remarks that the black preacher must take the call with the utmost seriousness. Mitchell states, "If Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) could be called before birth, so can they. And if Jeremiah's call could sustain him through unbelievable trials and rebuffs; it can for black preachers also. And it has!" Henry Mitchell, Black Preaching (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 211.
King with the confidence and heightened sense of mission which would enable him to excel in the academic environments of Crozer and Boston University. He had written earlier that year in the Morehouse student journal, The Maroon Tiger, that:

The function of education . . . is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.\textsuperscript{28}

The remainder of his educational and public careers is a bold testimony to this belief.

**Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University**

When King began his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary in the Fall of 1948, a new stage in his personal and intellectual development began. King found himself in an overwhelmingly white academic environment which made him painfully aware of his "blackness" and his self-imposed mission to overcome white stereotypes of the Negro.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28}Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{29}He says that, "I was well aware of the typical white stereotype of the Negro that he is always late, that he's loud and always laughing, that he's dirty and messy, and for a while I was terribly conscious of trying to avoid identification with it. If I were a minute late to class, I was almost morbidly conscious of it and sure that every one else noticed it. Rather than be thought of as always laughing, I'm afraid I was grimly serious for a time." Quoted in Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 28.
No doubt, for this reason as well as his superior intellectual gifts, he excelled at Crozer, earning an A in every course he took in the curriculum. King was valedictorian of his class.

The professor at Crozer who contributed most to King's theological and philosophical underpinnings of community was George W. Davis, Professor of Christian Theology from 1938 to 1960. King began his formal study of personalism with Davis. The theological personalism which informed many of the evangelical liberal doctrines taught by Davis would find their fruition in King's doctoral studies at Boston University.\(^{30}\) Other important intellectual sources which King would seriously engage while at Crozer were the works of Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, and Reinhold Niebuhr. His theological and ethical formulations of the beloved community owe much to these sources.\(^{31}\)

King graduated from Crozer in June 1951 and entered Boston University during the fall of the same year.

\(^{30}\) In a letter to Davis while he was a student at Boston University, King wrote, "I must admit that my theological and philosophical studies with you have been of tremendous help to me in my present studies." Quoted in Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 15.

\(^{31}\) See later discussion on Intellectual Sources.
King's major philosophical and theological studies at Boston University were with Edgar Sheffield Brightman and Harold DeWolf. Brightman, who was King's major professor, died during his second year at Boston University and Harold DeWolf, a protege of Brightman, became his adviser. King acknowledges that both men greatly stimulated his thinking.\textsuperscript{32} It was mainly under these thinkers that King studied personalism. Others whom he acknowledges as making significant contributions to his intellectual pilgrimage while at Boston University were Walter Muelder and Allen Knight Chalmers. According to King, these renowned pacifists provided examples of the inherent potential of human beings to create a just and loving society through cooperation with God.\textsuperscript{33}

While a student at Boston University, King met a young woman who was to become his life-long companion in the struggle to create human community. The daughter of Obadiah Scott, a black man who had triumphed over the many obstacles of race and class, Coretta Scott was well acquainted with the rigors of life in the segregated South.

\textsuperscript{32}King, \textit{Stride}, p. 82.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 82; see next section, "Intellectual Sources."
Though her family did not bear the social prestige of the King family, the Scotts had successfully carved a position of economic stability in the hopeless setting of Marion, Alabama. Coretta was a graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio and a student at the New England Conservatory of Music when she and King met. The young couple were married on June 18, 1953.

Montgomery: "The Proving Ground for Community"

Montgomery, Alabama was "the proving ground" for King's early vision of community. King's keen intellectual abilities and his eclectic appropriation of thought from a variety of philosophical, theological, historical, and social sources had well equipped him for the mission which lay ahead. His entire life from early childhood through the higher echelons of academia seemed to follow a direct path that converged on the kairotic moment in Montgomery. Not to be overlooked is the underlying idiom of the black religious experience from which King was never divorced. His long years of academic pursuit were undergirded by a deep spirituality and an understanding of life which

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34 Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 41.

informed his decision to return to the South. He and his wife felt that they had a moral obligation to return.  

On October 31, 1954, Martin Luther King, Jr. was installed as the twentieth pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama by his father. The following June, King received his Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Boston University. During that same year, another significant event which would affect his life and ministry also took place. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled unanimously in Brown vs. Board of Education that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The high court's ruling precipitated a climate of "interposition," "nullification," economic reprisals, and violence against black people which was led by White Citizen's Councils and the Ku Klux Klan from Virginia to Texas.  

In December of that same year, King became the spokesperson for the Montgomery Improvement Association, a position that placed him in

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36 King, Stride, pp. 7-8.

the practical arena of social action where his developing understanding of the nature of community and the method for its actualization would be tested in the crucible of struggle. The able leadership of King as spokesman for the Montgomery Improvement Association, which came into being after Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her bus seat to a white man, ushered in a new era not only for the Montgomery black community, but for the continuing struggle for civil rights throughout the country. King felt that the movement in Montgomery was divinely inspired and that God was using Montgomery "as the proving ground for the struggle and triumph of freedom and justice in America."38

King's ministry in the Montgomery Movement was characterized by two significant realizations that became working hypotheses in his future campaigns to achieve the beloved community: his practical realization of the method of nonviolent resistance as the means to achieve his vision of community and the power of the federal government to combat the barriers to community imposed by segregated statues and unjust laws.39

38 King, "Annual Address to the Montgomery Improvement Association," December 3, 1956, Holt Street Baptist Church, King Archives, Atlanta, GA; King Stride, p. 51; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 73.

39 See King, "Annual Address to the Montgomery Improvement Association," December 3, 1956.
Nonviolent Direct Action as the Method

In Montgomery, King realized the power of nonviolent resistance to achieve his vision of community; and the black church was the place which served as the source of its inspiration. Lerone Bennett contends that King's great achievement in reference to nonviolent resistance was to turn the Negro's rooted faith in the church to social and political account by melding the image of Gandhi and the image of the Negro preacher and by overlaying all with Negro songs and symbols that bypassed cerebral centers and exploded in the well of the Negro psyche.40

Before Montgomery, his understanding of nonviolence was confined to an abstract association of ideas and readings from his intellectual pursuits, but in the midst of the struggle he came to understand its power to effect change, both in society and within the votary him/herself. It is also important to understand that nonviolent resistance as a viable alternative for social change had been debated and attempted by the black leadership long before King emerged as a proponent of the method.41 Initially, the method of the movement which came to be called nonviolent


41 Ibid., pp. 24-29.
resistance, was conceived in the hearts of the black people of Montgomery as "Christian love." King writes that:

From the beginning a basic philosophy guided the movement. . . . It was the Sermon on the Mount rather than a doctrine of passive resistance, that initially inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with the creative weapon of love.42

The inspiration of Gandhi was to exert its influence through the letter of Miss Juliette Morgan to the Montgomery Advertiser, and later through the help of several Christian socialists and pacifists who collaborated with King as he fashioned a philosophy of nonviolence for the Montgomery Improvement Association.43 He says:

Nonviolent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method.44

The philosophy of nonviolent resistance was disseminated in the mass meetings which were held in the black churches throughout the city. King felt that the black church was the natural place for this idea to be

42 King, Stride, p. 66.
43 Ibid., pp. 66-67; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, pp. 77-80.
44 King, Stride, p. 67.
taught because of the long history of redemptive suffering which black people had endured. After Montgomery, he believed that American Negroes had been chosen by history to become "instruments of a great idea," the idea of nonviolent resistance. 45

Democratic Principles and the Role of the Federal Government

The other important lesson King learned in Montgomery was the place of the democratic principles inherent in the Constitution and the power of the federal government to combat the barriers to community imposed by segregated statues and unjust laws. Early in his ministry at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he formed a Social and Political Action Committee. The purpose of the committee was to educate the church and community on the importance of the NAACP and to uplift the necessity of being registered voters. During local state and national elections, the committee sponsored forums and mass meetings to discuss the major issues which affected the Negro community. 46 Later, in the bus boycott, King came to


46 King, Stride, p. 15.
realize that the battle for political and economic justice in the South would have to be fought beyond the local and state courts. The insidious tactics of the local and state courts and lawmakers in Montgomery convinced King that the federal government would have to take strong and aggressive leadership in order to create the political environment in which integration could become a reality.\footnote{Ibid., p. 170.}

The two strategic cases which determined the outcome of the Montgomery boycott were cases in which the federal courts overruled the local courts. On June 4, 1956, a United States district court ruled that racial segregation on city bus lines was unconstitutional and on November 13, 1956, the United States Supreme Court affirmed the decision of the three-judge district court in declaring unconstitutional Alabama's state and local laws requiring segregation on buses. He was well aware, however, that politics alone could not legislate morality, but it could insure the opportunity for the dispossessed and disenfranchised to have an equal voice in their destinies and the destiny of the country. He remarked at the end of the Montgomery movement:

Government is not the whole answer to the present crisis, but it is an important partial answer. Morals
cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. The law cannot make an employer love me, but it can keep him for refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin.48

In summary, Montgomery was a proving ground for King's ideal of community. The road which lay ahead for him would be filled with many lessons, but two significant elements emerged in this campaign which would become integral to his evolving understanding of the conception, character, and actualization of the beloved community: his realization of the method of nonviolent resistance as the means to achieve his vision of community and the power of the federal government to combat the barriers to community imposed by segregated statues and unjust laws.

The American Dream

Montgomery to Washington

The years of 1957-1963 represent the period in King's development which we refer to as his quest for the American Dream. Here one sees an intense focus on the role of the federal government and the place of the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Constitution in King's articulation of the beloved

48 Ibid., p. 175.
community. In 1960, in an address entitled, "The Negro and the American Dream," Kings says:

In a real sense, America is essentially a dream—a dream yet unfulfilled. It is the dream of a land where men of all races, colors and creeds will live together as brothers. The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."49

As he was to speak later to the national conscience about his dream which was "deeply rooted in the American dream," King, at this point in his development, tends almost naively to identify the beloved community with the American dream which for him was centered around enfranchisement of the American Negro, desegregation and integration through legislation, and economic empowerment of black people.50 It is also significant that during this period, King took two trips abroad in which he was exposed to the international scene of poverty and the struggle of colonized nations against crumbling European power.51


51 In March 1960, the Reverend and Mrs. King took their first trip abroad as part of an American contingent
The bus boycott had catapulted King into national and international prominence, but despite his popularity, Montgomery would remain his base of operations until January 1960. He would later move to Atlanta and serve as co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church so that he could devote more time to the movement. The successful campaign in Montgomery culminated in the founding to celebrate the independence of the Gold Coast. The entourage included such notables as A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell, and Ralph Bunche. Vice-President Nixon was the official U.S. Representative, but Kwame Nkrumah had invited black leaders as well. King, who had just reached his twenty-eighth year, was included in this distinguished company. On March 9, King and his wife were among the thousands of people gathered to hear Nkrumah shout, "The battle is ended. Ghana, our beloved country, is free forever." Quoted in William Robert Miller, "The Broadening Horizons," in Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 45. This experience made a momentous impact upon King's understanding of the liberation struggles of colonized nations and their role in the creation of world community. See "Discerning the Signs of History," sermon preached at Ebenezer Baptist Church, November 15, 1964, King Library and Archives, Atlanta, GA.

From February 2 through March 19, 1959, King and his wife spent a month in India studying Gandhi's techniques of nonviolence as guests of Prime Minister Nehru. After India, they visited Israel, Cairo and Athens. Upon his return, King was even more determined to bring his vision of community in America into actualization. After his visit to the land of Gandhi, nonviolence became for King, more than just a philosophy or technique for social change, it became a way of life. Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 144; see also King, "Sermon on Gandhi," Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, March 22, 1959, King Library and Archives, Atlanta, GA.
of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) on January 10, 1957. With SCLC, King became president of a larger organization to coordinate nonviolent protest movements that were appearing in various parts of the South. SCLC's activity revolved around two main foci: the use of nonviolent philosophy as a means of protest and securing the right of the ballot for every citizen, particularly black southerners. The new organization's ultimate goal was "to foster and create 'the beloved community' in America where brotherhood is a reality."52

King's optimism in the realization of the American Dream of equality and justice for all people was fueled by a number of successful projects between 1957 through 1960: the Prayer Pilgrimage (1957),53 the Crusade for Citizenship (1958),54 and the election of John Fitzgerald


53 Typescript, MLK Collection, Boston University. After the Pilgrimage, the Amsterdam News heralded him as "the number one leader of sixteen million Negroes in the United States." Quoted in Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 12.

Kennedy to the presidency of the United States. According to Oates, Kennedy's intervention in King's release won the critical black votes which he needed to defeat Richard Nixon.\(^{55}\) For King, this underscored his fundamental premise that the Negro franchise was the most powerful tool at his disposal "to foster and create 'the beloved community' in America where brotherhood is a reality."\(^{56}\) King also saw the symbolic significance of Kennedy's presidency for the historical movement of America toward real community.\(^{57}\) In an article entitled "Equality Now," he compared the new Kennedy administration with the Lincoln presidency one hundred years earlier. He felt that Kennedy, like Lincoln, stood at a unique place in history in which he had an opportunity to adopt a radically new approach to race relations and to determine the moral destiny of the nation. He encouraged Kennedy to take the offensive in the passage of a civil rights bill which would safeguard voting rights and other long-overdue benefits entitled to citizens of color. He also called upon

\(^{55}\) The margin of difference was only 112,881 and Kennedy captured almost three-quarters of the Negro vote. See Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound*, pp. 165-66.

\(^{56}\) *This Is SCLC*, p. 270.

Kennedy to abolish segregation by executive order, which like the Emancipation Proclamation of Lincoln, would set the legal tone for the moral course of the nation. 58

The years of 1961-1963 for King continued in the same pattern toward the realization of community in America. The optimism of King was severely tested during this period by the overt violence and disunity within the movement associated with the Freedom Rides 59 and later by his unsuccessful campaign in Albany, Georgia in 1961-1962. 60


59 King's involvement in the Freedom Rides, which began in May 1961 under the leadership of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), challenged him to note the developing militancy among the younger ranks of the Civil Rights Movement. While he acknowledged that the young element represented the "revolutionary destiny of a whole people consciously and deliberately," (quoted in Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 177), King argued that "The Freedom Ride[s] grew out of a recognition of the American dilemma and a desire to bring the nation to a realization of its noble dream." He believed that "One day America will be proud of their achievements." Statement delivered at a rally to support the Freedom Riders, First Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL, May 21, 1961, King Library and Archives, Atlanta, GA. He was castigated by the same for his failure to accompany them on the buses. Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 133-34.

60 For an astute analysis of the Albany Movement, see Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 140-67. Lewis claims "that the Albany experiment aborted largely because of the plangent discord among its technicians. The wrong things demanded at the wrong time because there was too little coordination, trust, and harmony within the Movement." P. 167.
He learned invaluable lessons, however, from both these episodes which uniquely prepared him for "the Battle of Birmingham" which took place from March through May of 1963. The Birmingham campaign brought the Negro's struggle before the national conscience. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King illustrates how his willingness to suffer nonviolently for justice was rooted in the principles of democracy and a greater vision of community. In his response to his clerical critics who accused him of being an outside agitator, he wrote:

I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat against justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country.

The March on Washington

The success of the Birmingham campaign created public sympathy and support which forced the vacillating Kennedy administration to take an affirmative stance on behalf of the repeated appeals of King and other civil

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61 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 211
62 King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 77.
rights leaders to submit a civil rights bill to Congress which would open public accommodations to Negroes across Dixie. On June 19, Kennedy submitted his new civil rights package to Congress. In order to create the pressure on Congress to pass the proposed legislation, the heads of the five civil rights organizations, King (SCLC), A. Philip Randolph (Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), Roy Wilkins (NAACP), Whitney Young (Urban League), and James Farmer (CORE) met with President Kennedy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and Walter Reuther (UAW) to discuss a march on the nation's capital. Although the President initially disagreed, he later lent his support to the rally. On August 28, 1963, thousands of pilgrims from every social class, religion, and race gathered at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial to hear a long list of speakers address the theme of the march, "Jobs and Freedom." But by far, the most eloquent and memorable address was King's articulation of his dream of community in America. In his speech, he referred to the theme that he had been rehearsing since Montgomery that the democratic principles inherent in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had been grossly ignored in regards to America's citizens of color. The Emancipation Proclamation of Lincoln, said King, had come "as a great beacon light of hope to
millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice," but "one hundred years later," the Negro was still not free. In fact, "the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land." America had written the Negro a "bad check," by reneging on the sacred promises written in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution which guaranteed to all its citizens the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The dream of which he spoke was rooted in the American dream that "one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" The vision which King enunciated in this speech was at once communitarian and eschatological for it called into community persons from every class, religion, and race and suggested that the freedom of humanity is bound to the sacred destiny of America:

. . . when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up the day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."63

63 King, "I Have a Dream" Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. Martin Luther King, Jr.:
The March on Washington had a profound impact on King's sense of mission and his role as an "historical individual" entrusted with the message of community. Following the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law on July 2, 1964. In that same year, King re-echoed the message of the March on Washington in his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo:

The tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama to Oslo bears witness to this truth (nonviolent resistance is redemptive). This is the road over which millions of Negroes are traveling to find a new sense of dignity. This same road has opened for all Americans a new era of progress and hope. It has led to a new civil rights bill, and it will, I am convinced, be widened and lengthened into a superhighway of justice as the Negro and white men in increasing numbers create alliances to overcome their common problems.

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind.64

The Turning Point of the Dream

The early development of the ideal of community in King reached its zenith in the March on Washington


in 1963, but the four and half years following proved to be a period in which his vision of community received its severest criticisms and challenges. In fact, King referred to these years as a period when his glorious dream for America turned into a "nightmare." These final years of King's life and ministry, though beleaguered with controversy and sabotage, are the most crucial in understanding the maturation of his personal and intellectual growth in respect to community. It is in this period that one sees most clearly King's wrestling with nonviolence as a means of achieving human community, his increased realization of the international implications of his vision of community, and his heightened consciousness of the nature and role of conflict in the creation of the beloved community.

King's optimism concerning the actualization of the beloved community in America was tried by the increasing number of violent eruptions in black communities across the nation and by fiery denunciations of nonviolent direct action as ineffective and ultimately demeaning to black Americans' sense of dignity and self-respect. The most articulate and formidable opponent of King at

this juncture was Malcolm X, the spokesperson for the Honorable Elijah Muhammed, founder and leader of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm accused King of succumbing to the wiles and enticements of the "white devil," by teaching black people to adhere to nonviolence. He castigated King as a coward for his use of children in Birmingham and referred to the March on Washington as "The Farce on Washington." King would later encounter similar criticisms from SNCC and other black groups and intellectuals. The criticism from SNCC had been a growing concern for King since the Freedom Rides. SNCC's mounting criticisms of King's nonviolent method reached divisive levels in the "March Against Fear" through Mississippi in 1966. King rejected these criticisms on moral and practical grounds and maintained that "If every Negro


in the States turns to violence, I will be the one lone voice preaching that this is the wrong way."\(^{68}\)

King's nonviolent campaigns in St. Augustine (1964) and in Chicago (1966) confronted myriad problems in terms of strategy, organization, and timing which added to the already declining toleration of nonviolence as a method for bringing about creative social change. St. Augustine was considered a failure by most observers,\(^{69}\) and Chicago, at best, only a partial victory.\(^{70}\) Even the Selma campaign (1965), though it led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, was seen by some as a symbol of King's weakness as a leader and a sharp blow for nonviolence.\(^{71}\)

King responded to his critics by emphasizing the ultimate ineffectiveness and impracticality of violent

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\(^{68}\)See King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 63. For King's response to Stokley Carmichael, et al. and other critics, see Ibid., pp. 23-66. See also Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 299, 321-24; and Louis Lomax, "When 'Nonviolence' Meets 'Black Power,'" in Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile, pp. 157-80.

\(^{69}\)Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 244; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 300

\(^{70}\)David Halberstam, "When 'Civil Rights' and 'Peace' Join Forces," in Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile, p. 195; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, pp. 417-19.

\(^{71}\)Louis Lomax, "When 'Nonviolence' Meets 'Black Power,'" pp. 167-71; see also, Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 280-83.
resistance within the context of American society. His argument was that violence, even in self-defense, fails to address the real issues which affect the quality of life of black Americans and the poor. Moreover, according to King, violence does not eradicate the structural problems of economic injustice and racism but actually contributes to the vicious cycle of fear and hatred which create the climate of violence that works against the realization of community. Nonviolence, on the other hand, gives the black American the moral offensive that is necessary to reveal the underlying causes of the exploited conditions of the poor and disenfranchised and creates the environment in which love and justice may flourish. He wrote in 1966:

I must continue by faith or it is too great a burden to bear and violence, even in self-defense, creates more problems than it solves. Only a refusal to hate and kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.\(^72\)

During the latter years of King's life, there is an increased appreciation of the international

implications of his vision of community. As indicated earlier, King had from the beginning been aware of the international scope of his struggle for civil rights in America. As early as 1956, there is evidence in King's speeches of the relationship between the struggles abroad and the black struggle for civil rights in America. 73

In the years following his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, however, King's remarks regarding international events became more pronounced. 74 His most critical commentary on international events was his bold excoriation of the Vietnam War. Despite the scathing attacks of black and white critics, King maintained that his opposition to the war in Vietnam was consistent with his fundamental vision of world community. Responding to the criticism that his stand against the Vietnam War was a tactical mistake which fused civil rights with the peace movement, King said:

I have always insisted on justice for all the world over, because justice is indivisible and injustice anywhere is a threat against justice everywhere. I will not stand idly by when I see an unjust war taking place and fail to take a stand against it. I will continue to express my opposition to this wrong

74 Lewis, King: A Biography, pp. 294-96.
policy without in any way diminishing my activity in civil rights. . . .

As noted, the role of conflict is an important theme in King's conception of human community and nowhere is it more clearly illustrated than in his decision to speak out against Vietnam. King's outspoken position against the war earned for him the disfavor of other civil rights organizations and key supporters of SCLC. King, nevertheless, insisted that justice is universal and that the mandate of justice arises out of a fundamental conception of the interrelatedness of all life. Caught in the fires of controversy and sabotage, King's

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75 King, Press Conference, April 12, 1967, Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, King Library and Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

76 King commented on the relationship between conflict and progress in his refutation of the claims that the increasing violence and militancy of black groups were indications of the failure of his program of peaceful protest. King, *Where Do We Go from Here?*, pp. 12-13.

77 Since the St. Albay campaign, King had become an object of surveillance and scorn for J. Edgar Hoover, the powerful Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Lewis, *King: A Biography*, pp. 200-01. Hoover's dislike for King fermented into an all-out onslaught against him and the Civil Rights Movement. David J. Garrow argues that there are three successive phases of the FBI's assault on King: the charge of being a communist, his alleged immoral personal conduct, and being a pronounced political threat to American society. See David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1981), pp. 204-19.
understanding of human community was forged into a conceptual and ethical framework which allowed him to see the American struggle within the context of an international perspective which he called the "world house."\textsuperscript{78}

The World House

The personal and intellectual odyssey which began in the context of the black American experience (i.e., family, church, community, and education), his eclectic search through the corridors of higher education at Crozer Seminary and Boston University, and his practical engagement within the Civil Rights Movement provided the essentials from which King formulated his mature thinking regarding the conception, character, and actualization of world community. King's maturing vision of community is, therefore, a product of reflective thought and practical engagement which emerged from struggle and conflict. At the time of his death, his vision of community had become international in scope and he raised the fundamental problems of militarism, poverty, and racism as the major impediments to the actualization of human community.\textsuperscript{79} His recommendation for creative change that

\textsuperscript{78}King, \textit{Where Do We Go from Here?}, pp. 167-202.

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., pp. 173-86.
would culminate in world community was a call for a "re-
volution of values and priorities" that would be both
national and international in scope. He called upon America,
because of its unique democratic heritage and its great
resources of wealth and technology, to be the leader in
this revolution. King stressed, however, that a true
"revolution of values and priorities" would issue forth
in structural changes within the American economic and
political system and in its foreign policy.

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right
side of the world revolution we as a nation must
undergo a radical revolution of values. A true revo-
lution of values will soon cause us to question the
fairness and justice of many of our present and past
policies. A true revolution of values will look un-
easy on the glaring contrast between poverty and
wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look
across the seas and see individual capitalists of
the West investing huge sums of money in Africa, Asia,
and South America only to take the profits out with
no concern for the social betterment of the countries,
and say "This is unjust." It will look at our al-
liances with the landed gentry of Latin America and
say: "This is not just." The Western arrogance of
feeling that it has everything to teach others and
nothing to learn from them is not just.80

King had also come to a place in his thinking
in which he understood more clearly the dynamic tensions
at work between poverty, racism, and war within the

80King, The Trumpet of Conscience, Chapter 2,
"Conscience and the Vietnam War," in Washington, A Testa-
ment of Hope, p. 640.
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American society and their relationship to the exploitation of the poor and powerless abroad. 81 Shortly before his death in Memphis, SCLC had planned a "Poor Peoples Campaign" which would converge upon Washington, D.C. in April of 1968 and demonstrate nonviolently in massive civil disobedience until Congress acted on the abject poverty across the nation. He argued that such a national confrontation with the federal government by an inter-racial coalition of 3,000 poor whites, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and blacks (who would comprise the majority) would symbolically demonstrate the class-based economic and social discrimination inherent in the national policy. 82 He also argued that the national policy of discrimination of the poor and ethnic minorities was but a microcosm of the nation's foreign policy which was most dramatically illustrated in the Vietnam War. King stated that, "The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit." 83 It was King's


82 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, pp. 449-52.

position that the problems of poverty and race within America are international in scope and therefore "inseparable from an international emergency which involves the poor, the dispossessed, and the exploited of the whole world." 84

King's personal and intellectual struggle to achieve the vision of a world house in which sectionalism gave place to ecumenicity and loyalties to race, class, religion were superceded by a greater loyalty to the interrelatedness of all life, came to an abrupt end in Memphis, Tennessee where he had joined sanitation workers in a strike for improved wages and working conditions. This campaign, like the many others in which he had been involved, was symbolic of his life-long quest to bring to realization his ideal of the beloved community. His closing words in his book, Where Do We Go from Here?, captures King's forthright and urgent appeal to create world community and frames the story of his life and ministry: "We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. This may well be mankind's last chance to choose between chaos and community." 85

84 Ibid., p. 652.
85 Ibid., p. 191.
The Intellectual Sources of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.

King was a highly eclectic thinker who appropriated knowledge from a variety of sources in the shaping and molding of his ideal of community. This brief accounting of the intellectual sources which contributed to the development of the ideal of community in King, will be concerned primarily with the intellectual foundations at Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, and Boston University.

Morehouse College

As stated earlier, the stimulating intellectual atmosphere of Morehouse College was well suited for the budding young preacher and theologian. The two men who were most responsible for King's early intellectual appreciation of religious life were Professor George Kelsey and Dr. Benjamin E. Mays. Kelsey was Professor of Religion

86 The major intellectual sources of Martin Luther King, Jr. have been documented at several places: Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved; Ansbro, Making of a Mind; Carter, ed., Debate and Understanding, "The Philosophical and Theological Influences in the Thought and Action of Martin Luther King, Jr."; Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound; Watley, Roots of Resistance, pp. 17-47; and Lewis, King: A Biography.
and Philosophy and Director of the School of Religion at Morehouse College from 1945 to 1948. He challenged King "to see that behind the legends and myths of the book were many profound truths which one could not escape." Kelsey also condemned the excessive emotionalism of churches as obsolete and useless and convinced King of the need for a more intellectual and social approach to the question of Biblical faith. King credits Kelsey with challenging him to reformulate his attitudes toward religion and the church.

Benjamin Mays, the stalwart and scholarly President of Morehouse College from 1940-1967, had also served as mentor and friend to Howard Thurman when he was a student at Morehouse. Through his weekly chapel messages and personal counseling, he made a singular impact on the religious and intellectual development of King. In men like Mays and Kelsey, King saw models of black preachers with keen intellectual skills and heightened social consciousness which he felt were necessary to

87 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 19.


89 See Jones, Candle in the Dark, pp. 133-231; and Mays, Born to Rebel, pp. 265-74.
address the overwhelming social problems confronting his people.

King's first formal introduction to philosophy was in the classroom of Professor Samuel Williams. At Morehouse, each student was required to take Williams's two-semester course in Philosophy. In Williams's class, King was introduced to some of the great thinkers who would serve as his intellectual companions and resources throughout his career. Among these were Socrates, Plato, Machiavelli, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and most notably Henry David Thoreau. King was to remark later:

During my student days at Morehouse I read Thoreau's Essay on Civil Disobedience for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance.\(^9^0\)

Another professor who made a lasting contribution to the intellectual formation of King during his college career was Gladstone Lewis Chandler, professor of English. Chandler helped King to master the art of elucidating ideas in the powerful oratorical fashion he had first encountered in the black church experience. In his sophomore year, under the able supervision of Chandler, he won second place in the Webb Oratorical Context.\(^9^1\)

\(^{90}\)King, *Stride*, p. 73.

Perhaps the most penetrating and lasting contribution to King at this stage of his intellectual development came from Walter Chivers who supervised King in his major in Sociology. Chivers, who had done extensive investigations into lynchings in the South,92 taught his students that racial injustice and economic injustice were inseparable allies in the exploitation of black people. He pointed out, "Money is not only the root of evil; it is also the root of this particular evil--racism."93 Chivers's analysis was confirmed for King during summer breaks when he worked as a laborer in order to identify more intimately with the plight of his underprivileged black brothers and sisters. Chivers was helpful, therefore, in helping King to understand that racism was not simply a personal phenomenon, but that it had its sources and vitality in the indigenous economic and political systems which conspired against black people.

George Davis

The major professor at Crozer who contributed to King's theological and philosophical underpinnings of

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92 See Ansbro, Making of a Mind, p. 76.
93 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 18.
community was George W. Davis, Professor of Christian Theology from 1938 to 1960. Davis was a representative of the evangelical liberal tradition which stressed a personality-centered Christianity, reason and experience, witness to moral and social issues, theological personalism, and an evolutionary revelation of faith.

Smith and Zepp identified five major themes which appear in Davis's writings that influenced King: 1) the existence of a moral order in the universe; 2) the activity of God in history; 3) the value of the personal; 4) the social character of human existence; and 5) the ethical nature of the Christian faith. Ansbro claims that Davis's influence upon King can be seen most clearly in respect to King's conception of the necessity of agape which reveals the inherent worth of human personality and his understanding of divine providence and history.

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94 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 21
95 See Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 23; see also Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, pp. 27-29.
96 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, pp. 21-31.
97 Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 15-16.
98 Ansbro pinpoints Davis's understanding of moral progress in history which traces the evolution of the human spirit "to higher levels of self-consciousness,
While at Crozer, King also read major religious, theological and philosophical thinkers who would serve as significant intellectual sources in his conception of community. King acknowledges his indebtedness to Walter Rauschenbusch for giving him a theological basis for the social concern with which he had grown up. Although he felt that the social gospeler had "fallen victim to the nineteenth-century 'cult of inevitable progress' which led him to a superficial optimism concerning man's nature," he agreed with Rauschenbusch's insistence that the gospel freedom, and active participation by the individual in communal activity." The shifts Davis discovered in the historical process are: 1) the transition from external controls to internal sanctions; 2) the transition from the impersonal to the personal; and 3) the transition from rank individualism to the solidarity of the social group, which enhances the realization of the personal. Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 63-70.

99 King, Stride, p. 73. Actually King's criticism that Rauschenbusch fell victim to "the cult of inevitable progress" is somewhat questionable. It is important to note that though Rauschenbusch makes numerous suggestions and pronouncements regarding "christianizing the social order" he does at points attempt to balance these claims with an articulate realism. Rauschenbusch also recognized that "however evolution may work in the rest of creation, a new element enters when it reaches the ethical nature of man. Ethically man sags downward by nature." Quoted in Robert T. Handy, The Social Gospel in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 281.
is holistic, that it deals with both the person's spiritual and physical well-being. He says:

> It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.\(^{100}\)

King was deeply impressed by Rauschenbusch's treatment of the Kingdom of God. For Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom of God is the interpretive paradigm by which one must exegete history.\(^{101}\) The Kingdom of God functions both as an ideal to attain and the source of hope in human history. For Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom of God is "the progressive social incarnation of God" which is manifested in association and cohesion implanted by the Spirit of God.\(^{102}\) John Cartwright has shown that Rauschenbusch is indebted to Josiah Royce, who introduced the term "beloved

\(^{100}\)King, *Stride*, p. 73.


community" as a solidaristic view of human society. The terms "Kingdom of God" and the "beloved community" are used synonymously by King.

King says that after reading Rauschenbush, he began a serious study of the social and ethical theories of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham, Mill, and Locke. While these thinkers taught King a great deal about the nature of the self and social reality, it was Karl Marx who challenged him to take a more critical look at the economic determinants in the history and development of human society and the concomitant need for social justice. After studying Marx's theory of history and the evolution of the State outlined in Das Kapital and The Communist Manifesto and other interpretive works on Lenin and Marx, King claims that he

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103 Cartwright, "Foundations of the Beloved Community," Debate and Understanding 1:3 (Semester II, 1977), Boston University, Martin Luther King, Jr. Afro-American Center, p. 172.

104 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 129; see also Cartwright, "The Social Eschatology of Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Essays in Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Evanston: Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Leiffer Bureau of Social and Religious Research, 1971), p. 3.

105 King, Stride, pp. 74-75.
ultimately rejected Marx's materialistic interpretation of history, his ethical relativism, and the political totalitarianism of the state.\textsuperscript{106} He argued, however, that there were notable points in the Marxist analysis of society which he found challenging. Despite communism's "false assumptions" regarding the nature of human persons, the destiny of human history and its "evil methods," he felt that its emphasis on a classless society and its concern for social justice were truths that Christians ought to accept.\textsuperscript{107} His reading of Marx reinforced his early concern for the gulf of inequity which existed between the "superfluous wealth and abject poverty" he had witnessed in his youth. His dialectical analysis of Marx led him to respond:

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., pp. 74-75. This analysis is also found in King's sermon, "How Should a Christian View Communism?", in \textit{Strength to Love}, pp. 96-105, which was a later version of a sermon he preached in Atlanta in 1952 entitled, "The Challenge of Communism to Christianity." See also "Melvin Watson to King," August 14, 1952, Martin Luther King Collection, Boston University. Watson was a professor of religion at the Morehouse School of Religion and a confidant of the King family, especially for young Martin. Watson also represents a crucial link between the two subjects of this dissertation, King and Thurman. In the correspondence noted above, his critique of King's presentation of communism reveals that Watson felt that the future civil rights leader was unclear in respect to Marx's position on historical materialism and communist attitudes toward religion and race.

\textsuperscript{107}King, \textit{Stride}, p. 75.
In so far as Marx posited a metaphysical materialism, an ethical relativism, and a strangulating totalitarianism, I responded with an unambiguous "no"; but in so far as he pointed to weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian churches, I responded with a definite "yes." 108

Another formidable challenge to King's positive view of Christian faith to effect constructive change in society came from Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's scathing criticism of Judeo-Christian morality as a glorification of weakness and his exultation of the will-to-power represented in a new breed of "supermen," disheartened King to the point that he despaired of the power of redemptive love to address the momentous concerns of social justice. 109

In the midst of this personal and intellectual struggle, a beam of hope fell on the darkened and confused mental skies of King when he heard a powerful sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, who had recently returned from a

108 Ibid., p. 77. It is instructive to note that King's dialectical treatment of communism and capitalism utilizes the paradigm of community which he refers to as the Kingdom of God. He says, "The Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both." Ibid., p. 77.

109 See Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 1-2; see King's reflections on Nietzsche in Stride, pp. 77-78.
pilgrimage to India to see Gandhi. In the sermon, he extolled the message of nonviolent resistance taught by Mahatma Gandhi. King was so moved by Johnson's "profound and electrifying" message that he left the meeting and purchased a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works.

Several scholars have made a connection between Thurman's earlier trip to India in 1936 and its indirect influence on King's interest in Gandhi's method of nonviolent resistance after hearing Johnson's message. S. P. Fullwinder suggests that Thurman may have been the first person to plant the "seed of nonviolent suffering" in the Negro mind. He credits Thurman with having interested Johnson in the significance of Gandhi's philosophy for the black struggle in America. After Johnson's trip to India to see Gandhi, he began a campaign to spread the philosophy of nonviolent resistance which King heard at the Fellowship House of Philadelphia.

King was deeply fascinated by the campaigns of nonviolent resistance by which Gandhi challenged the moral

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110 See earlier discussions of Mordecai Johnson's relationship to Thurman.
111 King, Stride, p. 78.
112 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, pp. 118-19.
conscience of the British through the power of "Satyagraha." Before reading Gandhi, King had despaired of the ethics of Jesus as being a viable means of transforming social evil. But after reading Gandhi, he saw the redemptive possibilities inherent in the method of non-violent resistance which enabled one to strive toward the actualization of human community. 113 He reflected:

It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and non-violence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months. . . . I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method opened to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. 114

King's intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence continued with his reading of Reinhold Niebuhr. He notes that there was a period in his development in which he became so enamored by Niebuhr that he almost "fell into the trap of accepting uncritically everything he wrote." 115

James P. Hanigan observed that "King's class notes and papers reveal more work on Niebuhr than on any other author, except the personalist philosophers with whom he dealt

113 King, Stride, p. 78.
114 Ibid., p. 79.
115 Ibid.
at Boston University." These statements are but small indicators of the impact of Reinhold Niebuhr upon King's understanding of human community.

King's indebtedness to Gandhi and the love ethic of the Sermon on the Mount provided the basis for his formulation of nonviolent resistance. Niebuhr, however, played an equally important role in "purging" King of any sentimentalistic, romantic attachment he might have had to nonviolent resistance. Niebuhr contended, as King indicates, "that there was no intrinsic moral difference between violent and nonviolent resistance." Niebuhr argued that nonviolence, like violence, also coerces and destroys because "it enters the field of social and physical relations and places physical restraints upon the desires and activities of others." The basic distinction between violence and nonviolence for Niebuhr, is

116 James P. Hanigan, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Shaping of a Mind," Debate and Understanding 1:3 (Semester II), Martin Luther King, Jr. Afro-American Center, p. 196.

117 King, Stride, p. 79.

not in degree, but in the aggressive character of one
and the negative character of the other. 119

The absolutizing of nonviolent resistance as an
ethical ideal or imperative was rejected by Niebuhr. His
dialectical interpretation of human nature, sin, and his­
tory would not allow him to locate grace in time. 120 This
was the essence of King's criticism of Niebuhr's position.

King argued that:

Niebuhr's ultimate rejection of pacifism was based
primarily on the doctrine of man. He argued that
pacifism failed to do justice to the reformation doc­
trine of justification by faith, substituting for
it a sectarian perfectionism which believes "that divine
grace actually lifts men out of the sinful contradic­
tions of history and establishes him above the sins
of the world." 121

119 Ibid., p. 240; Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?", The Christian Century (March 30, 1932): 415; Reinhold
Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 252; Reinhold Niebuhr,
An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Seabury

120 Niebuhr maintained that "There can be nothing
absolute in history, no matter how frequently God may
intervene in it. Man cannot live without a sense of the
absolute, but neither can he achieve the absolute. He
may resolve the tragic character of that fact by religious
faith, by the experience of grace in anticipatory terms,
but he can never resolve in purely ethical terms the con­
flict between what is and what ought to be." Niebuhr,
"Must We Do Nothing?", p. 417.

121 King, Stride, p. 80.
Niebuhr, however, did see nonviolent resistance as the most viable social strategy for black Americans, and this may very well have had an understandable impact upon King. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he wrote that the "emancipation of the Negro race in America probably waits upon the adequate development of this kind of social and political strategy." 122

King acknowledged the contributions of Niebuhr's thought upon his own development at several significant points: 1) Niebuhr's refutation of false optimism in segments of Protestant liberalism; 2) his insight into human nature, i.e., in individuals as well as groups and nations; 3) the relationship between sin and power; and 4) the reality of social evil. 123

Boston University

When King graduated from Crozer in June 1951, he was still grappling with Niebuhr's critique of nonviolent resistance. It was at Boston University, however, that he was able to intellectually resolve the question of the possibility of agape as a means of creating human


community. Although King was deeply influenced by Niebuhr's critique of nonviolent resistance, he finally rejected Niebuhr's "pessimism concerning human nature" under the influence of the personalists with whom he studied at Boston University. He rejected Niebuhr's theological presupposition regarding the imperfectibility of human nature in history. In a research paper written later while he was a student at Boston University, King appealed to the immanence of agape in human nature and history as being concretely conceived. He argued with Walter Muelder that Niebuhr had failed to appreciate the historical effectiveness of agape. Muelder had written:

There is a Christian perfectionism which may be called a prophetic meliorism, which, while it does not presume to guarantee future willing, does not bog down in pessimistic imperfectionism. Niebuhr's treatment of much historical perfectionism is well-founded criticism from an abstract ethical viewpoint, but it hardly does justice to the constructive historical contributions of the perfectionist sects within the Christian fellowship and even within the secular order. There is a kind of Christian assurance which releases creative energy into the world and which in actual

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124 King, *Stride*, p. 83.
125 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
126 See King, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," May 9, 1952, King Collection, Boston University, XIV, no. 58.
fellowship rises above the conflicts of the individual or collective egoism. 127

King's major philosophical and theological studies at Boston University were with Edgar Sheffield Brightman and Harold DeWolf. It was mainly under these thinkers that King studied personalism. 128 Under Brightman's tutelage, King began studying the philosophy of Hegel. Although the study was primarily concerned with Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, King also read his Philosophy of Right and Philosophy of History. 129 King rejected Hegel's "absolute idealism" because he felt it tended to converge the One and the many, but he was deeply influenced by the Hegelian contention that "truth is the whole." This contention led King to a philosophical method of rational


128 Smith and Zepp suggest that there are four significant themes of personalism which shaped King's intellectual quest for the beloved community: 1) the inherent worth of personality; 2) the personal God of love and reason; 3) the moral law of the cosmos; and 4) the social nature of human existence. Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 118. King stated that personal idealism was his basic philosophical position. He credits personalism with two valuable contributions to his developing religious and ethical convictions: the metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God and a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality. King, Stride, p. 82.

129 Ibid.
coherence which is a key personalistic doctrine.\textsuperscript{130} The Hegelian dialectic enabled King to develop a methodology for dealing with conflict and struggle, both in the intellectual and practical, social arenas. He maintained that the dialectical process enables one to see how growth comes through conflict and struggle.\textsuperscript{131} The dialectical method also gave King a keen analytical tool by which he could exegete the inner tensions of the human psyche and life.\textsuperscript{132}

After the death of Brightman, Harold DeWolf who was the dominant influence upon King's theistic personalism, became his major professor. King was deeply influenced by DeWolf's treatment of a personal God of love and power.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130}Brightman had written that rational coherence is a method of verification of truth. He maintained that a proposition was true if it met the following criteria: 1) it is self-consistent; 2) it is consistent with all known facts of experience; 3) it is consistent with all other propositions held as true by the mind that is applying this criterion; 4) it establishes explanatory and interpretative relations between various parts of experience; and 5) these relations include all known aspects of experience and all known problems about experience in its details and as a whole. Brightman, \textit{A Philosophy of Religion}, p. 128.

\textsuperscript{131}King, \textit{Stride}, p. 82.

\textsuperscript{132}See especially his sermon, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," in King, \textit{Strength to Love}, pp. 9-16.

\textsuperscript{133}See Ansbro's treatment of DeWolf's influence on King's conception of God, \textit{Making of a Mind}, pp. 38-63.
Unlike his predecessor, Brightman, who maintained that God is limited in power by a "nonrational Given," DeWolf held an absolutist view of God which maintained that the loving purposes of God will ultimately be victorious over evil, and that any limitations in God's power were self-imposed for the sake of human freedom and perfection. Every evil, according to DeWolf, has a positive place in the ultimate purposes of God.

King's philosophical appetite was not confined to Boston University; he also studied at Harvard University where he read existentialists like Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Kierkegaard,

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134 Brightman referred to his position as "theistic finitism." He argued that "A theistic finitist is one who holds that the eternal will of God faces given conditions which that will did not create, whether those conditions are ultimately within the personality of God or external to it. . . . All theistic finists agree that there is something in the universe not created by God and not a result of voluntary self-limitation, which God finds as either obstacle or instrument to his will." Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, pp. 313-14.

and Sartre. 136 His qualifying examinations at Boston University reveal that he was well acquainted with the Milesian, Pythagorean, Eleatic, and Atomist philosophers of Greece. 137

The experiential and intellectual sources of King's understanding of the beloved community are rooted in an existential quest for a method to overcome the barriers to community which he ultimately identified as racism, poverty, and militarism. But it should be noted that his initial search began in the context of the black community of Atlanta, Georgia where he struggled with the ominous presence of racism and segregation. The intellectual probings at Morehouse, Crozer, and Boston University cannot be separated from his experiential struggles to find a way to overcome the obstacles which he felt impeded human community.

136 Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, p. 38; Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 41.

137 Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 41.
CHAPTER VII

THE ACTUALIZATION OF COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT
OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

This portion of the analysis of the ideal of community in the thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. is concerned with the actualization of community. The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part of the chapter is an analysis of King's treatment of the barriers to community. It will proceed as follows: 1) the nature and role of evil in life; the question of theodicy, human suffering, and redemptive suffering; and 2) the nature of sin and its relationship to evil; the personal and social dimensions of sin.

The second part of the chapter will treat King's recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community. The analysis will proceed as follows: 1) community as the norm and goal of the moral life; 2) love (agape) as the means of the actualization of community; and 3) community, religion and social action.
Barriers to Community

The Nature and Role of Evil

For King, evil is a force in the world which works against wholeness and harmony in creation. Evil is real and is characterized by disorder, disruptiveness, intrusion, recalcitrance, and destruction. It is not an illusion or error of the mind, rather it is rooted in life itself. King believed that "there is a tension at the heart of the universe between good and evil." Nevertheless, evil is not ultimately victorious over goodness, for it carries within itself its own seeds of destruction. Goodness ultimately defeats evil because God is more fundamental than evil.

Christianity clearly affirms that in the long struggle between good and evil, good eventually will emerge as victor. Evil is ultimately doomed by the powerful, inexorable forces of good. Good Friday must give way to the triumphant music of Easter.


2 King, "The Death of Evil on the Seashore," pp. 76-77.

3 King, "Unfulfilled Dreams, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA, March 3, 1968, King Archives, Atlanta, GA, p. 3.

4 King, "Death of Evil on the Seashore," p. 82.

5 Ibid., p. 77; see also King, "A Knock at Midnight," in Strength to Love, p. 65.
King does not offer an explanation for the origin of evil, but he emphasizes the biblical perception of evil as real and destructive. King treats the question of theodicy by insisting that God placed a limitation on God's power in order to insure human freedom and responsibility. King maintained that if God's will were forced upon persons then God would defeat the divine purpose and would "express weakness rather than power." Human persons must be free to choose God's purpose and to cooperate with God in the creation of the beloved community. The question of the role of natural and moral evil and human suffering is understood as part of the creative purposes of God for King. "I do not pretend to understand the ways of God or his particular timetable for grappling with evil. Perhaps if God dealt with evil in the overbearing way we wish, he would defeat his ultimate purpose." Evil, however, is never caused by God, but is the by-product of God's self-imposed limitation on

6 King, "The Death of Evil on the Seashore," p. 76.
7 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
8 King's treatment of the problem of evil is deeply indebted to Harold DeWolf. See Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 53-60.
God's power. To suggest that God causes or ordains evil, according to King, is to deny human freedom and to resign to fatalism. God permits evil in order to preserve human freedom, yet God does not cause it.

A healthy religion rises above the idea that God wills evil. Although God permits evil to preserve the freedom of man, he does not cause evil. That which is willed is intended, and the thought that God intends for a child to be born blind or for a man to suffer the ravages of insanity is sheer heresy that pictures God as a devil rather than as a loving Father.10

King firmly believed that human suffering can be redemptive. In a revealing testimony on his perception of personal suffering, King emphasized how his trials had taught him the value of unmerited suffering.11 He suggests that there are three ways in which one can deal with suffering: one may react in bitterness, one may withdraw, or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force.12 To choose the latter is to cooperate with the divine purposes of God who is revealed in the crucified Christ of Calvary.13 In suffering, God gives the sufferer


12 Ibid., p. 41; see also King, "Shattered Dreams," pp. 87-90.

interior resources to sustain and enable him/her to transform the "spear of frustration" into "a shaft of light." Human suffering is overcome as the person freely chooses to cooperate with God in the struggle against evil.

Evil is overcome, however, not because of the individual's struggle against it, but because of God's power to defeat it. When the sufferer chooses to become a co-sufferer with Christ, pain is transformed into a creative good.

Almost anything that happens to us may be woven into the purposes of God. It may lengthen our cords of sympathy. It may break our self-centered pride. The cross, which was willed by wicked men, was woven by God into the tapestry of world redemption.

The cross is the interpretive paradigm for redemptive suffering. It symbolizes the love of God in Christ which is expressed in redemptive suffering. "Everytime I look at the cross," says King, "I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ."

It was in this theological framework that King understood the historical suffering of black Americans. He believed that in the unmerited suffering of black Americans lay the redemption of America.\(^{19}\) King felt that the redemptive suffering of black Americans could inject "a new meaning into the veins of history and civilization."\(^{20}\) He often suggested that by virtue of their historical suffering and oppression, black Americans were naturally suited for the role of suffering servants in the American context.\(^{21}\) Nonviolence, for King, is the method through which redemptive suffering of black Americans is most effectively expressed.\(^{22}\) Black Americans are entrusted

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20 King, "Address to the Initial Mass Meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association," Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, December 5, 1955, King Archives, Atlanta, GA.


22 King, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," New South (December 1961): 6; "Nonviolence is power," writes King, "but it is the right and good use of power. Constructively it can save the white man as well as the Negro." King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 59.
with the unique responsibility of loving, forgiving, and creating the environment in which reconciliation between the races can take place.\textsuperscript{23}

In summary, in the thought of King, evil is real and destructive. It is an "intruder" in the universe which works against wholeness and harmony in God's creation.\textsuperscript{24} At the heart of the universe there is a struggle between good and evil. Goodness, however, is ultimately victorious over evil because it is rooted in the power of God. King treats the problem of evil by maintaining that for the sake of human freedom and responsibility, God imposed self-limitations on the divine power. Human persons are therefore free to choose to cooperate with God's benevolent purposes or to cooperate with evil. Human suffering is understood by King to be the result of the presence of evil in the world. Suffering, however, can be transformed into a creative force if it is aligned with the purposes of God. Redemptive suffering is the power to overcome evil in the world. The struggle of


\textsuperscript{24}King, "Answer to a Perplexing Question," p. 127.
black Americans is a redemptive possibility in America and the world, if they choose to become co-workers with God. Nonviolence is the method through which redemptive suffering is enacted in the world.

The Nature of Sin

King also recognized the prevalence of sin in human existence. King's treatment of sin is rooted in the existential struggle between freedom and finitude. King suggests that sin is a product of the "civil war of the soul" or the "tragic schizophrenic personality" which wills righteousness but is unable to attain it. This is a product of King's dialectical anthropology. King did not concentrate on the individual's struggle with sin, rather he stressed the social manifestations of sin in selfishness, pride, and ignorance. For King, sin is distinguished from evil in that it involves human volition, freedom and responsibility. Sin is related to evil in that egoism, selfishness, and ignorance lead one to cooperate with the enterprises of malevolence.

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25 King, "Loving Your Enemies," p. 49.
26 King, "Unfulfilled Dreams," pp. 3-5.
27 King, "What Is Man?" The Measure of a Man, p. 10.
For King, sin is both formal and material. Formal sin refers to the willful act of choosing contrary to self-acknowledged obligations. Material sin, on the other hand, refers to choosing contrary to the actual will of God, whether or not that will is known. King inherited this distinction primarily from Harold DeWolf. King uses the language of "sin" and "ignorance" to designate formal and material sin respectively. When King refers to sin in the formal sense, he is speaking of consciously choosing to break self-acknowledged moral ideals. This understanding of sin has its roots in egoism and misdirected pride. This is the sin of Augustine when he cries out, "Lord make me pure, but not yet." King suggests that

... in a real sense the "isness" of our present nature is out of harmony with the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts us. We know how to love, and yet we hate. We take the precious lives that God has given us and throw them away in riotous living. We are unfaithful to those whom we should be faithful. We are disloyal to those ideals to which we should be loyal.

28 DeWolf, A Theology for the living Church, pp. 179-82.


30 Ibid.
Ignorance or material sin, for King, refers to moral blindness. King argued that many of the tragic expressions of sin such as war, racism, and economic injustice are the products of moral blindness. King's conviction that nonviolence as redemptive suffering for others is the only method for removing the barriers which impede community is related to this important distinction between formal and material sin. King's technique of moral suasion arises out of this fundamental belief that sin as ignorance is a barrier that the moral agent must overcome in order to realize inner harmony and to struggle for creative change in the world.

Sin, according to King, grows out of a fundamental need to be recognized and given attention. King felt that the desire to be recognized and understood is fundamental to wholeness in human personality, but inordinate and misdirected goods issue forth in disharmony and destructiveness to the self and to others. He agreed with the psychoanalyst, Alfred Adler, that the quest for

32 Ibid., p. 45.
34 King, "The Death of Evil on the Seashore," p. 77.
recognition and distinction is the basic impulse of life. Adler referred to this impulse as "the drum major instinct." The "drum major instinct," according to King, can be constructive or destructive; it depends ultimately on how the individual chooses to use it. If this basic instinct for recognition and gratification is not harnessed and disciplined, it is destructive to one's personality and to others. But if it is given in genuine love for others, it becomes a powerful creative force in establishing wholesome and harmonious human relationships.

Sin as Personal and Social

Sin, for King, is both personal and social. In its social manifestation, sin is a breach in relationship, not only with God, but in social relationships with others. The social nature of sin was King's dominant concern. He inherited much of his understanding of sin as a social phenomenon from Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr. King especially agreed with Niebuhr that in our collective lives sin rises to greater heights and to greater levels of

36 Ibid., p. 265.
37 King, Stride, p. 73.
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destructiveness. He identified racism, economic injustice, and war as examples of collective sin and barriers to world community.

While King's emphasis is essentially on the social manifestations of sin, it is important to note that he recognized personal sin as internal barriers that the moral agent must overcome in order to realize inner harmony and to struggle for creative change in the world. King, at various places, identifies these internal barriers as ignorance, fear, and hatred.

Ignorance, according to King, is a chief obstacle that must be overcome by the person who works for community. For King, ignorance refers to intellectual and spiritual blindness. He believed that ignorance is partly the cause of many of the great inhumane acts of history, i.e., the execution of Socrates by the citizens of Athens, the persecution of the early church by Paul, the church's rejection of the revolutionary insights of sciences, uncritical patriotism, etc. The crucifixion of Jesus, says

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38 Ibid., p. 13.

39 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 173-86. See also section entitled, "World House," in Chapter VI, for King's treatment of racism, poverty, and militarism.

King, was not executed by evil persons, but by blind men who did not know what they were doing. He says, "Blindness was their trouble; enlightenment was their need."\(^{41}\)

It is important to note that King does not equate ignorance with sin as disobedience, nonetheless, it is treated as a sin against the will and purposes of God. King's equation of ignorance with moral blindness is a crucial distinction in his nonviolent method of bringing truth to light on unjust situations where the conscience is addressed through moral suasion. The way of overcoming ignorance is by enlightenment. King's understanding of the question of ignorance and the need for enlightenment in the making of moral judgments grows out of his fundamental allegiance to philosophical and theological idealism, and moral suasion as a means of appealing to the conscience. It is a perspective which views situations of conflict and human striving in terms of the concepts of reason, truth, and meaning.\(^{42}\) At the heart of nonviolent direct action

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) "Moral suasionists, like philosophical idealists, appeal to ideas in the form of universalistic notions of reason, truth, and meaning; it is the reflection upon the appeal to ideas and values and truth that constitutes the crux of strategies for social change on the part of moral suasionists." Robert C. Williams, "Moral Suasion and Militant Aggression in the Theological Perspective of Black Religion," *Journal of Religious Thought* 30:2 (73-74): 27-50.
is the belief that enlightenment is capable of transforming the enemy into friend, and winning the opponent's commitment to the truth of the cause. The individual who works for community, therefore, is called upon to enrich his/her mind through education. Education, however, is not limited to academic achievement. Education is defined in broad terms by King, and it is his insistence that the pursuit of truth is available to all. King suggests that "the heart cannot be totally right if the head is totally wrong." King maintained that we are commanded to love God not only with our hearts and souls, but also with our minds. Intelligence is the only remedy for ignorance. Intelligence is "a call for open mindedness, sound judgment, and a love for the truth. It is a call for men to rise above the stagnation of closemindedness and the paralysis of gullibility." The "transformed nonconformist" is called upon to act out of informed conviction, not to social mores and customs which work against community.

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43 King, Stride, p. 84.
44 Ibid., p. 45.
45 Ibid.
The second internal barrier which must be overcome, according to King, is fear. King sees fear as essentially positive and creative. It is a natural physiological and psychological response to danger, but abnormal fear has a destructive quality which destroys both the individual and society. "Normal fear protects us; abnormal fear paralyzes us. Normal fear motivates us to improve our individual and collective welfare; abnormal fear constantly poisons and distorts our inner lives." 47

According to King, the problem of fear for the individual is not how to get rid of it, but how one masters it. The mastery of fear involves honest confrontation (truth), courage, faith, and love. 48 Honest confrontation involves a rational analysis of fear. When most fears are analyzed in the light of reason, they are discovered to be more imaginary than real. Some of our fears, according to King, are "snakes under the carpet." 49 Secondly, fears must be confronted courageously. Courage is the power of the mind to overcome fear; it is the "power of

47 King, "Antidotes for Fear," p. 117.
48 Ibid., pp. 117-20. Love is inclusive of truth, faith, and courage.
49 Ibid., p. 118.
life to affirm itself in spite of life's ambiguities," pains, and disappointments. 50 Thirdly, fears must be confronted in love. Hate, according to King, is rooted in fear. Racial hate and segregation are products of irrational fears which are based on ignorance and fear. Love, as understanding and organized goodwill, is the only remedy that overcomes the obstacle of racism. The irrational fears of many white persons, says King, could be absolved through education and redemptive suffering of the Negro.

The Negro must show them (white men) that they have nothing to fear, for the Negro forgives and is willing to forget the past. The Negro must convince the white man that he seeks justice both for himself and the white man. 51

A mass movement exercising love and nonviolence is the best way to achieve this end, according to King. The external barriers to community (war, racism, and poverty) find their origin in fear. 52 Fourthly, fear is mastered through faith. Faith refers to trust or confidence in the inherent goodness and justice of the universe which God has created. It is also the belief that God

50 Ibid., p. 119.
51 Ibid., p. 121. Parentheses added.
52 Ibid., p. 120.
is intimately engaged in the personal existence of the individual as well as in the world. King says, "The confidence that God is mindful of the individual is of tremendous value in dealing with the disease of fear, for it gives us a sense of worth, of belonging, and of at-home ness in the universe." 53

Only when fear is overcome at the individual level is the person able to respond to the external barriers that work against a harmonious social order. King, in a revealing testimony, shares how he overcame fear in the early days of the Montgomery bus boycott. After receiving threatening letters and telephone calls, fear for his life and family began to grow. In prayer to God, he found the "inner calm" to deal with his external situation. When his home was bombed three days later, he says, "I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with God had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life." 54

The other internal barrier to community is hate. Hate, according to King, is a destructive force which

53 Ibid., p. 125.
54 King, "Our God Is Able," in Strength to Love, pp. 113-14.
"scars the soul and destroys [the] personality" of its victim and of the one who hates. It has its genesis in irrational fears and ignorance. Racism is an expression of the irrational pathology of hate. King believed that white racists who are normally amiable and congenial in their day to day relationships, respond from an irrational and distorted sense of values when they are asked to accept Negroes as equals. The great tragedy of rac hate, he contends, is that it

... destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.

Hate also has a spiralling effect which issues forth in violence. The systemic violence inherent in economic injustice, war, and racism is a product of hate, ignorance, and fear. According to King, the chain reaction of hate can only be halted and overcome through the redemptive suffering of the hated. Love for the enemy is the true test of agape, and the only hope for the future of humankind which stands over the abyss of violent annihilation. King maintained that:

56Ibid.
57Ibid., pp. 51-52.
Upheaval after upheaval has reminded us that modern man is travelling along a road called hate, in a journey that will bring us destruction and damnation. Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival.  

In summary, the personal dimensions of sin reflected in the internal barriers to community: ignorance, fear, and hate are obstacles which the moral agent must overcome in his/her pursuit of the beloved community. The barriers are interrelated and must be consciously dealt with at a personal level as the individual struggles against systemic evil in the world. Inner spiritual and intellectual transformation are essential for external transformation of the social order. Love expressed in redemptive suffering for the other, for King, is the key which overcomes these barriers. Such love, it should be remembered, proceeds from an experience of spiritual regeneration and commitment to God. When a persons commit their lives to the power of God, they are enabled to overcome the internal barriers which obstruct personal wholeness and the systemic oppression in society reflected in poverty, racism, and war.  

In summary, King sees evil as an intruder in God's creation. Evil is positive and destructive and works  

\[58\text{Ibid., p. 47.}\]
against God's purposes for community. The question of evil as being part of the will of God is dismissed by King as contrary to divine benevolence. Evil exists, according to King, because of God's self-imposed limitation to assure human freedom and cooperation with the divine purposes for creation. King believed that though there is a tension at the heart of the universe between good and evil, ultimately goodness will triumph over evil. King's belief is rooted in the Christian affirmation of the efficacy of the cross and resurrection. King sees a resolution to evil as a fact accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ and in the proleptic realization of the Kingdom of God. Evil is overcome, according to King, not because of the individual's struggle to overcome it, but because of God's power to defeat it. For King this is most dramatically illustrated in the Cross of Christ.

King's treatment of sin is rooted in the existential struggle between freedom and finitude. This is a product of King's dialectical anthropology. King had a profound understanding of sin both as a personal and social phenomenon. King's understanding of the radical nature of sin within human personality and its heightened dynamic in social groups led him to a position which
rejected any suggestion that human agency alone could overcome the forces that work against community. King identified the barriers to community as racism, economic injustice, and war. These triplets of oppression, as he called them, are examples of collective sin. King was also aware of internal barriers that the individual had to overcome in order for community to become a reality. These he identified as ignorance, fear, and hatred.

**Overcoming the Barriers**

**Traditional Means of Overcoming Evil**

King argued that human persons have traditionally relied upon two methods for overcoming evil in the world. One is through reason. Through modern science and technology, King often stated, human beings have been able to reach great heights of discovery and victory over evils that have tormented humanity. Nevertheless the power of reason is inadequate to ultimately overcome the barriers of race, class, and poverty that work against community. The exalted optimism which arose from the birth of modern science has failed because it has forgotten the human capacity for sin.  

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59 King, "Answer to a Perplexing Question," p. 130.
When scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men. When we foolishly minimize the internal of our lives and maximize the external, we sign the warrant for our own day of doom.  

The second traditional method has been the belief that God alone will remove evil from the world. King suggests that this position is ultimately untenable because it is a fatalistic doctrine which relegates the human person to the status of a helpless invalid. Such a belief is born of pessimism and a misconception about the nature of persons and God. God nor persons by themselves will rid the world of evil, rather the overcoming of barriers which prevent community is a cooperative effort between God and persons.  

King believed that the barriers of evil and sin which have locked people in oppression can only be overcome through the human willingness to receive the gift of God in Christ which issues forth in regeneration and courage to struggle against the external forces that work against community. King argued that the triplets of oppression (militarism, racism, and poverty) are the great social

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60 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 172.
61 Ibid., pp. 131-33.
62 Ibid., pp. 135-36.
evils which must be overcome if the world is to survive. He recommended a revolution of values and priorities as the only way that these barriers could be overcome. Such a revolution of values, according to King, is rooted in love as the supreme unifying principle of life.63

Community as the Norm and Goal of the Moral Life

For King, the ideal of community serves as the goal toward which all life strives and the norm for ethical reflection. Specifically, for King, the beloved community is the Christian social ideal which is rooted in the interrelatedness of all life and in the unity of human existence under the guidance of a personal God of love and power who works for universal wholeness. The religious and the ethical are positively related in King. Faith serves as the point of departure for ethical reflection and informs his understanding of love as the means of actualization of community, the nature and role of the moral agent and the church in society.64

From the beginning to the end of his rich and controversial career, King upheld the vision of the

63 Ibid., pp. 190-91.
64 See Ervin Smith, The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr., pp. 40-42.
beloved community as the ultimate norm and goal for his struggle in the arenas of civil rights, economic justice, and for world peace. The interrelatedness of all life and the fundamental unity and interdependence of human existence are basic presuppositions in all of his thinking regarding the moral life. In one of his earliest articles, he indicated that the purpose of the Montgomery bus boycott "is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community." Later, near the end of his life, he spoke from a global perspective which utilized the same norm and goal as his basis for speaking on world peace.

Love as the Means of Actualization

Love is the ethical principle which creates and maintains community. Community and love are inseparable in the thought of King. Love is the *summum bonum* of life, which is found in the person and nature of God who is

65 King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," Phylon, vol. 18 (April, 1957), p. 30; see also This is SCLC, in Meier and Broderick, Negro Protest, p. 272, where he says, "Our ultimate goal is genuine group and interpersonal living--integration. Only through nonviolence can reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community be effected."

revealed in the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. "This principle," says King, "is at the center of the cosmos. It is the great unifying force of life. God is love. He who loves has discovered the clue to the ultimate meaning of reality." 67

King defined love as agape. He often compared his understanding of agapaic love to the kindred Greek notions of eros and philia. Eros, according to King, refers to aesthetic or romantic love. Philia refers to the intimate, reciprocal affection between friends. But agape goes beyond eros and philia in that it is creative understanding and redemptive goodwill for all persons. Agape is the love of God operative in human hearts which seeks to preserve and create community. 68 Unlike eros and philia, it is overflowing and seeks nothing in return. It simply loves because it is of God. "At this level," says King, "we love men not because we like them, nor because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess some divine spark; we love every man because God loves him." 69

68 King, Stride, pp. 86-87.
69 King, "Loving Your Enemies," in Strength to Love, p. 50
According to King, agapic love is expressed as altruism, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In his sermon on "Being a Good Neighbor," King delineates three ways in which love is altruistic. First, love is demonstrated as universal altruism. According to King, universal altruism goes beyond the boundaries of race, class, and other provincial loyalties. Such love is rooted in an understanding that all persons are created in the image of God and therefore are lovable because they bear in their individual personalities a common humanity which goes beyond external accidents of race, class, nationality, etc. King felt that the great tragedy of narrow provincialism, as in segregation, is that it fails to recognize the sacredness and universality of human personality. He contended that such a "spiritual myopia limits our vision to external accidents," and consequently, people outside of our limited ethical fields are treated as things, and not as persons with inherent value and worth. The moral implications of such narrow visions of humanity are far reaching and can be discerned in misdirected ideals of nationalism, economic injustice, and social isolation.

70 King, Strength to Love, pp. 26-35.
Universal altruism, however, enables us to see all persons as inherently equal with dignity and eternal worth. 72

Love is also expressed as dangerous altruism. Such love involves risk and requires sacrifice. Here love is other-directed and goes beyond the natural desire for personal security. The key question that this love asks in ethical situations which require neighborly concern for others is not "What will happen to me if I act lovingly in this situation?" Rather it asks, "What will happen to my neighbor, if I fail to act on his/her behalf?"

On the eve of his assassination, King said this was the question which motivated him to go to Memphis on behalf of the garbage collectors. 73 "The true neighbor," according to King, "will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others." 74

Love is also expressed as excessive altruism. Excessive altruism is concretely expressed in acts of

72 Ansbro suggests that King's perception of agape in this respect is indebted to George Davis, Harold DeWolf and other personalists who held that human personality, conceived as "imago dei," has the capacity for love which creates human community. Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 15-26.


sympathy. As such it is to be distinguished from pity which arises from an abstract understanding of humanity. Unlike pity, sympathy is concerned with particularity. "Sympathy is fellow feeling for the person in need--his pain, agony, and burdens." Examples of pity are the paternalistic endeavors of missionaries and philanthropic handouts which are devoid of true love and compassion. True love, as sympathetic concern for others, does not do something for others, but seeks creatively to do something with others. It is only in this respect, suggests King, that the dignity and self-worth of others are preserved.

Excessive altruism also goes beyond deontological decrees. It seeks not only to fulfill what is perceived as one's duty or that which is in compliance with law, it goes "the second mile." For King love is a "purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative" act which arises out of genuine concern for the neighbor. Therefore, it cannot be enforced by external decrees,

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75 See Thurman's treatment of "sympathy" as love and imagination in earlier discussion.

76 King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," p. 32.

77 King, Stride, p. 86.
but must be motivated by unenforceable, self-imposed sanctions. He makes a distinction between enforceable and unenforceable obligations. Enforceable obligations refer to moral demands (rules, laws, statues) which are imposed from without, while unenforceable obligations refer to the inner sanctions of persons which are self-imposed. 78 Unenforceable laws, according to King, "concern inner attitudes, genuine person-to-person relations, and expressions of compassion which law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify." 79 Enforceable obligations are human laws which insure justice; unenforceable obligations belong to higher law, rooted in the moral order of the cosmos, and they produce love. 80 Although behavior can be regulated by external decrees, morality cannot be legislated. This is the logic of his argument against the limits of desegregation as an enforceable demand and integration as an unenforceable demand. He maintained that

78 Here his indebtedness to personalism's treatment of the moral law of autonomy and Kant's categorical imperative are apparent. See earlier discussion of the moral law under the nature of persons in King.


80 Ibid.
Desegregation will break down the legal barriers and bring men together physically, but something must touch the hearts and souls of men so that they will come together spiritually because it is natural and right. 81

For King, the ultimate solution to the problem of community lies in the human willingness to be bound by the unenforceable obligation of the moral law which is within. This is the nature and scope of love as universal, dangerous, and excessive altruism. There are, however, two other very crucial, interrelated expressions of love which serve as means of actualization of community, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are salient expressions in King's understanding of love. For King, forgiveness is the loving act on the part of the wronged individual(s) which removes the barriers which inhibit authentic relationship between her/himself and the other who have been separated by ignorance, fear, hate, and violence. 82 Reconciliation is the result of forgiveness; it is the coming together of disparate parties that have been separated by internal and external barriers which work against


wholeness and harmony in relationships between God, persons, and the world. 83

Forgiveness is the product of moral predisposition; it is not an occasional act, but is part of personal character. The charge of Jesus to Peter to forgive his enemies seventy times seventy times, according to King, is not simply a matter of quantity, but of quality. He says: "A man cannot forgive up to four hundred and ninety times without forgiveness becoming part of the habit structure of his being. Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude." 84

Forgiveness, according to King, goes beyond the injunction of *lex talionis*, which actually perpetuates the vicious cycle of ignorance, fear, hate and violence, and lifts the person to a higher law, the law of love. 85 Love never seeks to humiliate its opponent, but always seeks to find a way of transforming enemy into friend. 86

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83 Although King never makes this distinction systematically, it is apparent throughout his works. See especially, the treatment of community ordered by love in "The Totality," where King's sermon, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" is analyzed.


86 Ibid., p. 52; King, *Stride*, p. 86.
This is the basis for reconciliation. In fact, King says, "Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again." Both grow out of the command to love the enemy. King contends that the degree to which we are able to forgive determines the degree that we are able to love our enemies.

In King's many statements regarding the need for the Negro to love white segregationists, the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation are fundamental. It is his insistence that the oppressed must develop the capacity to forgive if the beloved community is to become a reality. While the oppressor has responsibility to request forgiveness from the one(s) s/he has violated, the initiative to forgive is always the responsibility of the wronged person(s). King says, "The Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities, and fears." He suggests that this was the greatness of Jesus's redemptive
suffering on the Cross, his willingness to forgive his enemies. For King, the highest expression of love was when Jesus uttered the words from the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." According to King, a testament to the power of forgiveness and reconciliation exemplified in the suffering of Christ is the historical chronicle of failed kingdoms and empires which were built on force contrasted against the kingdom of love which Jesus established.

For King, love is not a sentimental, passive emotion, but the creative synthesis of a strong, rational principle wedded with sentience. King characterizes this combination of reason and sentience in the person as a "tough mind and a tender heart." Tough-mindedness represents for King, "incisive thinking, realistic appraisal, and decisive judgment." This rational principle which is part of love allows the individual to be discriminating and astute in making moral judgments. Tough-mindedness without tender-heartedness, however, can carry over into

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93King, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," in Strength to Love, p. 11.
a moral disposition which begets insensitivity, bitterness, and violence which destroy community. Hardcore rationality creates a false dichotomy between fact and value, science and religion, external and internal dimensions of life, and is ultimately responsible for the negation of human personality.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 9-12; King, \textit{Where Do We Go from Here?}, pp. 171-73.} The moral life, according to King, must continually uphold the creative synthesis between a disciplined mind and a tender heart. He says:

One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right if the head is totally wrong. Only through the bringing together of head and heart—intelligence and goodness—shall man rise to the fulfillment of his true nature.\footnote{King, "Love in Action," p. 45.}

Closely related to his understanding of the rational/sentient nature of love is King's correlation of love, justice, and power. For King, love is power to achieve justice.\footnote{Ansbro shows how King's treatment of love, justice, and power is appropriated from Tillich's analysis in Paul Tillich, \textit{Love, Power, and Justice} (New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Book, 1960), pp. 11, 49-50. First published in 1954. See Ansbro, \textit{Making of a Mind}, pp. 7-8.} Like Tillich, King did not see a necessary conflict between love, justice and power,
rather the three, properly understood, form a creative union which issues forth in wholeness and community. As noted earlier, King rejected Nietzsche's conception of Christian love as a glorification of weakness. King argued that Nietzsche failed to understand the true nature of Christian love as *agape* because he restricted love to the emotional level or "soft-mindedness." Consequently, Nietzsche identified love with the resignation of power. For King, the rational nature of persons, which incorporates freedom and self-transcendence, is the basis for their power over nature, time and space, and the crippling human circumstances that work against community. 97 Power, properly understood, King argued, "is the ability to achieve purpose." Love and justice are regulating ideals for power. Justice, however, for King, does not have ontological status, rather it is fulfilled in love as the *summum bonum* of life. For King, "Love that does not satisfy justice is no love at all. It is merely sentimental affection, a little more than what one would have for a pet. Love at its best is justice concretized. Love is unconditional." 98 Justice is the politico-social ideal

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97 King, "What Is Man," pp. 8-9; see earlier discussion under King's treatment of the nature of persons.

98 King, *Where Do We Go from Here?*, pp. 89-90.
which "at its best is love correcting everything that stands in the way of love." Power, therefore, without love, according to King, "is reckless and abusive and . . . love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice."\textsuperscript{99}

This was a critical argument for King because it enabled him to move beyond the Niebuhrian analysis of love as an impossible possibility in social and political affairs. Unlike Niebuhr's contention that justice is an approximation of love which can only be achieved in individual relationships, King actually grants to justice the potentiality of becoming one with love in an ontological union wedded with power. Walter G. Muelder, one of the personalists whom King credits as influencing his intellectual development, succinctly captures this crucial point in the following.

Since love is freely given, writers often contrast it with justice, which measures to each what is due and which supposedly can be coercively commanded. Justice and mercy are to be held in conflict, the one may be enforced and the other not. This supposed conflict arises when justice is first abstracted from love, with which it is in fact indivisible, and then treated as an absolute principle. But the limits of the idea of justice point to the larger context of love of which it is an indispensable aspect. When one thinks through any serious problem of justice, i.e., how to give persons their due, he is confronted

\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., p. 36.
by deep dimensions of integral responsibility. In the Bible the righteousness of God and his mercy are an indivisible whole. The components are distinguishable but not separable in him. His righteousness is a justice of mercy which offers salvation and reconciliation.  

Theologically, King resolves "the crisis of powerless morality and immoral power" by understanding justice within the context of the redemptive suffering of Christ. Along with Muelder, King believed that the Cross is the ultimate expression of the fact that "self-sacrificing and forgiving compassion are the ultimate fulfillment of person-in-community and the ultimate revelation of the character of God." King maintained that "Jesus eloquently affirmed from the cross a higher law," the law of love, which transcended "the old eye-for-an-eye philosophy" which is the demand of justice as expressed in lex talionis. The Cross is the symbol of the length that God will go to restore broken community. As co-workers with God, persons are called to create a just

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100 Muelder, Moral Law, pp. 169-70.
101 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 37.
102 Muelder, Moral Law, p. 170.
104 King, Stride, p. 87.
and loving society through redemptive suffering. King in a revealing personal testimony, writes:

My personal trials have taught me the value of unmerited suffering. . . . I have lived these past few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive. There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."105

Nonviolence: Love in Action

For King, love as redemptive suffering is the central theme which informs his understanding of nonviolent resistance. He maintained that it was through Gandhi's emphasis on love and nonviolence that he discovered the method of social reform which was both morally and practically sound for oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.106 For him, nonviolent resistance was more than a method of action, but a moral imperative, born of his Christian conviction which defined his way of life.107

106 King, Stride, pp. 78; Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 3-7.
107 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, pp. 132-38.
For King, nonviolent resistance is love in action which creates and preserves community. For King, *agape* is most concretely expressed in the philosophy of nonviolent direct action. In his famous recapitulation of his intellectual odyssey, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," he delineates six basic characteristics of his understanding of nonviolent resistance: 1) nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards, but it is ultimately the way of the strong man, i.e., it is not "passive" in the sense that it succumbs to evil, rather it actively seeks to confront the opponent with the error of his/her ways. "It is not passive nonresistance to evil, it is active nonviolent resistance to evil."  

2) Nonviolence does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent, but to win his/her friendship. As such its ultimate goal is redemption and reconciliation. "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. . . ."  

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109 King, *Stride*, p. 84.

110 Ibid.
3) Nonviolence makes a distinction between evil and the evil-doer. Here, King's understanding of the inherent goodness of all persons as bearing the image of God is operative. Therefore, nonviolent resistance is not directed at the persons themselves, but against the forces of evil by which they are victimized.\textsuperscript{111}

4) Nonviolent resistance emphasizes redemptive suffering. It is a willingness on the part of the votary to accept suffering without retaliation. King believed that redemptive suffering has tremendous educational and transformative power. Redemptive suffering is the highest expression of love as symbolized in the Cross of Christ.\textsuperscript{112}

5) Nonviolent resistance not only avoids physical injury, but psychological violence as well. "The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent, but he also refuses to hate him."\textsuperscript{113} Related to this belief is the idea that nonviolence recognizes the interrelatedness of all life. King maintained that to do harm to another is to harm oneself because human existence,

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.; also King, "Suffering and Faith," in Washington, \textit{A Testament of Hope}, pp. 41-42.
\textsuperscript{113} King, \textit{Stride}, p. 85.
as with all of life, is interdependent. Therefore, when whites uphold unjust statues of segregation, they ultimately hurt themselves.

6) Nonviolent resistance is based on the conviction that the universe is ultimately on the side of justice. The person who accepts nonviolence as a way of life, according to King, must also accept the belief in a creative force which works for universal wholeness. At the root of nonviolence is a deep faith in the future which is based on the belief in the moral order of the universe. Implied in the belief in a moral order is the belief in the ultimate actualization of community. 114

Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom

Nonviolence represented love in action for King. For him, it was the only method for achieving the beloved community. 115 A fundamental presupposition in King's thinking is the principle that means and ends must cohere. King maintained that "means and ends must cohere because the end is preexistent in the means." 116 If the end of

114 Ibid., p. 88.


a peaceful and just society is to be achieved, according to King, it must be accomplished by a method which is peaceful and just. Violence, whether physical or psychological, cannot achieve constructive and creative ends because it carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. This affirmation was the basis of his criticism of some advocates of Black Power. The philosophy of violent revolution, according to King, was not only impractical, but foremost it was immoral. King argued that as a practical method of revolution, violence is counter-productive for black Americans because of their relative size in relation to the population and their lack of resources and technology to sustain a revolution.  

King also maintained that Black Power's advocacy of violence failed to recognize the relationship between power and morality. "Power and morality," he explained, "must go together, implementing, fulfilling, and ennobling each other." Violence is immoral, for King, because it ultimately works against community. Nonviolence is the only practical and moral method which can bring

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117 King Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 56-59.
118 Ibid., p. 59.
119 Ibid., pp. 52, 61.
about genuine human community because the ends which it seeks are in coherence with the method itself.

King also rejected the argument for self-defense. Although he acknowledged that defense of property and person are constitutional rights, he maintained that there is a very thin line between self-defense and retaliatory violence. King believed that self-defense fails to address the real issues which are the causes of segregation, disenfranchisement, economic deprivation, etc. and actually furthers the vicious cycle of violence. In this sense, self-defense creates more problems than it solves. King argued that,

Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.120

King's political posture also informed his methodology for creating community. Politically, King was a reformist. Although some have labelled his latter years as a radical stage in his development, his basic political outlook still remained reformist.121 Coupled with his

120 King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," pp. 57-58.
121 See later discussion in this chapter regarding King's radicalism. See also Harold Cruse, Rebellion or Revolution? (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968), pp. 60-63.
reformist political posture, King believed that it was the divinely appointed mission of black and other oppressed peoples to save the soul of America through redemptive suffering.\textsuperscript{122} For King, this mission could only be accomplished by working for creative and constructive change within American society, not through violent revolution. Nonviolence as a strategy was the most complementary method to achieve this end.\textsuperscript{123} Therefore, liberation, for King, was not based on defeat or humiliation of the white man, but through the willingness of the Negro to suffer redemptively for his sake and to call the nation to a higher destiny.\textsuperscript{124} Liberation, in King's thinking, is inextricably bound to integration.\textsuperscript{125} Integration and liberation are analytically distinct, but practically they are inseparable. To be truly liberated within American society, King argued, requires that there be an interpersonal venture of cooperation and responsibility. Unlike other

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," pp. 58-59.
\item King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 57, 132-34.
\item Ibid., p. 61.
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nations where the oppressor is occupying a foreign land and is forced to leave after revolution, the American Negro and white man are both at home, and the situation can only be changed by the responsible sharing of power which is expressed in authentic, interpersonal living. Liberation, therefore, can only be achieved within the context of an integrated society. This places America in a unique place in world history and has implications for its destiny as a moral force in international affairs of peace and harmonious relations among other nations.¹²⁶

Nonviolence and Civil Disobedience

King's understanding of nonviolence as strategy for social change also included his belief that noncooperation with an evil system is a moral imperative. This belief informed his basis for nonviolent civil disobedience. Along with Thoreau, King felt that it was a moral obligation to disobey unjust laws. Unlike Thoreau, however, he believed that civil disobedience must be nonviolent.¹²⁷

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 61-62, 188-91.
An adequate understanding of King's view of civil disobedience demands an analysis of his conception of law. King made a distinction between just and unjust laws. King agreed with Aquinas that "an unjust law is no law at all." "A just law," he argued, "is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law." He further argued that "Any law that uplifts human personality is just" and that "Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." King stated this distinction more concretely by demonstrating the difference between just and unjust laws. He argued that an unjust law is a code that the majority inflicts upon the minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. An unjust law is also a code which the majority imposes upon the minority which the minority had no part in enacting or creating, i.e., segregated statutes came into being without the Negro's exercise of the ballot. A just law, King maintained, is the opposite. It is sameness made legal. It is a code which the majority, who happen to believe in that code, compel the minority (who had had opportunity through ballot to express their

128 King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 82.
dissent) to follow because they believe in the law themselves and consequently, are willing to be governed by the same. 129

King believed that one had not only a legal but a moral obligation to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. When one disobeys an unjust law for the sake of calling attention to circumstances which cripple and demean human personality, then that individual is showing the highest respect for law. The nonviolent resister, according to King, must not only disobey unjust laws but must be willing to accept the penalty for civil disobedience. Such an attitude of respect for the principle of law counters the charge of anarchy and uplifts the value of redemptive suffering for higher ends. 130

The techniques which King used in his campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience included marches, demonstrations, wade-ins, boycotts, and prayer pilgrimages. Underlying these tactical maneuvers was the basic presupposition that power and morality must be wedded in order to bring about creative social change. First, King

130 Ibid.
maintained that the primary purpose of nonviolent civil disobedience is to dramatize an evil by mobilizing the forces of goodwill and generating pressure and power for change.\textsuperscript{131} This underlying principle of strategy reflects King's understanding of the nature and role of conflict in the realization of human community and it underscores his thesis that the nonviolent campaign is ultimately directed at the evil system, not the individual.\textsuperscript{132}

Secondly, at work in his understanding of civil disobedience is the notion which was fundamental to the efficacy of redemptive suffering, i.e., that a time interval of sufficient duration is essential to bring about the projected change that issues forth in wholeness and reconciliation. While violence tends to be quick and efficient, nonviolence requires a type of "revolutionary patience."\textsuperscript{133} Although, King strongly opposed the kind of tolerance that breeds greater injustice,\textsuperscript{134} by implication his doctrinaire stance on liberation through

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," p. 60.
\item[132] Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 110-62.
\item[133] See earlier Thurman discussion on nonviolence.
\item[134] King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 80-82.
\end{footnotes}
integration and peaceful, nonviolent change, confirms the argument that social change requires patience which is rooted in steadfastness. 135

Thirdly, the forces of good will must be organized. King believed that the "children of darkness" tend to be wiser and better organized than the "children of light." King was both a theoretician and practitioner of this principle. 136 King fervently believed and practiced his words: "To produce change people must be organized to work together in units of power." 137 Critics of King's nonviolent stance who cite his strategy as lacking "real-ism" in effecting creative and constructive social change often fail to recognize that he was well aware of the nature and depth of recalcitrant, systemic evil and the need to be "realistic" in regards to power relationships. 138

136 King, "Somethings We Must Do," President's Address, Montgomery Improvement Association, Montgomery, Alabama, December 5, 1957.
137 King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," p. 60.
138 Walton, Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., pp. 77-102; see also earlier discussion of criticism of Black Power advocates and Malcom X; King, "The Death of Evil on the Seashore," in King, Strength to Love clearly outlines King's thinking in regards to evil and the unwillingness of oppressors to relinquish power without struggle. See especially, pp. 76-77, 82-83.
King's dialectical method of resolving conflict, however, would not allow him to maintain the "real" without the ideal, rather both are held in creative tension and resolved at the higher level of redemptive suffering in love. For King, the theological resolution of conflict is symbolized in God in Christ, who is revealed in redemptive suffering on the Cross. Jesus Christ, the ideal human personality, willingly suffers and dies in love as a symbol of God's willingness to share power and to create community. The moral resolution of conflict is demonstrated in the individual's willingness to become a co-sufferer with Christ for the realization of the beloved community. This is not to suggest that King's love ethic is born of a superficial sentimentalism, for as it has been demonstrated, King understood well the relationship between morality and power. King's emphatic position regarding the organization of power to achieve a just and loving society is a clear indication of his belief that oppressors do not relinquish power without struggle and conflict. His call for massive civil disobedience in The Poor People's March on Washington is an illustration of King's understanding of the need to

\[139\] King, *Stride*, p. 82.
confront immoral power with the power of love through non-violent direct action. During the latter months of his life, King said:

Nonviolent protest must now mature to a new level to correspond to heightened black impatience and stiffened white resistance. This higher level is massive civil disobedience. There must be a force which interrupts its functioning at some key point. That interruption must not, however, be clandestine or surreptitious. It is not necessary to invest it with guerilla romanticism. It must be open, and above all, conducted by large masses without violence. 140

Smith and Zepp suggest that King's matured understanding of nonviolence and massive civil disobedience reflects a critical change in strategy from "liberalism" to "radicalism." The former refers to social change through moral suasion, legislation, and education, which is basically reformist. 141 The latter refers to King's matured vision of radically transforming the priorities and structures of American society. Liberalism stresses persuasion; radicalism emphasizes power and coercion.


141 Early in his ministry, King foresaw the need to go beyond the false dichotomy between education and legislation as means to achieving equality within American society. King, Stride, pp. 17-19. Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 136-37; see also earlier discussion on "Montgomery: Proving Ground." He insisted instead on the need for economic and political organization in order to bring about genuine community. King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," pp. 60-61. See also Frank Morris, "A Dream Unfulfilled," in Cartwright, Essays in Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.
for the liberal, cooperation and consensus are the important social processes; for the radical, conflict and confrontation are important. As King became more and more radical in his thinking, he placed more and more stress upon power, coercion, conflict and confrontation.142

Even with changes in strategy, King's major concern remained that power be used to achieve the goals of the beloved community which is defined within the context of integration. To the end of his life, nonviolence remained the only practical and moral method to achieve human community. But the overall strategy and political position is essentially reformist. When King speaks of a "revolution of values and priorities" and of overcoming the triplets of oppression (poverty, racism, and war), he speaks within the framework of American democratic society with the willingness to suffer the penalties imposed by law for his civil disobedience.143 No where in his writings, sermons, or speeches does he speak of overthrowing the system. His political, economic, and social vision is one of transformation through nonviolent protest, not violent revolution.

In summary, King's understanding of love as redemptive suffering finds its most practical application

142 Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, pp. 137-38.
143 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 172-91.
in the method of nonviolent resistance. Nonviolent resistance, for King, is *agape* in action; it is both a method of bringing about constructive social change and a way of life. For King, love, law, and civil disobedience are not mutually exclusive ideas, rather they are seen as harmonious elements in one singular quest to create the beloved community. Power and morality are treated in a creative dialectic by King which is resolved theologically and morally in redemptive suffering for others. King's reformist political posture also informed his understanding of nonviolence as the only method for bringing into realization the beloved community. Since King defines liberation within the context of an integrated society, nonviolent resistance is the only viable method to create the kind of society and world in which love and justice reign. Such a vision of community requires a type of patience wedded with steadfast endeavor for social change. King was well aware of the cost of such a lofty vision. Near the end of his life he wrote:

There is no easy way to create a world where men and women can live together, where each has his own job and a house and where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if it is created in our lifetime, it will be done in the United States by Negroes and white people of good will. It will be done by people who have the courage to put an end to suffering by willingly suffering themselves rather than inflict suffering upon others. It will
be done by rejecting the racism, materialism and violence that has characterized Western civilization and especially by working toward a world of brotherhood, cooperation and peace.\textsuperscript{144}

King's recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community have been discussed. The barriers to community, according to King, can only be overcome by the power of agape. Agape is the ethical principle which creates community. Agape is expressed as altruism (universal, excessive, dangerous), forgiveness, and reconciliation. The true test of agape is the love of the enemy. In King's thinking, there is a correlation between love, power, and justice. Love is the power to achieve justice. Justice does not have ontological status, rather it is fulfilled in love. More specifically, justice is love concretized. Love is ultimately revealed through redemptive suffering for others. For King, the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ is the highest expression of agape and is the symbol of the length that God will go to create and preserve community. The moral agent, therefore, is under mandate to suffer redemptively for the sake of the other. The crisis of power and morality ("loveless power" and "powerless love") is resolved through redemptive suffering.

\textsuperscript{144}King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," p. 61.
Nonviolent resistance, for King, is love in action. Redemptive suffering is the key element which informs his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. King felt that nonviolence was the only moral and practical method for achieving community in American society and the world. The way of nonviolence is moral because the means which it employs informs the end which it seeks. A peaceful and just society or world, according to King, cannot be created through violent struggle because the method of violence only perpetuates the climate of violence which works against community.

Community, Religion, and Social Action

The Moral Agent

The discussion turns now to King's understanding of the nature and role of the moral agent and the church in social action. As stated, the nature of persons in the thinking of King includes the sacredness of human personality, human freedom and responsibility, the moral law, the rational nature of persons, the dialectical nature of persons, and the communitarian nature of personality. These respective themes in King's conception of persons inform his understanding of the moral agent and his/her responsibility to become a co-worker with God in the creation of the beloved community.
King's understanding of the moral nature of personality is religious. In King, faith precedes morality. While it is true for King that all persons are created in the image of God, yet there is "a tension at the heart of human nature" between good and evil which tends to drag persons down to lower levels of existence.\(^{145}\) Because of the dialectical nature of the self, there is an endless struggle between freedom and finitude which prevents the moral perfection of the individual. King affirmed with the Apostle Paul, "The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, I do." King concluded that "the 'isness' of our present nature is out of harmony with the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts us. We know how to love, and yet we hate."\(^{146}\) In other words, persons are powerless to realize the ideal of agape by their own will and power.\(^{147}\) For King, the power of human reason alone is insufficient to attain the moral ideal of love. The arrogant abuse of reason and freedom accounts for the moral irresponsibility that works against harmonious human relations, and ultimately,

\(^{145}\) King, "Unfulfilled Dreams," p. 5.

\(^{146}\) King, "What Is Man?", p. 12.

\(^{147}\) See earlier discussion on sin as a barrier to community.
against community.  

The humanist hope of redeeming the world through reason and science, according to King, is a product of "exalted Renaissance optimism," which attempted to free the mind of humankind, but forgot about the human capacity for sin. The only remedy for the question of human sin is the cure of grace. The grace of God, which is freely given, must be freely received by the penitent sinner. In commentary on the Parable of the Lost Son, King speaks symbolically of the son who returns home (to his original nature, the imago dei) to his father who freely forgives him for his waywardness. King suggests that this is the glory of the Christian religious experience: "that when a man decides to rise up from his mistakes, from his sin, from his evil, there is a loving God saying, 'Come home, I still love you.'"

King firmly believed that an experience of inner transformation was primary to involvement in social transformation. Salvation, however, is not equated with moral

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150 King, Stride, p. 82.
perfectionism, rather it is understood as an inner quality of life which issues forth in deeds of goodwill and love for the neighbor. "In the final analysis," says King, "what God requires is that your heart is right. Salvation isn't reaching the destination of absolute morality, but it's being in the process and on the right road." 152 The individual who opens his/her life to God in Christ, according to King, experiences a new birth and a new orientation of values which enables him/her to struggle for social transformation. King believed that "Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in an humble and loving spirit." 153 The regenerated individual is a "transformed nonconformist" in society, and following the way of Christ, is willing to suffer redemptively for others. 154 The "transformed nonconformist" refuses to cooperate with evil systems which exploit and destroy human personality, and willingly suffers the penalty of


154 King writes, "To be a Christian, one must take up his cross, with all its difficulties and agonizing and tragedy-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its marks upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which only comes through suffering." Ibid., p. 25.
law for his/her nonconformity. For the person who suffers redemptively for the sake of others, his/her life becomes a living sacrament of the Presence of God in the world which works for universal wholeness. 155

The Nature and Role of the Church

King's ecclesiology will be discussed in respect to 1) the nature of the church; 2) his understanding of worship as a social experience of spiritual unity; 3) the church as the moral custodian of society; and 4) the church as an institution for social change.

For King, the nature of the church is Christocentric, i.e., the church as the Body of Christ is the symbol of the beloved community in the world. 156 For King, the Christian church is the place in which agape is realized in common sharing and nurturing, and is a sign of faith, hope, and love for the world. 157 While Christ is the central figure of the Christian fellowship,

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the all-embracing, unifying principle of love is the key which binds other religious faiths in unity. ¹⁵⁸

For King, the church exists both in time and eternity; it is in the world, but not of the world. Its highest loyalty is to God who is revealed in Christ. King writes:

Living in the colony of time, we are ultimately responsible to the empire of eternity. As Christians we must never surrender our supreme loyalty to any time-bound custom or earth-bound idea, for at the heart of our universe is a higher reality--God and his kingdom of love--to which we must be conformed.¹⁵⁹

Secondly, the church is also the center of worship for the gathered community. King understood worship to be primarily a social experience which transcends all forms of sectarianism, class, and race.¹⁶⁰ Early in his pastoral ministry, King proclaimed that "worship at its best is a social experience with people of all levels of life coming together to realize their oneness and unity under God."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 253; see also King, Stride, p. 88.
¹⁶⁰ King, Where Do We Go from Here?, p. 190; see also King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," p. 253.
¹⁶¹ King, Stride, p. 10; see also King, "A Knock at Midnight," p. 63.
Thirdly, King believed that the church is the moral custodian of society. It is entrusted with the responsibility to both proclaim to the world and demonstrate in its fellowship the dynamics of human community. The church's role as moral custodian is first a call to demonstrate agape within its own fellowship. According to King, the great tragedy of the Christian church has been its conformity to unjust mores and customs of society within its own fellowship which work against human community. The racism reflected in the creation of Negro and white churches is a tragic expression of the disunity within the Christian church which scars the soul of the Body of Christ.\(^{162}\) The church's cooperation with classism and exclusiveness within its fellowship destroys its witness in the world.\(^{163}\) As moral custodian of society, the church is called to a prophetic role as a creative minority which refuses to conform to unjust statues of the State, but boldly and courageously confronts the systemic evils which prevent the realization of the beloved community. As the prophetic witness of Christ,

\(^{162}\)King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in Why We Can't Wait, p. 91; see also King, "A Knock at Midnight," p. 62.

\(^{163}\)Ibid., p. 63.
The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. 164

King believed that the church must be involved as an institution in the struggle for social justice. King maintained that the institutional church is entrusted with the "ideals of a higher and more noble order." 165

It is the ekklesia which gives moral guidance and direction to society, and willingly suffers the penalty for nonconformity and noncooperation with social evils which destroy human personality and ultimately impede the actualization of human community. 166 The moral failure of the church, according to King, is that as the very institution which should be in the forefront of the call for justice and peace in society, it has actually participated in and perpetuated social evils. 167 Its

164 Ibid., p. 62.
conformity to patterns of racism, exclusiveness, sectarianism, economic injustice, and violence has made it a thermometer which records and registers majority opinion, rather than a thermostat which regulates and transforms the temperature of society.  

While King was often critical of the black church for what he perceived as two extremes: classism and emotionalism, he also maintained that the role that the black church played in the Civil Rights Movement was a glorious example in the history of Christendom. From its beginning in Montgomery to Memphis, the black church was the central motivating force behind the movement. King felt that the witness of the black church in the Civil Rights Movement was reminiscent of the early Christians:

For never in Christian history, within a Christian country, have Christian churches been on the receiving end of such naked brutality and violence as we are witnessing here in America today. Not since the days of the Christians in catacombs has God's house, as a symbol, weathered such attack as the Negro churches.  


In summary, King believed that the nature and role of the church is to serve as the moral custodian of society. It is called to proclaim and to demonstrate in its fellowship, the power of agape to create community. The moral failure of the church is that it has conformed to the mores and customs of society which work against community. King called upon the church to recapture the zeal of the early Christians and to see themselves as citizens of two worlds, of time and eternity. The church, for King, must participate as an institution in the struggle for social justice. It must be the true ekklesia of Christ in the world. The black church, for King, symbolized the authentic mission of the church in society through its redemptive suffering for justice in the Civil Rights Movement. For King, the moral agent derives his/her strength from the gathered community in worship, but his understanding of the church is decidedly social in its formation and intentionality. The social gospel influence of Rauschenbusch, the personal theism of DeWolf, and the black church experience contribute in large part to this radically social understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. 171

171 See King, Stride, p. 73; Ansbro, Making of a Mind, pp. 163-82; and earlier discussion on the influence of the Black Church.
In the above, King's understanding of the barriers to community and his recommendations for overcoming those barriers have been examined. Part III of this study will explicate the continuities and discontinuities in Thurman's and King's thinking regarding the ideal of community (Chapter VIII) and will offer findings and conclusions (Chapter IX).
PART III

A COMPARISON OF THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY IN
HOWARD THURMAN AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
CHAPTER VIII

A COMPARISON OF THE IDEAL OF COMMUNITY IN
THE THOUGHT OF HOWARD THURMAN
AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Introduction

In this study, the ideal of community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. has been analyzed. In both Thurman and King, it has been demonstrated that the ideal of community is the defining motif of their lives and thoughts. The discussion began by raising several fundamental questions which served as the basis for an analytical construct or method to examine each thinker's view of community. The initial question was concerned with the nature of community in each thinker, i.e., How is community conceived? What is its character? What are the dynamic elements involved in their respective views and how are they related? Secondly, the experiential and intellectual sources of community in their lives and thoughts were examined. The question raised was, What were the personal, social and intellectual sources which informed and shaped their understandings of community?
And thirdly, the question of the actualization of community was raised: What barriers did they identify that must be overcome in the actualization of community? What were the recommendations of each thinker for overcoming the barriers and creating community? or How is community actualized? In each section, particularly under the experiential and intellectual sources of community, this study has shown how the black American experience of oppression based on race and color was related to and helped to mold their respective responses to the questions outlined above. The comparison of the ideal of community and the conclusions which follow are products of this analysis.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first treats the continuities between the two thinkers and the latter treats the discontinuities. The final chapter will be concerned with findings and conclusions.

**Continuities**

**The Nature of Community in Thurman and King**

**Conception of Community**

There are striking continuities which exist in the conceptions and characteristics of community in Thurman and King. For both thinkers, the nature of community is rooted in the interrelatedness of all life, which is
teleological, i.e., it is the nature of life and existence to seek wholeness and harmony in all relations.

For Thurman, community or "common ground" refers to wholeness, integration, and harmony. In each particular manifestation of life, there is the potential for it to realize its proper form, or to come to itself. The actualization of any form of life is synonymous with community. Community as "actualized potential" is true at all levels of life. There is, for him, a fundamental structure of interrelatedness and interdependability inherent in all living things, at microscopic levels of existence and in human society. Life, for Thurman, is a dynamic, ongoing project. God is at work in creation in a manner akin to an artist shaping and re-shaping his/her masterpiece. For him, God is not finished with creation, and consequently, God is not finished with the human story which is ever unfolding and coming to itself in history. Similarly, personality is an unfinished project which involves the individual in relation to God in a concerted endeavor of free and responsible acts that issue forth in commitment and maturity.

Like Thurman's community is the single, organizing principle of King's life and thought. The conception of community in King, which he referred to as "the beloved
community," is rooted in the interrelatedness of all life and in the unity of human existence under the guidance of a personal God of love and reason who works for universal wholeness. It refers primarily to the Christian social eschatological ideal. For King, the beloved community is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. Concretely expressed, it is the mutually cooperative venture of persons in which they realize the solidarity of the human family by assuming responsibility for one another as children of God.

The Triadic Character of Community

For Thurman and King there is a triadic relationship between God, persons (individuals), and the world. These three principals are integrally related and form the basis for the dynamic character of community. Also for each thinker, community is a cooperative affair involving all three elements. Religious experience is the fundamental category for their thinking regarding community.

In their anthropologies, both stress the sacredness of personality, the rational nature of human beings, freedom and responsibility, the communitarian nature of self, and the autonomous nature of the moral law. Human persons and individuals have their ground and being in the personal God of love and power who wills human community. God is the creator, ground and sustainer of community. God is
transcendent and immanent; the signature of God is upon all creation. God's love is the basis for redemption and reconciliation, and the means for the creation of human community. God's power, for both, is manifested in the divine ability to overcome the forces of evil in human history and in individuals, and in the creation of community.

God's will for community can be discerned in the world, the vast totality of the cosmos, nature, human history, society, and the state. God's activity in the world is characterized by loving, reasoned, and totally self-determined activity. Human persons and individuals are called to participate freely and responsibly with God in the creation of human community.

Of primary importance for both Thurman and King is the role of the state in the creation of community, particularly, America. A just and equitable society for both is based upon the democratic model expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence. Thurman and King saw in the founding principles of American democracy, the potentiality for the creation of world community. For each, America has a unique destiny and responsibility as a nation to demonstrate the truths of democratic idealism in the world. Black Americans and other oppressed ethnic groups, according to both,
have a redemptive role to play in "saving the soul" of America by calling the nation back to its founding principles and moral responsibility in the world.¹

The Experiential and Intellectual Sources of the Ideal of Community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Black Family, Church, and Community as Primary Contexts of Development

The analyses of the experiential and intellectual sources of the ideal of community in Thurman and King demonstrate that their respective understandings of community arose initially from their common experience of oppression and segregation as black Americans in the deep South.² It has also been shown that out of the particularity of their experiences of community and non-community in the segregated South, there emerged a universal vision of human community which transcended race, class, religion, and other forms of sectarianism. Their early childhood experiences in the contexts of family, the black church, and black communities of Daytona, Florida and Atlanta,

¹The discussion will return to this important dimension of their thoughts in the next chapter on conclusions.

²This claim follows the logic of Blackwell, The Black Community, pp. xi, 5. See Chapter I, "Definitions."
Georgia provided them with a sense of personal worth and an awareness of the interrelatedness of life which became central elements in their respective views of community.

These early experiences in the family, church, and community gave them a sense of mission and purpose in their personal and intellectual quests to find a method to overcome the barriers which are antithetical to community. While each subject represents distinct social origins and class orientations within the black community itself, the common experience of being black and victimized by segregated statutes and policies of the deep South, combined with the unique insights of the black American religious experience, led both to raise fundamental questions about the relation of Christianity to racism and formed the backdrop for their respective methods of creating community. For both Thurman and King, the central, axiomatic questions underlying their visions of community are How does Christianity address the problem of American racism? and What is the most moral and practical method for overcoming racism in American society? This is not to suggest that the issue of class was not an important barrier which each sought to overcome, but the question of racism within the context of American society was their initial point of departure.
The Intellectual Quests for Community
Rooted in Primary Experience of
the Black Community

For each, their respective intellectual searches for community must be understood within the social contexts of these early experiences. For black Americans, education has been traditionally perceived as a path to liberation from the bondage of white racism. Education for both were promoted by their families, their churches, and the black communities from which they came. Thurman was

\footnote{Frederick Douglass wrote that education was "a direct pathway from slavery to freedom." Frederick Douglass, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, with a New Introduction by Rayford W. Logan (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 79. Reprint from revised edition of 1892. See also Angela Davis's excellent treatment of the role of knowledge in the liberation of the slave in "Lectures on Liberation," New York Committee to Free Angela Davis. (These lectures were originally given at UCLA during the fall quarter of 1969 for her class, "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature.") Here she explores the notion of freedom in light of the philosophical concepts of identity, self-knowledge, and the philosophy of history. Education, she argues, is a form of resistance for the slave in which s/he discovers the extent of his/her alienation from self and consequently, from freedom. The recognition of his/her condition of alienation through self-knowledge is at the same time the rejection of that condition. "Consciousness of alienation entails the absolute refusal to accept that alienation." For the slave, according to Davis, "enlightment does not bring happiness, nor does it bring real freedom--it brings desolation, misery...." Real freedom is a product of resistance and struggle against the condition of alienation created by enslavement (pp. 10-11). Thurman says that his grandmother thought there was something "magic" about reading. Mary E. Goodwin, "Racial Roots and Religion," p. 533.}
encouraged by his grandmother, the church, and members of the Daytona community such as Mary McLeod Bethune and Dr. Stockings, and later by Mordecai Johnson and Benjamin Mays. Mays and Johnson, as our biographical treatments indicate, were pivotal influences for both subjects. King was born into a middle-class black family where the mother and father were educated and the surrounding black Atlanta community encouraged him to pursue higher education. Thurman and King were both graduates of Morehouse College, an historically black institution which has always understood its mission as a training center for future black leaders. Morehouse College reinforced in each a sense of mission and purpose which had begun early in their families, churches, and communities. Their later intellectual pursuits (which were informed by the questions mentioned above) at prestigious white institutions and with noted professors find their basis in the early development of these men within the environment of the black community.

While the black experience of community is fundamental in understanding the development of the ideal of community in Thurman and King, it is equally important to see how their common experience of struggle to achieve universal community out the particularity of the black religious experience found creative affinity with the
intellectual tradition of liberal protestant theology. Such a perspective also helps to understand the parallel themes found in each and answers in part the question of Thurman's influence upon King. The continuities between liberal protestant theology and the black religious experience and their impact upon the thinking of King and Thurman can be seen in their common themes of the interrelatedness of all life, the primacy of religious experience, the moral order of the universe, the love and power of God, the dignity and worth of human personality, and the social nature of human existence.

In each thinker there is an apparent evolution in their understandings of community. Both acknowledge that early in their development, their conceptions of community were primarily relegated to the black community. Thurman says that when he was growing up in Florida, white people did not even fit into an ethical field, rather relationships with whites were considered amoral. Similarly, King indicates that it was not until his experience on the Atlanta Intercollegiate Council, that he was able

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4 See earlier discussion in Chapter V, under section entitled, "The Conception of Community" in King.

5 Thurman, The Luminous Darkness, p. 3.
to conquer his "anti-white feeling."\(^6\) As their respective biographical profiles demonstrate, through knowledge and exposure, both grew beyond these narrow understandings of community into a vision which transcended racial, cultural, religious, and national loyalties. For both, the growth of the ideal was rooted not only in their intellectual quests, but in practical engagement with their initial problematic: the relationship between race and American Christianity and the search for the most moral and practical method to overcome this barrier. A major theme which emerges for each is that out of the particularity of their oppressed status as black men in American society, their respective understandings of faith provided the source and the method to seek universal fellowship.

The Actualization of Community

Common themes which exist between Thurman's and King's treatments of the actualization of community are: evil and sin as barriers to community, community as the norm and goal of the moral life, love as the means of actualization for community, and the nature and role of the moral agent in the creation of community.

Evil and Sin as Barriers to Community

Thurman and King identified evil and sin as barriers to community. While their views of evil and sin differed, both recognized that sin is both a personal and social phenomenon which erects internal and external barriers that must be overcome in the creation of community. For each, the internal barriers of sin find greater manifestation in social evils such as racism, classism, and religious exclusiveness.

Community as Goal and Norm of the Moral Life

For Thurman and King, community is the goal toward which all life strives and the norm for ethical reflection. The religious and the ethical are positively related in both. Faith serves as the point of departure for moral decision making and informs their views of love and the nature and the role of the moral agent in the actualization of community.

Love as the Means of Community

Love, for both, is the method for creating and maintaining human community. While Thurman's treatment of love also emphasizes its relationship with truth, both agree that all love is of God, and that love is the profoundest act of religion and life. For both, love has a
strong rational core and is wedded to sentience. Love transcends justice and is expressed most completely in forgiveness and reconciliation. Love is ontologically related to justice and power. While this is more explicit in King, as it is expressed in social relations, Thurman had a rich understanding of the relationship between the justice, power and love in interpersonal relationships.

For both love of the enemy is the true test of love and redemptive suffering is its ultimate fruit. Redemptive suffering as expressed in nonviolent resistance, for Thurman and King, is the only moral and practical means of creating community. Both argue that in moral decision making, means and ends must cohere, i.e., the end or goal which is sought (community) cannot be achieved through means that are antithetical (hate, violence, war, etc.). For each, revolutionary violence is never a viable or legitimate option for the person who seeks wholeness and harmony in human relations. Love, as it is demonstrated in nonviolence, is a moral imperative in the actualization of human community.

The Nature and Role of the Moral Agent

A common theme in both thinkers is the nature and role of the moral agent in the creation of community. For each, the person who works for community in the world must
also seek community within. While this is the dominant strand in the thinking of Thurman, we have demonstrated that King also had a clear understanding of internal barriers that must be overcome in the actualization of community. For both, therefore, spirituality is inextricably bound to the struggle for social justice and liberation. Spirituality, as personal encounter and commitment to the God of love, provides the ground (the love of God), the means (the power of love) and the goal of social action (a just human society, i.e., human community ordered by love).

Discontinuities

The Nature of Community in Thurman and King

Under the nature of community, we shall compare Thurman's and King's conceptions of community and their treatments of the triadic character of community. Thurman's treatment of community is more clearly developed and systematic than King's. This is due primarily to their respective lifestyles, careers, and lengths of life. By virtue of longevity, academic positions, pastoral offices, and chaplaincies, Thurman had time and opportunity to develop a more systematic presentation of his ideas. King, on the other hand, was catapulted into the midst of the civil rights struggle at an early age and had less time
to devote to a systematic presentation of his understanding of community. This fact, however, has no bearing on the profundity nor the fruitfulness of his intellectual contributions.

Conceptions of Community

The comparison of their conceptions of community is most revealing in respect to their treatments of the individual and society and their understandings of God. These two pivotal concerns are intricately related in Thurman and King and have significant implications for their recommendations for the actualization of community.

The Individual and Society

For both thinkers, there are salient differences in their conceptions of community and in the elements which comprise community. Their respective conceptions of community proceed from different points of departure and reflect, to some extent, their personal pilgrimages toward community. The individual serves as the point of departure for Thurman's understanding of community. King's conception begins with the social existence of persons. This is not to suggest, as it has been demonstrated, that Thurman does not see the individual in relation to the social order or that King does not value the interrelatedness
of social existence and the individual. Their respective emphases, however, have implications for their particular constructions of community and their treatments of the roles of the individual and society. These differences also reflect their particular historical and personal situations which, in turn, informed their understandings of community and where they chose to work for its realization.

Thurman's ministry can be seen as a priestly/pastoral endeavor of enriching the spiritual life of individuals and empowering them for the work of community in society. King, on the other hand, embraced a prophetic model of ministry and was visibly and concretely engaged in the quest for social justice. The shaman, unlike the prophet who speaks to the community, "Thus says the Lord," leads the community to God by "giving others access to the spiritual world and effects a care for their ailing condition." Mitchell adds that


8 Ibid.
Thurman, in his shamanistic function, does not simply bring the message of truth from God to the religious community, but he leads individuals and the community to have an experience with the divine from which they may gain a sense of wholeness themselves.⁹

Thurman's conception of community or "common ground" arises out of the individual's identification with the natural processes of the created order. The theme of the "aliveness of life" is rooted in his early affinity with nature and his own propensity toward solitariness. Life, as such, serves as a hermeneutical principle. By observing the extreme orderliness and exquisite harmony of living things, Thurman discovered an inherent vitality at work which issues forth in harmony and directiveness. This principle of vitality which is operative in the natural order finds correspondence in the inner workings of the mind of the individual. In each manifestation of life, there is the inherent potential for it to realize its proper form, or to come to itself. According to Thurman, the actualization of any form of life is synonymous with community. The quest for personal identity is also part of the mind's inherent logic which seeks wholeness and integration. An individual's identity stands in direct relationship to the mind's actualization of its inherent

⁹Ibid.
potential. Therefore, a healthy sense of self or personal identity is the clue and ground for community with others.

King's conception of community begins with the social existence of persons. For King, the universe of shared values is decidedly social. The person can only exist in relationship with other persons, of whom God is the Supreme Person. This is a direct inheritance from personalism:

The implication is that the nature of human beings is such that they need fellowship and thus they naturally seek community. Individuals are constantly interacting with each other in society, and such interaction affects their experience, consciousness, and history. An individual reaches the level of personhood only in social relations, a person grows and develops through social reaction with other persons.¹⁰

In Thurman and King, the character of community is triadic, i.e., there are three basic elements in their conceptions of community: the individual or persons, God, and the world. However, for Thurman, the emphasis is on the individual and God, the world as such is secondary. The "creative encounter" between God and the individual is the basis for religious experience and is the place where the individual seeks community. For Thurman, community begins within, through the individual's commitment

¹⁰Smith and Zepp, Search for Beloved, p. 113.
to the God of life. In the presence of God, the committed individual is both enabled and required to work for community in the world. The individual begins with his/her "own working paper," with the internality of religious experience, which serves the point of departure for what he called, "the outwardsness of religion." 11 Hence, the methodology involves a movement from "the inwardsness of religion" to "the outwardsness of religion." 12

In King, the three principals (persons, God, and the world) are equally related in a positive, creative relationship which constitutes "the three dimensions of a complete life." For him, ideal human society is the product of the creative interaction of all three elements; one cannot be divorced from the other. The personal and

11 Thurman devotes an entire chapter to "The Outwardness of Religion," in The Creative Encounter, Chapter II, pp. 56-91. The "outwardness of religion" is the externalization of the individual's response to the divine initiative within. See Thurman, The Creative Encounter, p. 91; and the earlier discussion in Chapter II, The Nature of Community in Howard Thurman.

12 Thurman, Chapter I, "The Inwardness of Religion," The Creative Encounter, pp. 19-55. See earlier discussion of the influence of Rufus M. Jones on Thurman's understanding of community.
social dimensions of religious experience are treated in a dialectical framework which endeavors to maintain a balanced treatment of the two modes of existence. The autonomy and the sociability of the person are guarded in a creative interplay between the inner and outer dimensions of religious experience. The ethic which emerges, therefore, is able to incorporate a more positive vision of the nature and role of persons as a social actors within society. This crucial distinction has implications for their views of freedom and responsibility.

Thurman's emphasis on the cultivation of the inner life as the basis for the development of a genuine sense of self, and consequently for authentic existence in the world, rests on his distinction between the inner and outer modes of self-existence. The inner mode of existence is primary to the outer, i.e., the internality of experience informs the externality of existence. Freedom and responsibility are treated in similar fashion. As we have seen, "freedom" for Thurman refers to a quality of being and spirit; freedom is located within; its locus is the human will. "Liberty," on the other hand, refers to external prerogatives, privileges, and grants that are conferred upon the individual from a social arrangement or context. The freedom of the individual, as it is
interpreted by Thurman, places ultimate responsibility upon the individual to work for justice within society. Although Thurman treats responsibility as a shared experience in which the individual interacts responsibly with others, again the emphasis is on the individual and his/her relationship to society. The responsibility of society towards the individual is not the major emphasis of Thurman.

King's treatment of the sociality of persons informs his treatment of freedom and responsibility. For King, an inclusive human community in which people are able to develop and realize their potential is the goal of life. Political and economic systems reflect the social nature of persons and their interdependency; and social institutions are responsible for the development of human personality. He does not make the distinction between "freedom" and "liberty" as it is articulated by Thurman, rather freedom and liberty are conjoined in the context of social destiny. Here the emphasis is placed on society and its responsibility to persons. King, like Thurman, makes a distinction between the internal and external modes of existence. He, however, attempts to maintain a dialectical tension between the two realms which is resolved in the quest for a "responsible society." The definition of a "responsible society" as offered by the First Assembly
of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 is the model which best captures King's emphasis:

Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbor. Any tendencies in State and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and his work of salvation. A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.\(^{13}\)

Personality, as understood by King, is only meaningful within the context of other persons and society.\(^{14}\) Freedom is always within destiny, it is not limitless nor can it be relegated to a function of the will. Thurman's understanding of freedom, on the other hand, is rooted in the nature and function of the will.\(^{15}\) While Thurman's


15 Thurman says, Freedom is "the will and ability to act at any moment in time as to determine the future." Moreover, it is "the sense of options or alternatives." The "sense of options" refers to the experience of the inner self located in the will. See earlier discussion and example used by Thurman under "Freedom and Responsibility" in Chapter II.
understanding of freedom maintains that it is a birthright which is inalienable and cannot be granted by external prerogatives, King's view of freedom suggests that outside of social existence with others, freedom is a misnomer. King maintained that it is the purpose and responsibility of society to insure the freedom of persons. This is the nucleus of his argument against segregation as social system which impedes the person's capacity to deliberate, decide and respond, in essence, to be free. 16

Perspectives of God

The discontinuities which exist in their conceptions of community are most revealing in respect to their treatments of God. A crucial distinction between King's and Thurman's understandings of God is that the latter's vision of ultimate reality is theocentric while the former's is Christocentric. This distinction may well reflect Kenneth Cauthen's distinction between "evangelical liberalism" and "modernistic liberalism" as the two types of American protestant liberalism. As indicated earlier, both thinkers were influenced by proponents of evangelical liberalism. Thurman, however, falls more appropriately into the designation of modernistic liberalism. Cauthen

16King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 97-98.
claims that the main distinguishing feature of the two
schools of thought are their respective treatments of Jesus
Christ.

The loose connection of the modernistic liberals within the traditional faith can be seen clearly in their estimate of Jesus. The thinking of these men was not Christocentric. Jesus was important—and even unique—because he illustrated truths and values which were universally relevant. However, these truths and values can be validated and even discovered apart from Jesus. He is not so much the source as he is the exemplar of the religious norm. Jesus might be psychologically helpful, but he was not usually thought to be logically necessary for the highest experience of God in human life.17

For King, Christ is the source of the norm of the beloved community. The redemptive love of God, revealed in the cross of Christ, is King's answer to the possibility of achieving community within history. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the symbol of the power of God and of the ultimate defeat of the forces which block the realization of community. Thurman, on the other hand, sees Jesus as an exemplar of the possibilities of the committed individual in the quest for community. Jesus is not the norm of community, but an expression of the inherent potentiality of human nature to achieve the highest goal of the moral life, love.

These two major differences in Thurman's and King's conceptions of community (the individual and society and their perspectives of God) inform their particular recommendations for the actualization of community.

The Actualization of Community

The Barriers of Sin and Evil

For Thurman and King, evil and sin are barriers to community. Their treatments of evil differ, however, and are related to their respective conceptions of the nature of God, their anthropologies, and their emphases on the individual and social dynamics of community. For Thurman, evil is the positive and destructive principle that works against harmony, wholeness, and integration. It is not an intruder, rather it is a constituent part of life. Life is good in the sense that it includes both good and evil. Evil serves a purpose in the evolution of life as an upender which upsets the balances and insures a dynamic, creative quality in all living things. Because evil is a part of life, it must be interpreted within the divine context. Therefore, God is able to use evil as an instrument for the divine and ultimate purposes in the world. The creative resolution of the conflict between good and evil in the universe is guaranteed by the very logic of life which works against all dualisms. For Thurman,
the contradictions of life are not final. Life is ultimately one. This is the basis of hope and the ground for the ultimate achievement of community within history.

Thurman makes a distinction between natural, punitive, and moral evil. He claims that most of the suffering and pain in the world can be attributed to moral evil. Moral evil is a consequence of human disobedience to God. It is rooted in egoism and is an abuse of human freedom and responsibility. The locus of sin is the human will and freedom. Although Thurman recognizes the personal and social dynamics of evil and sin, his primary concern is how the individual deals with evil at the personal and private levels of his/her existence. The emphasis in Thurman is on the internal barriers of evil and sin that work against community within the self (fear, self-deception, and hate). For Thurman, the individual's personal response to the internal barriers imposed by sin has implications for the eradication of the social manifestation of evil in the world. Because of Thurman's positive conception of human nature, he maintained that the individual through spiritual discipline could ultimately overcome the internal barriers which separate him/her from the vision of God. Thurman maintained that when a solitary individual chooses not to cooperate with evil at the level of his/her
personal existence, but places his/her life on the side of goodness, that person anticipates community at the level of his/her functioning. What the individual discovers within as impediments to harmonious self-existence, s/he also discovers in society. The struggle to overcome the barriers within propels the individual into the world as an agent of reconciliation.

Unlike Thurman, King sees evil as an intruder in God's creation. Evil is positive and destructive and works against God's purposes for community. The question of evil as being part of the will of God is dismissed by King as contrary to divine benevolence. Evil exists, according to King, because of God's self-imposed limitation to assure human freedom and cooperation in the realization of the divine purposes for creation. King believed that though there is a tension at the heart of the universe between good and evil, ultimately goodness will triumph over evil. King's belief is rooted in the Christian affirmation of the efficacy of the cross and resurrection. Unlike Thurman, King sees a resolution to evil as a fact accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ and in the proleptic

\[18\] King, "Death of Evil on the Seashore," p. 82.
realization of the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{19} Evil is overcome, according to King, not because of the individual's struggle to overcome it, but because of God's power to defeat it. For King, this is most dramatically illustrated in the Cross of Christ.\textsuperscript{20}

King's understanding of sin differs from Thurman's in that the latter identified sin as egoism or pride. King refused to equate sin to egoism or pride alone. King's treatment of sin is rooted in the existential struggle between freedom and finitude. King suggested that sin is a product of the "civil war of the soul" or the "tragic schizophrenic personality"\textsuperscript{21} which wills righteousness but is unable to attain it.\textsuperscript{22}

While King, like Thurman, upheld the sacredness of human personality, he also had a profound understanding of sin both as a personal and social phenomenon. King's understanding of the radical nature of sin within human personality and its heightened dynamic in social groups

\textsuperscript{19} Smith and Zepp, \textit{Search for Beloved}, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{20} King, "Shattered Dreams," p. 91.

\textsuperscript{21} King, "Loving Your Enemies," p. 49.

\textsuperscript{22} See King, "Unfulfilled Dreams," pp. 3-5. This is a product of King's dialectical treatment of anthropology. See earlier discussion.
led him to a position which rejected any suggestion that human agency alone could overcome the forces that work against community. Unlike Thurman who maintained that community could be achieved by individuals who freely commit themselves to the very logic of life over a time interval of sufficient duration, King's treatment of the pervasive nature of human sin, in particular his astute understanding of power and its relationship to social evil, demanded a doctrine of grace which made available extraordinary resources to overcome the barriers of evil and sin in personal and social existence.

King firmly believed that as persons choose to become co-workers with God through faith, they are empowered to overcome the barriers erected by evil and sin. Unlike Thurman who stressed the significance of internal barriers in the realization of community within oneself, King's emphasis is on the social manifestations of evil and sin which impede the actualization of community in the world. He identified them as poverty, racism, and war. As stated, King does not neglect internal barriers that prevent the realization of authentic self-existence. His emphasis, however, is on the social dimensions of evil

and sin and the need for cooperation between persons and God in the struggle to overcome these barriers.

Overcoming the Barriers to Community

As stated, their respective treatments of the individual and society and their ultimate construals of reality have direct implications for their recommendations for overcoming the barriers to community. For Thurman, the religious grounding of the moral life proceeds from a theocentric vision of reality. He maintained that the historical Jesus is a religious subject rather than a religious object; he is not God, but "the for instance of the mind of God." "Jesus is the revelation of how personality perfects itself and creates community."24 When Jesus is elevated to the status of God, according to Thurman, the universality and inclusiveness of religious faith are jeopardized by a principle of exclusiveness. A theocentric understanding of God, on the other hand, frees the individual for a direct, immediate encounter with the living God and creates the grounds for authentic community in the world.25 The fruit of this creative encounter is love which is the means of actualizing community.

24 Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 58.
For King, Jesus Christ is the ground and goal of the moral life. His Christocentric treatment of the moral life combines both the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ as the normative character for community. Jesus is not only the exemplar of community, but is the source of the norm for community, which is love. The cosmic Christ is not interpreted by King in a christomonistic fashion, but rather in broad and universal categories which openly accept and embrace the truth claims of other religious orientations.

These distinctions between theocentric and Christocentric understandings of the moral life and the roles of the individual and society are important as they relate to concrete, historical application of ethical principles and the creation of community. For both thinkers, love is the ethical principle which brings about the realization of human community.

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26 Muelder writes, "In Christology it is essential to emphasize both the cosmic Christ, i.e., the love and power of God revealed in Christ, and the historically powerful Jesus Christ who is thoroughly rooted in the whole community and especially in the Old Testament community." Muelder, Moral Law, p. 155.

27 King, Stride, p. 88; King Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 190-91.
For Thurman, there is no mediator involved in the divine encounter. The creative encounter with the God of love is immediate and personal. This understanding of the moral life and the potentiality of human response to the divine initiative in such an encounter is rooted in a profoundly positive anthropology and a doctrine of sin which is psychological rather than racial. Hence, his understanding of the fall and sin, and consequently redemption, arise primarily from an affair between God and the individual. While the world (human society) is important, it is related in a secondary sense.

As stated earlier, a key concept in Thurman's anthropology and ethical theory is the distinction he makes between "innocence" and "goodness." Innocence, for Thurman, is given; community is achieved goodness. In Thurman's treatment of creation myths, the fall is treated as "a fall from innocence." In each account, human beings' original experience of community is both potential and actualized potential within the framework of innocence. In the state of innocence, the things which work against community are dormant or unactualized, but once they are actualized by the agency of free-will, disharmony results and innocence

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28 See Thurman's "Conception of Community," in Chapter II.
is lost. After the fall from innocence, the divine-human project of "goodness" or "community" becomes the goal toward which human endeavor must be directed. "Community" or "goodness" must be achieved through free and responsible actions. Goodness as achieved community is brought about through the radical freedom of the individual who makes a conscious, deliberate choice to strive for wholeness within the self and the world. Innocence is given without knowledge; goodness, however, comes through knowledge and responsibility. In the individual's struggle to achieve goodness, there is no savior figure, rather the locus of the individual's moral initiative is the human will. For Thurman, sin is understood primarily as willful disobedience to God. Individuals are not sinners by virtue of a fallen existence, but through conscious, deliberate decisions which are antithetical to community. Redemption, therefore, is not a cosmic remedy offered outside the will and freedom of the individual. Rather, redemption is a divine-human possibility for the individual who already has the power within to choose wholeness and harmony with God.29

29 Mitchell aptly states Thurman's position: "He acknowledges the divinity of Jesus but maintains that we all possess the same quality of divinity within ourselves. He does not deal with Jesus's divinity, nor with his role
King's understanding of sin and the need for redemption through the efficacy of Christ had a profound impact on his view of nonviolence as the means of actualizing community. Like Thurman, King recognized an individual fall, not a racial one. He stressed, however, the cumulative, structural and social nature of human sin and its destructive consequences for human personality. Although he distinguished individual responsibility from collective responsibility, the emphasis is on overcoming the social barriers of sin through the power of nonviolent love. Such an endeavor, according to King, required an extraordinary grace which is effected in the cross of Christ. The soteriology present in King's understanding of the crucifixion of Christ emphasizes social redemption and the creation of a new situation.

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30 See earlier discussion of nonviolence under King.

31 Erwin Smith, The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr., pp. 53-54; see also earlier discussions in Chapter V, "The Totality"; Chapter VII, section entitled, "Love as the Means to Actualization."
The two thinkers' respective conceptions of God and the related treatments of the individual and society inform their views of the nature and role of the church in social change. For Thurman, the church is the social institution which is entrusted with "the Jesus idea." Jesus is not the central object of worship for the church, rather the ideal of community and the ethic of love which he taught as the means of actualizing community form the basis of the idea with which the church is entrusted. The church is the inclusive religious fellowship in which the committed individual seeks communion with those who share the common encounter with the divine Presence. 32 The central theme underlying Thurman's ecclesiology is his belief that experiences of unity and fellowship are more compelling than the fears, dogma, and prejudices which divide and separate people. He believed if these spiritual experiences of unity could be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration, they should be able to undermine any barrier that separates one person from the other. These barriers include racism, classism, denominationalism, and religious beliefs which hinder authentic fellowship between individuals as children of God.

The primary emphasis of Thurman in respect to the church is the spiritual cultivation of the individual through the worship/teaching ministry of the church. The church is called upon to actualize the vision of community within its own fellowship and the world. Thurman does not counsel the church as an institution to confront unjust social arrangements, rather he sees the church as a spiritual facilitator and enabler in the quest for social justice.

For King, the nature and goal of the church is Christocentric. It is the Body of Christ and the symbol of the Beloved Community in the world. As in Thurman, the church is called upon to demonstrate community within its own fellowship and the world. Both thinkers are critical of racial, classist, and denominational exclusiveness within its institutional structures. Thurman, however, identifies exclusiveness beyond race, class, and denominationism, and raises the issue of exclusiveness among other religions. For Thurman, the principle of exclusiveness among religions is centered around Jesus as a religious object. While King embraces love as the universal bond between all religions, he does not clearly articulate how this claim is actualized in religious fellowship.
King understood worship to be primarily a social experience in which persons from all levels of life realize the oneness and unity of God and the human family. Thurman's emphasis lies with the immediacy of religious experience between God and the individual which has implications for the gathered community and its relationship to society. King begins with the social nature of the church, and worship as such, is an expression of the social mission of the church in the world. This difference is most dramatically illustrated in their respective ministries and their understanding of the church's role as an institution involved in the creation of community. Thurman's pastorates and chaplaincies, and eventually his work with the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund, served primarily as spiritual resources for those engaged in the quest for social justice. King, on the other hand, was able to mobilize churches as participants in the struggle for social change. From Montgomery to Memphis, the black church served as the primary source and the means through which he struggled for community.

Whereas, Thurman identified the church's mission basically as a facilitator and enabler of individuals engaged in the work of community, King's social vision of the church allowed him to see the church as the moral
custodian of society. For King, this means that the church as an institution, the ekklesia of Christ, has a prophetic role as a creative minority within society. Its mission is to give moral direction to society and to willingly suffer as an institution the penalty for nonconformity and noncooperation with social evils which destroy human personality and ultimately impede the actualization of human community.

In summary, the treatments of community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. represent two responses to the same questions which informed their personal and intellectual quests for community: How does Christianity address the problem of American racism? and What is the most moral and practical methodology for overcoming racism in American society? Thurman's personal pilgrimage, which he called "the search for common ground," culminated in a theocentric vision of reality which emphasized the nature and role of the committed individual in the actualization of community. King's personal odyssey toward the beloved community resulted in a Christocentric conception of community which stressed the nature and the role of society in the actualization of community.

While both thinkers maintained different points of departure in respect to the nature and actualization
of their central concern, there are striking parallels in their thoughts and recommendations for the creation of human community. Both were products of the black American experience of oppression and segregation. The resolution of this initial problematic became the labor and goal of their lives; and it was out of the particularity of this experience that their universal visions of community arose. Although Thurman and King differed in respect to their conceptions of evil and sin, they both recommended the same means of actualization: love as redemptive suffering. King's treatment of power and its correlation with justice and love enabled him to raise the ethical vision of community to a level of social consciousness which is not as pronounced in Thurman. Also, their respective conceptions of God and the relationship of individual and society informed their approaches to the role of religion and the church in social change.
CHAPTER IX

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The discontinuities which exist between Thurman and King are perhaps more important than the continuities. They reveal different dimensions of the common problems which their conceptualizations and recommendations for the actualization of community address, and consequently, they provide new insights and directions in the creation of a model for the work of community in the world. This final chapter is concerned with the findings of this comparative analysis and their significance for the conception, character, and actualization of community.

The two thinkers' approaches to community (their respective emphases on the nature and role of the individual and society and their construals of ultimate reality) can serve as heuristic instruments in the explication of the principal elements involved in the conception, character, and actualization of community. These elements or formative principles include their common themes of spirituality as a basis for social transformation, the relationship between love and power, the nature and role
of the church in the work of community, the nature and role of the state, and specifically, the unique role of black Americans and other ethnic minorities in the realization of community within the context of American society and the world. In each, their respective points of departure and emphases combine to form a model for the achievement of human community.

**Spirituality and Social Transformation**

Both Thurman and King agreed that spirituality is the basis for social transformation, but the theme is more pronounced in Thurman's treatment of the individual and social responsibility. Thurman maintains that movement from the inner experience of community within the self is the basis for social transformation. His understanding of the movement from the "inner" to the "outer" dimensions of religious experience has profound implications for spirituality and social change, and serves as a corrective to the tendency of one-dimensional theological discourse which exalts the social dynamics of community at the expense of the individual relationship between God and the self. Mozella Gordon Mitchell suggests that Thurman's contribution to black theology rests on his provision of an intellectual framework for a proper sense of
self and urge toward community.¹ Thurman's pastoral/priestly endeavor to lead the individual to the inner resources of being, which he described as "the hunger of the heart"² is a cogent reminder that the work for harmony and wholeness in the world cannot be accomplished without the cultivation of the inner life.

As Thurman's treatment of community serves as a corrective to overemphasis on the social dimension of community building, King's view of community warns against the temptation to quietism and detachment which is a chief criticism of Thurman's position (though not totally justifiable).³ By stressing the importance of maintaining a sense of self in the midst of a hostile society where privileges and prerogatives are granted on the basis of race and social status, Thurman's emphasis on the autonomy of the individual is essential. Its shortcoming, however,


³Thurman, Lawrence Lectures, p. 26; Smith, Mystic as Prophet, p. 133.
lies in the absence of a viable ethical foundation for calling society into accountability.\textsuperscript{4}

Thurman's strong insistence on the immediacy of religious experience as an encounter between God and the individual places ultimate responsibility on the individual for the work of community in the world. Meanwhile, his relegation of the world to a secondary status in relation to the individual and God, and his relative depreciation of institutions and social structures in his theocentric construal of reality, result in an ethical framework which comes perilously close, at points, to atomizing individuals within society. Consequently, he does not offer the basis for viable social ethic which calls society into accountability. As it will be illustrated later, this is not necessarily his intention. Thurman was an outspoken

\textsuperscript{4}Gibson Winter's definition of "social ethics" is helpful in underlying this crucial distinction between Thurman and King. In the language of Winter, "social ethics" could more properly be called "societal ethics." "The term ("social") should really be societal, since it is the evaluation of societal organization and public policy in the shaping of society with which social ethics is concerned. . . . In general, then, social ethics deals with issues of the social order—good, right, and ought in the organization of human communities and the shaping of social policies." Gibson Winter, "Religion, Ethics, and Society," in \textit{Social Ethics: Issues in Ethics and Society}, edited and with Introduction by Gibson Winter (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), pp. 5-6. Parentheses added.
advocate of racial and social change within American society. The problem rests, however, in his theoretical formulation rather than in his intentionality.

King's Christocentric vision of community gives a more prominent place to the role of social institutions and structures in shaping the destiny of persons and social groups. This is a direct product of King's conception of community as a totality in which God, persons, and the world are integrally related as it is articulated in his "Three Dimensions of a Complete Life." Also, King's understanding of the Kingdom of God allowed him to interpret theologically and ethically the nature of the responsible society. It allowed him to fashion a more balanced view of the individual's relationship to society and society's relationship to the individual. Utilizing the Kingdom as a paradigmatic instrument in interpreting the relationship between individual and collective responsibility in the creation of a loving and just society, King wrote: "The Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both."^5

The redemptive love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is

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^5King, Stride, p. 77.
King's answer to the possibility of achieving community or realizing the Kingdom within history. While he did not believe that human efforts alone could bring the Kingdom of God into realization, he strongly believed that the power of God, demonstrated in the cross and the resurrection of Christ, was the assurance that God would accomplish the divine and eternal purposes.⁶

Despite this difference in emphasis and ethical formulation, it is instructive to note the complementarity which exists between the two thinkers' understanding of the totality of interaction between the individual/persons, God, and the world. Thurman's point of departure is the individual and his/her relationship with God as preparation for the work of community in the world. The movement as such is from the inner to the outer mode of existence (or in his words, from the "inner consciousness" to "world-mindedness"). Here the committed individual is highlighted as the key to social transformation.

For King, there is a direct correlation between persons, God, and the world. The ideal human society or community is the product of the cooperative venture between

persons and God in relation to the world. The point of departure is social. Social transformation takes place in a cooperative network between God and persons. For King, while the individual's commitment and development are important, the accent is on society's role and responsibility in the creation of community.

Both thinkers, however, ultimately stress an organic pluralism as the goal of community, but with different points of entry.\(^7\) The language of both thinkers suggests this distinction. Thurman's primary concern is always with the "creative individual," which is reflected in his appropriation of Cross's and Schreiner's thought.\(^8\) King, however, emphasizes the redemptive possibilities of the "creative minority."\(^9\) Ultimately, Thurman's insistence on the individual's spiritual development as a prelude to creative social engagement is not in conflict

\(^7\) In the language of Muelder, "social solidarity rightly conceived is markedly pluralistic. Interdependence, mutual aid, group discipline, and freedom belong in the concrete whole. Social ethics must therefore consider community as an organic pluralism." Muelder, Moral Law, pp. 46-47.

\(^8\) See earlier discussions of the influences of Cross and Schreiner on Thurman, Chapter III.

\(^9\) For examples see King's sermons, "Transformed Nonconformist," pp. 18, 24; and "A Knock at Midnight," p. 59 in King, Strength to Love.
with King's accentuation of the social nature of persons involved in the creation of community. Thurman's individualism is a product of his mystical orientation. He explains that while the basic ethical significance of mysticism is individualistic, the ascetic impulse of the mystic ultimately brings him/her face to face with the society in which s/he functions as a person. The mystic, according to Thurman,

...discovers that he is a person, and a personality in a profound sense can only be achieved in a milieu of human relations. Personality is something more than mere individuality—it is a fulfillment of the logic of individuality in community.¹⁰

King's treatment of community follows the pattern of personalism. Muelder writes:

What personalism offers as a social philosophy is the hypothesis that community conceived normatively as rational love and as organic pluralism is consistent and coherent with the metaphysical actualization of the person.¹¹

The discontinuities, therefore, which exist between Thurman and King in respect to the individual and society find "common ground," so to speak, in their agreement that spirituality is the basis for social transformation and

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¹¹Muelder, Moral Law, pp. 46-47.
that the ultimate model of community is an organic pluralism which seeks unity in diversity and guards individuality in society. For both, the political framework which best represents this model is democratic idealism as represented in the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence. The discussion will return to this important observation in the latter part of the chapter.

Love and Power

Thurman and King recommended love as the means for overcoming the barriers to community. Thurman concentrated on the power of love as a means of overcoming the internal barriers of deception, fear, and hate. King emphasized love in respect to social justice and the organization of power in the creation of a responsible society. King identified the major crisis of our times as the collision between immoral power and powerless morality. His resolution of the dialectic created by this crisis is rooted in his understanding of agape. This interpretation of agape is decidedly Christocentric. Muelder succinctly states that the central question for King in his quest for a method to eliminate social evil is "How was love as redemption related to just power? Is there a loving way to change unjust expressions of power and powerful embodiments of
injustice?" While this question was also a serious concern of Thurman's, King's struggle with "social evil" created a deeper need to understand the relationship of power, justice and love in social situations. This dynamic is not as clearly defined in Thurman. While Thurman recognizes the necessity of the just or equitable distribution of power in social relationships, his primary concern is with the individual's response to unjust political and economic arrangements, which is equally important in the quest for social justice. King, on the other hand, concentrates on the political and economic nature of social existence and its relationship to love, justice, and power. Personal morality for King is weighed on the scales of


one’s commitment to social justice; the interior religious experience has meaning only in the external context of social relations which are based on power. James P. Hanigan makes a significant observation in respect to King’s social ethic:

Faith for him had its realization or its truth in some new situation outside the subjective experience and attitudes of the individual believer. Whatever interior changes of attitude and affections this might require, faith demanded more than a new heart or a new attitude. It demanded a new situation, a new relationship that could be seen and evaluated. Truth was to be found in doing, and the only test of faith was the quality of the activity and of the actor.¹⁴

Again, it is important to note that their respective treatments of love and power combine to create the basis for their common concern of overcoming barriers that militate against community. Thurman’s keen insight into the problem of identity and the need to maintain a balance between one's self-fact and self-image is rooted in his understanding of the individual's discovery that s/he is a child of God and, therefore, is infinitely loved and ultimately secure. This fundamental conception, he argued, forms the background for a healthy sense of self and is

the quintessence of social transformation and revolution. Thurman says:

I didn't have to wait for the revolution. I have never been in search for identity--and I think that (all) I've ever felt and worked on and believed in was founded in a kind of private, almost unconscious autonomy that did not seek vindication in my environment because it was in me.15

It is Thurman's claim that once the individual understands that s/he is loved by God, that person is both empowered and required to become an agent of reconciliation in the world. Therefore, while King's accentuation of the social expression of love and power is important, it is equally enlightening to reflect on the relationship of love and power in respect to the internal struggles to overcome the psychological forces which conspire against personal wholeness and communion. This is Thurman's invaluable contribution.

The Nature and the Role of the Church in Society

As with other important points of difference, Thurman's understanding of the church's role in society is not in conflict with King's. His emphasis, however, is on the need for the interior life of the individual to

receive nourishment and direction through the spiritual resources of the church. He viewed the church as the place where "the individuals who were in the thick of the struggle for social change would be able to find renewal and fresh courage."\(^{16}\) His experiments in worship in university settings, and most notably with the Fellowship Church, are examples of his emphasis. Also, his long standing role as counselor to activists engaged in the struggle for creative social change is confirmation of this belief. On at least one occasion, even King was a beneficiary of this ministry.\(^{17}\)

It can be argued that the experiences of community which Thurman created in his respective ministries in localized and particular situations, King was able to accomplish at a greater social level through organization and mobilization of churches as institutions within American society. This is probably due, in part, to King's more traditional understanding of the Christocentric nature of the church, as opposed to Thurman's broader interpretation of the church as a fellowship which transcended different religious beliefs. Although the movement which

\(^{16}\)Thurman, *Head and Heart*, p. 160.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., pp. 254-55.
King led was supported by those of other religions, it is doubtful whether he would have been able to organize the masses of black people, and many whites, if he had begun initially with the paradigm of inclusiveness utilized by Thurman. King's success as a leader was rooted in his unique embodiment of black folk culture and his supreme ability to articulate the religious idiom of the black church experience. Thurman's appeal tended to be more universal and less adaptable to the particularity of black folk culture and religious life.

Again, their understandings of the church need not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but represent two related dimensions of the church's mission in the actualization of human community: the church as both a spiritual resource where experiences of unity occur and the church as moral custodian of society. A creative synthesis of both views would produce an ecclesiastical model in which the pastoral and prophetic offices of the church are fulfilled in a balanced construct which holds in tension the care and nurture of the individual committed to social change and the role of the church as an institution involved in the moral issues of society.

The American Dream and Black Americans

It is no small wonder that out of the particularity of their oppressed status as black Americans, Thurman and King sought a universal vision of humanity which transcended the barriers of race, class, denominationalism, and other forms of sectarianism. This study has shown that for Thurman and King, the central, axiomatic questions underlying their visions of community were, How does Christianity address the problem of American racism? and What is the most moral and practical method for overcoming racism in American society? The other issues which they raised regarding classism, war, religious exclusiveness, etc. have their origin in this initial problematic. To miss this fundamental concern in Thurman and King is to obscure the essential matter of their life-long projects. Certainly, as it has been shown, the ideal of community was an evolutionary conception with which each wrestled in their respective empirical settings, but its origin and development cannot be divorced from these basic questions. Their early experiences of community and non-community in the deep South, their later academic and intellectual quests, and the work of community to which they devoted themselves attest to their relentless searches for community within the American system dominated by racism and segregated statutes.
Thurman and King provide the contemporary church with important answers to the two questions which informed their personal and intellectual quests for community. First, both thinkers called upon the American church not merely to redress its racist practices, but to repent. In fact, both claimed that the transformation of American society is inextricably bound to the transformation of American Christianity. The absence of community within the church for Thurman and King was a tell-tale documentary of the church's spiritual condition and its lack of moral authority in society. They claimed that the moral failure of the church is directly related to the demise of American democracy. 19

Secondly, both agreed that the only moral and practical method to overcome the racism within American society is through nonviolent direct action. Thurman and King

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recommended that black Americans, because they were vic-
tims of the violence of racism in American society and
because of their unique appropriation of Christian faith
from their masters who had bastardized and disgraced the
religion, stood in candidacy as redemptive sufferers for
the soul of America. Both agreed that somehow experience
and history had uniquely prepared black Americans for this
sacred task.²⁰

It is also important to note that King and Thurman
were political reformists. For each, liberation and in-
tegration are inseparable and integrally related to the
realization of the American dream. It should be under-
scored, however, that their respective loyalties to the
principles inherent in American democracy did not prevent

²⁰ Both Thurman and King fall easily into the cate-
gory which Cornel West describes as "weak exceptionalism." This being a sub-category of one of four theoretical con-
structs West outlines as Afro-Americans' traditional re-
sponses to American racism. Cornel West, Prophesy
Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity
For West, the self-image of Afro-Americans in the excep-
tionalist tradition is "one of pride, self-congratulation,
and often heroism. Afro-Americans are considered to be
more humane, meek, kind, creative, spontaneous, and non-
violent than members of other racial groups; less mali-
cious, mendacious, belligerent, bellicose, and avaricious.
This tradition posits Afro-American superiority, not over
all others, but specifically over white Americans" (p.
72).
them from openly and critically denouncing the rampant hypocrisy and racist practices of their country. Indeed, these principles, combined with the ethical insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the black American religious experience, formed the basis of their critique of American society. The recurring universal themes of the dignity and worth of human personality, the equality of human persons, the freedom and responsibility of individuals and society's responsibility to its constituents are dominant themes in their writings, sermons, and addresses. Both thinkers believed that America not only had a responsibility to its citizens of color, but that America had a moral responsibility to the world. They felt that because of its vast national resources, its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural composition, God had called America to set an example for world community.

It has been suggested that in some respects Thurman's and King's visions of America can be identified with themes in Robert N. Bellah's classic "transcendent universal religion of the nation" which interprets the American experience as being subject to blessing or judgment in light of ultimate and universal reality. In his celebrated article, "Civil Religion in America," Bellah states:

There actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and
well-institutionalized civil religion in America . . . (which) has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care and understanding that any other religion does.21

For Bellah, the sources of American Civil religion are the writings and official documents of the founders of the republic. Among these are the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. However, his understanding of the historical and mythic motifs of these sources goes beyond formal statements and national polity. His favorite and most often cited source is a sermon preached by John Winthrop, the first leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on board ship in 1630, before landing in the New World. The sermon is entitled, "A Modell of Christian Charity,"22 Bellah argues that this sermon is an illustration of the 'covenant' that was presented to the new settlers. This covenant between the Divine and the Puritans is a formula for divine blessing or judgment, dependent on the type of ethic the new society chose to


embrace. The keeping of the covenant was predicated on the obedience of the settlers to virtue as opposed to interest, i.e., caritas versus cupiditas.23 According to Bellah, this covenant was broken almost as soon as it was instituted.24 Nevertheless, it was from such sources that the covenant idea sprung, which serves as the mythos that informs American civil religion.25

Bellah speaks of three times of trial in the American civil religion: the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the contemporary situation brought on by the turbulence of the sixties and early seventies. The Revolution was the period comparable to the biblical imagery of the Exodus with Washington symbolizing the Moses of the nation. At this point, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence became sacred scriptures. In the second period of trial, it was the Civil War, in which Lincoln emerged as the savior of the nation during internal strife over slavery and political secession. The third and present

24 See Bellah, The Broken Covenant, Chapters I and II.
crisis, for Bellah, presents a new challenge for American civil religion. In the other times of trial, new symbols, peculiar to the American people, were precipitated. Now, Bellah argues, this present situation entails the possibility of new international symbols and a new world civil religion which transcends nationhood and calls upon America to relinquish greed and power in the rest of the world. This, he contends, would actually strengthen America both morally and politically.

Fortunately, since the American civil religion is not the worship of the American nation but an understanding of the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality, the reorganization entailed in such a new situation need not disrupt the American civil religion's continuity. A world civil religion would be accepted as a fulfillment and not a denial of American civil religion. Indeed such an outcome has been the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning. To deny such an outcome would be to deny the meaning of America itself.26

At various places, Thurman and King strike remarkably similar notes to Bellah's thesis. King, in particular, falls easily into the convenantal motif articulated by Bellah, but gives it an important twist in relation to the problem of race within the American ethos.27 As


27 See especially King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 67-83, where he analyzes the tragic "schizophrenic personality" of America on the question of race. King writes, "She (America) has been torn between selves—a self in
stated earlier, in his early development as a civil rights leader, the American dream was centered around enfranchisement of the American Negro, desegregation and integration through legislation, and the economic empowerment of black people. During his latter years, following his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, there is an increased realization of the international implications of the American dream. King's constant references to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation and the moral failure of America as nation and a world power are pervasive in his writings and sermons.

which she proudly professed the great principles of democracy and a self in which she sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy." Ibid., p. 68. Parentheses added.


While Thurman's vision of America is not as clearly articulated as King's there are definite indicators in his perspective which parallel the interpretation of covenant enunciated in Bellah. Thurman perceived America as an experiment in the mind of God to create the climate and opportunity for the actualization of human community. Thurman maintained that the sovereign purposes of God are manifested in the coming together of various races and ethnic groups in one place at a particular time in history to create a new nation. How the various groups arrived in America (i.e., slavery, conquest, etc.) is not the most important question for Thurman. In fact, through the human atrocities and errors committed in the enslavement and oppression of black people, the occasion is created for the redemptive possibilities of love. 31 Thurman, however, 


like King, is concerned primarily with the problem of racism as an obstacle to the realization of the American dream.  

For Thurman, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation are the pivotal documents of the American experience which insure freedom for the individual under God and remind America of its role as steward of the great ideal of democracy.

In an eloquent and revealing statement, Thurman outlines his vision of the United States of America as a metaphysical and religious manifestation of the sovereign purposes of the Divine Spirit actualizing itself in human history and pointing the way to human community:

It is my conviction that our nation is involved in the far-flung purpose of God to establish a world community of friendly men living beneath a friendly sky.


32 See Thurman's treatment of the dilemma of "outsiders" living in the midst of "insiders" and the inherent conflict this presents for the nation. Thurman, The Search for Common Ground, pp. 86-88.

Think of our startling history at this point just for a moment! It is not chauvinistic to affirm that our total life as a nation has been a schooling in the meaning of human freedom against a time when the only thing that serves the collective life of man is a dynamic faith in the worth of the individual and the freedom which it inspires. Our national life was launched in a revolution against tyranny with its corresponding assertion of human dignity. Our emergence as a nation is a judgment against all dictatorships. From the beginning we have been made up of the widest variety of peoples from the ends of the earth. Our roots go deep in the various cultures, faiths and heritages of the peoples of this planet. For a long time interval we were isolated by two oceans, and in this isolation we were tutored by a political, social, and religious ideal which placed the premium supreme upon the inherent worth and dignity of persons. Our responses as a nation to this tutoring was to inscribe these ideals in the formal arrangements by which we pledged ourselves under God to undertake our social adventure. We are blessed with the kind of climate and the abundance of natural resources which contributed deeply to our individual and our collective emotional security—all this social development against a time when the human race would be faced with a mass crisis created by the almost sudden emergence of vast power over nature that both time and space are cancelled out, and for the first time in human history, men, wherever, they are on the plant, are, as if they were next door neighbors. The world is a neighborhood, but there is no confidence in the integrity of the neighborliness. For more than a century, we, as token representatives of the many peoples of the earth, have been in school, learning the meaning of human dignity and the responsibility of the freedom which it inspires. Our fatal responsibility before God is to provide the inspiration for the confidence in the possibilities of a way of life on this planet in which no man need to (be) afraid and in which "the bruised reed will not be crushed or the smoking flax quenched!" No strength of arms, no might of material wealth can qualify our nation for such a role. This possibility of a life of freedom under God is the crown that He
holds steadily over our heads with the hope that as a nation we may grow tall enough to wear it. 34

This lengthy quotation captures the essence of Thurman's understanding of the nature and role of America in world history and what he perceives as a divinely sanctioned mission. During his latter years, Thurman again articulated this view of America in a speech entitled, "America in Search of a Soul." 35 Here he refers to Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address as a source which outlines the conception of the "new nation" entrusted with the moral responsibility of realizing the democratic ideal in the world of other nations. He also underscores the significance of the inherent worth and dignity of the individual and the concomitant freedom and responsibility which a democratic political arrangement insures. In this speech, however, Thurman suggests that perhaps "school is out" for America, referring to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the potential for nuclear devastation wrought by the creation of the atomic bomb. There is a strikingly


35 This speech was presented during the Robbin's Lecture Series at the University of Redlands, Redland, California, January 1976; Taped Recording is also available at the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund, San Francisco, CA.
similar theme in King where he reminds America of her moral responsibility to the poor and other nations of the world, and finally warns the nation that this particular moment in history may be the last chance for humanity to choose between chaos and community. Bellah sounds a similar alarm and calls for a national year of mourning and repentance for the American bicentennial.

Despite their apparent disenchantment with the failure of America as a moral leader among other nations, in Thurman and King there is an eschatological hope of community which informs their vision of America and its mission to the world. During the latter years of King's life and ministry, he analyzed the difficulties and tensions within and outside of the civil rights movement and identified "the temptation to despair" as being bound to the realization of the deep entrenchment and interrelatedness of the three evils of racism, poverty, and militarism. He also argued that the national policy of discrimination against ethnic minorities was related to the nation's foreign policy as illustrated in the Vietnam War.

36 King, Where Do We Go from Here?, pp. 186-91.
Nevertheless, King believed that the international liberation movements arising from the oppressed was the sign of hope for the future of America and humankind. In his last speech, while recognizing the pessimistic state of the nation and the world, he raised the element of hope for this particular period of history and America's role in it. King stated:

But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period in the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding--something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembling today, whether in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee--the cry is the same--"We want to be free."39

In Thurman's last formal treatise on community within American society, he concludes on a positive note regarding the realization of the American dream. Referring to the crisis within American society, Thurman felt that "the present solution is a stopgap, a halt in the line of march toward full community or, at most, a time of bivouac on a promontory overlooking the entire landscape of American society."40 In a voice of prophecy, Thurman

40 Thurman, Search for Common Ground, p. 103.
envisions another creative moment for America when one in the likeness of Martin Luther King, Jr. will come forth bearing the dream of community.\textsuperscript{41} For both, therefore, the eschatological hope for America and the world is bound to the struggle of oppressed peoples.

This eschatological hope for America is also a prominent theme in Bellah. As stated, Bellah sees the possibility of the emergence of a world civil religion out of the third time of crisis in America.\textsuperscript{42} The denial of such an outcome, however, is the argument of John T. Watts.\textsuperscript{43} Watts contends that Bellah's imaginative theory of eschatological hope is idealistic and that it forces an interpretation on American history that is foreign. Cartwright's criticism of Bellah's transcendent universal religion of the nation is quite similar. He writes, "Seeking to be normative, it moves so far away from the distinctive American experience that it becomes rather abstract."\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 104.
\textsuperscript{42} Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," p. 40.
Watts argues that the historical personages whom Bellah acknowledges as significant authorities in the development of American civil religion such as Winthrop, Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, Lincoln, etc. adhered tenaciously to an exclusivistic "we-they" syndrome which was fundamentally opposed to alien symbols from the beginning. Charles H. Long raises this issue as a methodological concern. Long's criticism is that at the core of American civil religion is a language that is oppressive to non-Europeans, notably black and Native Americans, because it ignores their reality, and hence renders them invisible. This language, according to Long, is also repressive in that it hides from social consciousness the European mentality of conquest and exploitation, which too is an integral and vital component of civil religion.

All interpretations of American religion, whether from the point of view of the revealed tradition or the civil tradition, have been involved with a subjective concealment of the inner dynamics of their own religious-cultural psychic reality and correlative repression and concealment of the reality of the other. This procedure has been undertaken to give American reality a normative and centered mode of interpretation.

46 Ibid., p. 219.
Long calls for a new hermeneutic, a reinterpretation of American history, which includes the presence of non-Europeans, and ultimately calls for a transformation of American consciousness and society. Interestingly, Bellah makes similar recommendations.\(^47\)

Thurman and King make several important contributions which merit further research and closer examination in the American civil religion debate. Thurman's and King's analyses and recommendations for "saving the soul of America" can be helpful in laying the foundations for the "new hermeneutic" of which Long speaks, and may well be the direction which is needed for the redemption of American society.

First, Thurman's and King's diagnoses of the malady which afflicts the American psyche (and consequently, American civil religion) overcome the tendency towards abstraction which is a chief criticism of Bellah. Both not only point to the xenophobic tendency inherent in the American consciousness, but also offer concrete analyses of the dilemma created by the tragic struggle between American democratic idealism and its antithetical twin, racism.\(^48\)


\(^48\) In addition to earlier references, see Thurman, The Luminous Darkness and King, Where Do We Go from Here?, Chapter III, "Racism and the White Backlash," pp. 67-101.
Secondly, Thurman's and King's respective proposals for overcoming the barriers which militate against American and world community warrant further discussion within the context of American civil religion. Thurman's insistence on the internal cultivation of spirituality as a prelude to social transformation and King's accentuation of the social responsibility of the nation form a creative model for the role of religion in the reconstruction of American society.

Finally, the role of black and other ethnic minorities in the redemption of American society, as presented by Thurman and King, deserves careful attention from scholars involved in the American civil religion debate. Both argue that within the rejected groups of American society lies the basis for its social transformation and the creation of world community. King's vision of America and the relation of black Americans to its realization have already been discussed. It is sufficient to add that until the end of his short career, King maintained the belief that reconciliation would come to America through the redemptive suffering of black Americans and others who dared to follow their glorious example. 49 Thurman maintained

49 "Playboy Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," in Washington, A Testament of Hope, pp. 346-47; "The Negro
that the dichotomous scenario of "outsiders" living in the midst of "insiders" is perhaps the greatest threat to American democratic values. A reinterpretation of "The role of minorities in the modern state is crucial not only for the state as a community among world states, but also for the experience of community on the part of minorities themselves."50 Thurman thought it not unreasonable to infer from the Biblical narrative and the pattern of Life itself that the oppressed and rejected should lead the way to redemption. This, for him, is particularly applicable in regards to the American destiny.51


Summary

By virtue of their conceptions and recommendations, Thurman and King represent two distinct, yet related approaches to the problem of community. Their proposals for human community must not be viewed as conflictual, but as ultimately complementary. Although their respective approaches differed at important places, the urgent need and mandate for human community was the common goal and labor of their lives. Thurman reflected on this common sense of mission between himself and King:

Perhaps the ultimate demand laid upon the human spirit is the responsibility to select where one bears witness to the Truth of his spirit. The final expression of the committed spirit is to affirm: I choose! and to abide. I felt myself a fellow pilgrim with him and with all the host of those who dreamed his dream and shared his vision.52

Thurman and King insisted that goal of human community was not merely an utopian ideal, but the very destiny of the human family. They argued that because of the advances in scientific technology, once distant cultures and nations have now become an international neighborhood with fundamental structures of interdependability and interrelatedness. Therefore, human community and international cooperation are no longer options, but vital necessities for continued existence on the planet.

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52 Thurman, Head and Heart, p. 255.
In closing, this study has been a comparative analysis of the ideal of community in the lives and thoughts of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the purpose of this study to demonstrate how these two thinkers contributed to the religious and moral formulations of human community. In both, there are major continuities and discontinuities which have significant implications for the conception, character, and actualization of community.

It has been suggested that the two thinkers' approaches to community, i.e., their respective emphases on the nature and role of the individual and society and their construals of ultimate reality, can serve as heuristic instruments in the explication of the principal elements involved in the conception, character, and actualization of community, and lay the theoretical framework for discussion of a model for the work of community. These elements or formative principles include their common themes of spirituality as a basis for social transformation, the relationship between love and power, the nature and role of the church or religion in the work of community, the nature and role of the state, and specifically, the unique role of black Americans and other minorities in the realization of community within the context of American society.
and the world. While they were not labeled as "American civil religionists," it has been suggested that their analyses and recommendations for community within American society could serve as valuable contributions to the American civil religion debate. Thurman and King, in many ways, represent the best in the American dream. Their views of integration and liberation within American society and the method they upheld as the only moral and practical one available to the men and women of conscience are, at once, a critique on American society and a distant goal to which the nation is called.

Finally, and of particular importance for this examination, has been the fact that these two pastors and social prophets were black Americans whose understandings of community were rooted in their personal searches to find the most moral and practical method to overcome the barrier of racism in American society. It is of no small consequence that out of their particular situations of oppression based on race and color that they searched for a universal human fellowship which transcended the artificial barriers of race, class, and religious exclusiveness. The findings of this dissertation make it clear that these two faithful pilgrims, like the patriarch Abraham, were looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
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