

# MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND THE FUTURE OF MULTICULTURAL AMERICA: TOWARD A KINGIAN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

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It is indeed an honor to be part of this year's Hein-Fry Lecture Program. It is also a privilege to address you upon the 35 years and a day since Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. More importantly for me, it is an honor to be among my esteemed colleagues, Dr. Robert Franklin and Dr. Dwight Hopkins, who have contributed in their own scholarly work to the dreams and visions of Dr. King. My contribution to today's discussion centers on Martin Luther King, Jr. and his contribution to the educational field in the United States. I would like to suggest that his education, both formal and informal, prepared him for a vision of a multicultural society. First, I want to place King within the scope of theological education here at Gettysburg. Second, I intend to elaborate on King's own educational process. Third, I would like to suggest, on the basis of his educational biography, what I call a "Kingian educational process" for the future of a multicultural United States, a process that could be incorporated at various levels in the general and religious educational experiences of students.

At various points in this presentation you will hear me use the terms "education," "religious education," "multicultural education," and "culture." I use the term "education" in the very broad sense of the word that has been popularized and defined by the work of the late Lawrence A. Cremin, president of Teachers College Columbia University, who stated that education is "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended," that can take place in schools, youth groups, clubs, and other agencies.<sup>1</sup> When I refer to "religious education," the education that takes place within the congregational or denominational setting, I am referring to the intentional manner, formally and informally, in which the church assists the baptized creature to know and interpret his/her life under the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

My references to "multicultural education" develop from the work of Christine Bennett in which she describes multicultural education as "the change of the total educational environment so that it will develop competences in multiple cultures and provide members of all cultural groups with equal educational opportunity."<sup>3</sup> By "culture" Bennett means "a cluster of factors (societal institutions and aspects changing over time) that influence socialization, or the process by which members of a society learn to conform to standards for perceiving, evaluation, behaving, and doing."<sup>4</sup> The Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Freed in Christ*, puts it this way:

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America too often react fearfully or grudgingly to the diversity of cultures. We are to delight in the fact that the people called, gathered, and enlightened have such diversity. We are, as a multicultural church, to minister in a diverse but divided society.

To this, the statement adds that

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience 1783-1876* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1980) ix.

<sup>2</sup> A. Roger Gobbel, "Christian Education: An Exercise in Interpreting," in *Education for Christian Living*, edited by Marvin Roloff (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987) 139.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Bennett, *Comprehensive Multicultural Education* (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1992) 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

culture includes music, art, and dance, but is more than that. Culture -- the attitudes and patterns of life -- plays a part in setting priorities, developing procedures, and choosing expressions of faith.<sup>5</sup>

While we in the United States annually remember the renowned civil rights leader of the twentieth century who called for equality of opportunity, the right to sit on a public bus, economic development, and world peace, we see a paucity of literature on King and education. Although I see education as a thread that runs throughout the course of King's life, that specific component has not been a prominent piece in literature on the life of King. Yet, when looking at his life-span and at his own reflections on his personal development, education is an overarching factor for examining King. This factor can become a model for those of us in the field of general and religious education to follow. Brian Haggerty indicates that this educational tradition and familial interest in education was predictable early in King's life.<sup>6</sup> Among the characteristics identified by Haggerty is the fact that King had faith in his students: the human person was created in the image of God, and he reminded black children that they were "as good as anyone." He continues with the following:

He was convinced of his message.  
 He sought to change structure as well as attitudes.  
 He identified educational content with educational process.  
 He struck a balance between reflection and action.  
 He combined criticism with vision.  
 He was committed to his work.

Frederick D. Harper underscores King's influence on education when he states that King was a teacher whose expertise on civil rights and race relations would characterize him as a local, national, and international teacher. He further states that King starts from outside of the classroom and points teachers into the homes of his/her students.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Carpenter, examining the scarcity of research in King's philosophy of leadership, makes a substantial case for this particular aspect of his life in regard to its implications for education. Carpenter suggests that King advocated a prominent role for schools in changing the social order. Moreover, King saw that role including the involvement and respect for the professional teacher as well as the parents in order to bread down the barriers that so often divide these two populations within communities.<sup>8</sup> Bennie Goodwin states in his dissertation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: American Social Educator," that while King has been portrayed and described in military and religious terms, nevertheless King's overall "purposes, perspectives, programs and procedures can legitimately be described as educational and ...can justifiably be perceived as an American social educator of significant merit." By the term social educator he means that King is one who "carri[ed] out the educational process in the wider context of his/her society rather than in an educational institution." He continues by saying, "he/she is an outstanding person who by the presentation of ideas via symbols and symbolic acts intentionally influences positive change in the thinking-behavior of a significantly large segment of his or her society."<sup>9</sup> This took place through non-violent direct action.

The beginning of this presentation in reality starts with the Multicultural Program at Gettysburg Seminary. From the late 1980's to the present time seminarians at Gettysburg have been required to take one unit in Multicultural Ministries as part of their theological education in preparation for two of the rostered ministries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: a pastor or an Associate in Ministry. The program began initially with the concern from the Professional Leadership Unit of the Lutheran Church in America. The initial experience was a concentration on one topic, such as the intensive multi-dimensional aspects of poverty in Adams County in South Central Pennsylvania. At the present time it includes students having various cultural immersion experiences: from tutoring students in English as

<sup>5</sup> A Social Statement on *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. August 31, 1993. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Haggerty, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Role Model for Religious Educators," *Religious Education* 23 (Jan-Feb 1978) 60-68.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick D. Harper, "The Influence of Martin Luther King on Education," *Adult Education* (April 1973) 312.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Carpenter, "The Leadership Philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: its educational implication (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1970) 197.

<sup>9</sup> Bennie Goodwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: American Social Educator (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1974) 4, 233.

Second Language classes in Adams County to life with the Ute Indian tribes in Utah; from encounters with Palestinians in Israel to schooling in Liberia; from Lutheran parish life in San Juan, Puerto Rico to issues of race at Trinity Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; from an immersion in a thriving and healthy African American and Afro-Caribbean congregation at Epiphany Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York, to observing and assisting with home stays and ministry projects in Mexico City, Mexico.

This program is consistent with the ELCA social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*,<sup>10</sup> for it takes seriously the statement's exhortation that ministry must be lived out in an increasingly multicultural nation and in a technologically connected world or global village. This social statement informs us this afternoon with its commitment to ecclesiastical leadership when it states:

The Christ to whom the Church witnesses is the Christ who breaks down walls of cultural exclusivity (Mark 7:24-29; John 4). We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have recognized ourselves to be in mission and ministry in a multicultural society, and have committed ourselves to welcome cultural diversity. Given our history, the commitment was neither quick nor easy.

It further states the church's commitment to the changing contexts for ministry with a commitment to:

the effort to start and to support ministry in African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or multicultural settings; the effort to recognize and to empower pastoral leaders while honoring their cultures; the effort to provide resources in languages other than English...

It is from this social statement and the ecclesial commitment that it reflects that the "Martin Luther King seminar" and the "Socio-Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King" developed. These courses have taken place each January for the past several years. A self-selected number of students choose to embark on an expedition and an inquiry into one of the foremost North American leaders and one of the greatest African American leaders of the twentieth century. The seminar experience includes some or all of the following: walking the same streets that King walked, meandering through and getting a glimpse of the childhood home of King in the "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood in the city of Atlanta; examining King's educational experience at Morehouse College; viewing the legacy of the Civil Rights movement at the Park Service Center; seeing the personal and familial side of King at *The King Center*; reflecting at the King tomb; attending the annual King Memorial Concert with the sound of the voices from Morehouse and Spelman undergraduates and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; attending worship at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church where his maternal grandfather, his father and he had all pastored; worshipping and sitting in on classes at the Interdenominational Theological Center. Students also experience soul food at various places in the area and feast at Pascals' Restaurant where King and his associates planned and worked at strategies during the movement. These field experiences are supplemented and supported with required reading of King sources: his own writings as well as biographical pieces and essays on Dr. King. In addition, the professor and students enter into dialogue, discussion, and conversation about all of the above in seminar sessions during the evening after the hectic and in some ways, eclectic pace.

One of the initial questions to which the students respond is their reason for taking part in such a seminar. Naturally, the responses vary. Some participate because it is an intensive five days. In addition to the intensity, students are curious to find out more about King the man, King the pastor, or King the man of faith. Students born after King's death have experienced the holidays and heard the "I Have A Dream Speech" for many of their school years. For them, Martin Luther King, Jr. is part of history, not a living character in their existential experience. He is someone in text books or sermons. With that being the case, he is removed from their life-span, and they desire to see the other side of the picture. For those who are older and who grew up during those years, they come to find out about the man they saw on the television screen but who was thought to be a black man who was a trouble-maker, revolutionary,

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<sup>10</sup> *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. A Social Statement of the ELCA.

a communist, who disrupted the nation. At least that is what they heard in their homes from parents, relatives, and friends. And then there are those who come to confirm and see what they have studied over the years and to view the streets and places where King walked and spoke, as well as to see life within the African American community. I share some of the responses to illustrate:

- The black and white images of King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial seemed just as distant as the moon landing. That was ancient history. I wanted to know what happened to the dream and who was dreaming now. My intension in taking the seminar was to learn about King in a new way.
- My initial impressions of African American Community and life were a mass of understatements and misrepresentations by the media because that is all that I had to rely upon.
- The Civil Rights Movement seemed in the past and I subconsciously thought that the people of this country, black and white, are in a far different place than we were during the Movement. Also...I thought that the civil rights movement involved quite a bit of violence on the part of blacks.
- I have not been totally immersed in the black culture until participating in this project.
- I wanted to understand the African American struggles with slavery, through the civil rights times, and into the present within the context of the gospel.
- I was nervous about entering places in which I would be outnumbered in regard to race for the first time, and I didn't to know how I would react.
- He was a man of vision, compassion, strength, and peace, and a man who became a martyr for the cause of worldwide social justice.
- I have always been a sympathizer with the civil rights movement, but only from afar...I went into this experience and realized that, in spite of my various jobs and worldwide travels, I had led a rather sheltered life in some ways.

The seminar attempts to address the various dimensions of King experienced and expressed by the students by challenging the perceptions and assumptions of hearsay and myth and replacing these with a small encounter with King who is a human creature as we all are; a person who contributed to the human community in this nation and the world. One cannot undertake this seminar without observing the roots or contributing factors for King's growth and development as a national leader. With this being the case, as an educationist, I cannot help but look at the role of education in the life of this Nobel Peace Prize winner. This role was supported and nurtured within his home, church, community, educational institutions, and educational mentors. Each of these, some more than others depending on the period in King's life, contribute to his life in the United States and a citizen of the world. Thus, King is a prototype of the multicultural person. All of these can be examined. In a sense and from my perspective, what we see develop is an educational process that took him from Atlanta to Philadelphia, from Boston to Montgomery, and on to India, Sweden, France, the Caribbean and back to the U.S. This was accomplished through and supported by his experience within the African American community in the southern part of the United States. I envision this multicultural process as a series of successive concentric rings expanding and probing through his life-span.

The First Ring is sense of place. King's educational development did not widen with his entrance into the formal school setting but was fostered and nurtured from within surroundings of the family home. King was born on January 15, 1929, to Michael and Alberta King in Atlanta, Georgia. The location and identification of his birthplace is important in order to put this educational biography in perspective. Two questions emerge that must be answered: What was Atlanta? How does it fit into the life of one of its most famous citizens?

Atlanta was known in the black community as a thriving southern city where there was a large black professional community including doctors, lawyers, teachers, clergy of prominent congregations, etc. It also was known as "the gateway to the South," "the New York of the South," and "the unofficial capital of

the South.”<sup>11</sup> Out of a total population of 318,587 citizens, 101,503, or one-third of the citizens, were African American.<sup>12</sup> Vestiges of that time can be seen in the development of the Atlanta Insurance Agency building and visits to the Herndon Home, the intellectual hub of the Atlanta University Center and its historically black colleges of Morehouse, Spelman, Clark, and Morris Brown, in addition to its theological seminaries.

More specifically, Martin was born on Auburn Street, or what is popularly known as “Sweet Auburn,” a thriving part of the black community, in the home of his parents and grandparents. King describes it as “quite ordinary in terms of social status” and “not the slum district,” of “average income” with “little crime” and “very religious.”<sup>13</sup> Even now one can see the steeples of the large black churches, the variety of stores and small neighborhood businesses as well as social service agencies and community offices such as the NAACP and, in its present context, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

The Second Ring is the sense of family or belonging. To look at Atlanta and even “Sweet Auburn” is to speak too broadly, for the roots of King’s passion for the work of the intellect was rooted within in his family. One cannot think of King without looking at and examining his familial ties to education. He describes his parents in glowing terms:

Our parents themselves were very intimate, and they always maintained an intimate relationship with us. In our immediate family there was also a saintly grandmother (my mother’s mother) whose husband had died when I was one year old. She was {very} dear to each of us, but especially to me. I sometimes think that I was her favorite grandchild. I can remember very vividly how she spent many evenings telling us interesting stories.

He goes on to describe the familial atmosphere:

The same applies to my environment. I was born in a very congenial home situation. My parents have always lived together very intimately, and I can hardly remember a time that they ever argued (My father happens to be the kind who just won’t argue), or had any great fallout. I have never experienced the feeling of not having....My father has always been a real father. This is not to say that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth; far from it. My father has never made more than an ordinary salary, but the secret is that he knows the art of saving and budgeting....He has always had sense enough not to live beyond his means. So for this reason He has been able to provide us with the basic necessities of life with little strain.<sup>14</sup>

This example and demonstration of household stewardship became an important piece for King and his siblings in the post-high school years.

When King describes his mother one sees the affection of a child for a caring and nurturing human being. “Our mother has also been behind the scene setting forth those motherly cares, the lack of which leaves a missing link in life.” These are his words to describe the important role she exhibited throughout those growing years. Taken together, King’s remembrances of his father, mother, and grandmother suggest the feeling of security that he and his siblings experienced. This also contributes to another aspect of his family life, the stress on the educated life.

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis Baldwin, *Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 16; M.K. King, “An Autobiography of Religious Development,” 12 September-22 November 1950, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1, edited by Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 359.

<sup>12</sup> University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center. *United States Historical Census Data Browser*. ONLINE. 1998. University of Virginia. Available: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>. [31 March 2003].

<sup>13</sup> M.K. King, “An Autobiography,” 360.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

To add to this familial picture, there is the fact that both parents were college educated and professional people. Martin Luther King, Sr. or “Daddy King” was the pastor of one of the prominent black Baptist churches, Ebenezer. Alberta King was a teacher and musician. That fact, in and of itself, did not account for King’s passion for learning, but it certainly cultivated the environment for the love of the intellect. This love for the world of ideas and reflection continued in his formal school experience from elementary through college in Atlanta. As Lewis Baldwin notes, “He also had the typical child’s desire to know and understand, and he often raised questions to his parents about race, religion, and other matters.” Martin Luther King, Sr. characterized young Martin as “a curious youngster who really did wonder constantly about his peculiar world he saw all around him.”<sup>15</sup> Martin began his formal educational experience in nursery school at the age of three and then started kindergarten and elementary education at the age of five. It was during this early period that we find another side of King that might surprise those of us who may only think of him as the all-giving person and the benevolent neighbor.

As stated before he enjoyed the pleasure and opportunity to discuss with his parents around the dinner table. An incident had occurred with a playmate. He and his friend had been friends for about three years, and Martin was now six. The father of his white playmate owned the store which was located directly across the street from the King home. Their friendship ended upon their entering their respective schools, and his white playmate told him that he was no longer allowed to play with Martin anymore.<sup>16</sup> Disturbed by this comment and turn in relationship, King went to his parents with the news, and during their regular discussions at the dinner table his parents explained the issue of race in America to him as they themselves experienced it. At that young age, King vowed “to hate every white person.”<sup>17</sup> As he continued to grow physically and emotionally, the feeling of hate grew as well despite the plea from his parents that as a Christian person, it was one’s duty to love even the white person. This feeling of hate lasted well into his college years.

This experience is important to us who look with twenty-first century eyes. We see that the seeds of hate and race are built from the early childhood years, and King was not an exception. It also indicates that the issue of hate becomes stronger than the element of love and respect. After all it was King’s playmate who learned to hate or despise King, a hatred which he learned from his father. Moreover, the power of hate is so profound that King had difficulty hearing the message of Christian love expressed by his parents. In King’s own words, “The question arose in my mind, how could I love a race of people who hated me and had been responsible for breaking me up with one of my best childhood friends? This was a great question in my mind for a number of years.”<sup>18</sup> This raises another issue, namely, the role of religious formation and education in the development of King.

The Third Ring in this suggested educational process concerns the Church or life in the community of faith. Life within the church was an integral part of King’s growing years and constitutive of this ring. In one sense he had no choice about being involved in congregational life, with his father “Daddy King” being the pastor of Ebenezer as King’s maternal grandfather had been before him. In some ways it was a typical Protestant religious formation, including Sunday school, various church services, and Sunday school programs. It was there that one feasted on the Word and enjoyed the fellowship of friends and the building of Christian community. For King, church was his second home. In his own words, “My best friends were in Sunday School, and it was the Sunday School that helped me to build the capacity for getting along with people.”<sup>19</sup> The importance of the religious education that took place is important for our understanding of King. For most Protestant churches the educational ministry occurs in the Sunday school system. It is from within the Sunday school that participants from the congregation are able to read, learn, memorize, interpret, and sing the stories of God’s mighty and gracious acts over time by studying and examining the textbook of the community, the Bible. The Sunday school at the same time helps us to continue to live out that story as it helps us to build our congregational community. King is very mindful of the relationships that were nourished there, however, the Sunday school has religious education as its primary task. For that to take place, King experienced the teachers who were volunteers

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<sup>15</sup> Baldwin, *Balm in Gilead*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> M.K. King, “An Autobiography,” 362.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

and learned the stories from the Bible, the history, heroes and heroines of the church. In general, this manner of formation is foundational for one's life and vocation, and that is the case for King. King's remarks on the Sunday school incorporate the benefits and liabilities of this educational enterprise in the faith community. He highlights the transmission of the tradition and the reliance on volunteer staffs which might not be as well equipped to teach as we might hope.

The lessons which I was taught in Sunday School were quite in the fundamentalist line. None of my teachers ever doubted the infallibility of the Scriptures. Most of them were unlettered and had never heard of Biblical criticism. Naturally I accepted the teachings as they were being given to me. I never felt any need to doubt them, at least at that time I didn't. I guess I accepted Biblical studies uncritically until I was about twelve years old. But this uncritical attitude could not last long, for it was contrary to the very nature of my being. I had always been the questioning and precocious type. At the age of 13 I shocked my Sunday School class by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

From this brief description and self-disclosure or assessment, we are able to see that King's thinking is beginning to change during the transescent or early adolescent years. Up to that time, he accepted what was taught to him in the Sunday school classes. Disequilibrium is expressed; now he sees a gap between the Scripture's depiction of life and that which he experienced or reasoned. Nevertheless, as crude and elementary as the instruction was, the very fact that he was able to ask the questions and raise the issues within the context of the class indicates an environment that was conducive to doing that type of questioning or making such assertions. The incident also indicates the ongoing struggle of the church to be able to bridge the gap between its educational mandate and the tensions that exist among the theological academy, denominational Christian education offices, and the Sunday school classroom. The very educational process caused this disequilibrium for him, and, I would contend, that is to be commended. While in general education we laud this developmental transition, in religious education we seem to want to ignore it. King's remembrances affirm the transition.

The Fourth Ring includes schooling or formal education. King's educational experience continues along the typical progression of a child in the 1940's with the interface of home, school, and church. King attended all-black schools in segregated Atlanta. This was the law of the state, set forth in the Georgia Constitution of 1877. While legislators established a common school system, it was divided along the issue of race. It stated, "The school shall be free to all children of the state, but separate schools shall be provided for the white and colored races." With this the rule, black Atlanta, even within the oppressive atmosphere, developed its own institutions. In terms of calculated expenses in 1929, the year of King's birth, Georgia was third from the bottom in spending \$800/classroom compared with \$4,100/classroom in New York.<sup>21</sup>

Upon completing elementary school he began his high school years at the black high school in Atlanta, Booker T. Washington, at the age of thirteen. After two years he is enrolled at Morehouse College. These years are significant not only because they add another layer to his educational development but also because they contribute another dimension for understanding the black intellectual environment in which King was immersed. In addition, these years mark the emergence of another factoring ring, that of the educational mentor. King encountered both at Morehouse.

Morehouse College, one of the historically black colleges, was established in 1867. It was and continues to be an all male institution with a commitment to the cultivation, development, and recognition of black leadership through the liberal arts curriculum. Nestled in the segregation of the south, it expected its

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas V. O'Brian, *Politics of Race and Schooling* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1998) 54. See also C.T. Wright, "The Development of Public schools for Blacks in Atlanta," *The Atlanta Historical Journal* 21 (Spring 1977) 115-128; the Georgia Constitution 1877, available online from Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia [<http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/gacon.htm>].

graduates to succeed despite the hostile environment. The school motto, "Whatever you do in this hostile world, be the best," comes through in its students and alumni.<sup>22</sup>

The Gettysburg seminarians who step foot on the campus are mesmerized by the large numbers of students going to class, engaged in conversation, or just milling around the campus. As one Gettysburg student put it, "At Morehouse and Spelman I was surprised by the sheer numbers....I felt rudely out of place...[which] came from the fact that every one of the students I saw was black, dressed differently and obviously younger than I....I cannot deny that the color of their skin aided in the impact..." This is not the image that is depicted of young black males from the news media. Gettysburg students are astonished at the great pride exhibited by the student tour guides, the celebration of leadership depicted on the number of portraits of persons affiliated with the institution, and the commitment of the graduates to serve the community. This is substantiated by the words of Lewis Baldwin when he writes, "In the 1940's Morehouse College was like other black colleges in that it stressed humanitarian values, and young men who studied there were expected to succeed despite segregation and to become leaders of their people."<sup>23</sup> It was not only here that leadership was developed, but it was and is here also that young black men see, experience and can engage black leadership. And that is what King did. He was a Morehouse man; his mother was a graduate of Spelman College which is located across the street. In some ways he had no choice since his father was a graduate of the institution. His venture into higher education was a place of freedom for thinking and reflecting. It was at Morehouse that King in a sense came into his own intellectual identity. It is here that we find his first written statement on education that not only informs us but instructs us as to developing a Kingian process for education. In addition, it is at Morehouse and through the college experiences that he is able to bridge the gap between his Sunday school experience and the critical thinking skills needed to do theology. And it is at Morehouse that he is introduced to the possibility of what a multicultural United States might look like.

Writing in the *Maroon*, the Morehouse College newspaper, King wrote an editorial comment entitled, "The Purpose of Education," in which he attempts to counter the prevailing attitude of his fellow college classmates with whom he has had bull sessions. For King, education has a two-fold function: utility and culture. He goes on to say that education must enable a person to be more efficient, that is, trained for quick, effective thinking; to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and fact from fiction. King said, and I would agree, that education assists one in thinking critically. But even that is not enough, for the proper appropriation of the educated person must also include character, that is to say, the educated person must also be prepared and equipped for living within the society. He closed his commentary by stating, "If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, 'brethren!' Be careful, teachers!" In some ways his remarks are pertinent today, be it in college or professional theological education.

It is also from the Morehouse experience that King experiences an ongoing interaction with inter-racial encounters by being involved in extracurricular activities, specifically the Intercollegiate Council. This is an interesting development, for through these years he had carried within himself the childhood incident when he had had to terminate the friendship with his 6 year-old friend because of race. But in the midst of his education he tells us, "the wholesome relations we had in the Intercollegiate Council convinced me that we had many white persons as allies, particularly among the younger generation. I had been ready to resent the whole white race, but as I got to see more of white people, my resentment was softened, and a spirit of cooperation took its place."<sup>24</sup> It is here that we see one component of a multicultural society, and that is the intention on-going, sustained encounter with the other. Separation by race only builds up suspicion, hate, anxiety, and false conclusions. King had to encounter the other, see the difference, and experience the difference, but ultimately to see the brother or sister. It was not as bitter as he had imagined during his childhood years.

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<sup>22</sup> See Mary Christine and Phillip and Joan Morgan, "The Morehouse Mystique," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 10 (December 16, 1993) 16-19; Gwendolyn Glenn, "Following the Leaders," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 14 (March 6, 1997) 22-25.

<sup>23</sup> Baldwin, *Balm in Gilead*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Press, 1998) 14.

King's liberal arts course of study included a major in sociology and a minor in English, but that which becomes as important to his academic program was his encounter with the black academic. We hear about the mentors in graduate school, Brightman and De Wolf, but there were a cadre of black professors who were able to excite and prepare King for his graduate education. King identifies them: Gladstone Chandler, professor of English; George D. Kelsy, professor of religion; Walter Chivers, sociology advisor; and Samuel Williams, professor of philosophy. It was in Williams' undergraduate class that King became familiar and identified with non-violence in reading Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience."<sup>25</sup>

The personality that distinguishes himself to King and with whom he identifies as his intellectual mentor was Benjamin E. Mays, a University of Chicago Ph.D. who had come from the Howard University School of Religion where he served as Dean. This encounter brings us to the Fifth Ring, mentors. King's encounter with Mays was significant for several reasons. Mays was an ordained Baptist clergyman who weaved and balanced the world of scholarship with theology without the emotionalism that was demonstrated by his father, from which he wanted to escape. Second, it was through Mays' insight and vision as a school administrator that King was able to enter Morehouse College. Third, Mays was a respected scholar with an impressive list of scholarly research articles and books.

Let us probe this formidable administrator. Born and raised in South Carolina, Mays was a graduate of Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. He went on to do his master's and doctoral studies at the University of Chicago where he completed his dissertation entitled, "The Idea of God in Contemporary Negro Literature," which was later popularly published as *The Negro's God*. In this work he was the first to acknowledge that the African American's ideas of God emerged or grew out of his/her social situation.<sup>26</sup> It was Mays' contention that there was a need for a theologically trained pastoral leadership for those involved and working in black church communities of faith. Theologically, Mays was informed by the Social Gospel movement, particularly as it helped to inform and address the issues facing African Americans of his day.

In addition to being the research scholar, Mays also promoted the Morehouse tradition of preparing African American men for leadership positions. He underscored this by stating, "The Morehouse philosophy was and is that a man does not have to accept the view that because he is a Negro certain things were not meant for him. He can be free in a highly segregated society. Long before the demonstrations and Supreme Court decisions abolished segregation, the Morehouse students were taught to accept no segregated situation except that which was absolutely necessary; and that though their bodies were segregated, their minds could be free."<sup>27</sup>

Along with being a strong civil rights advocate, Mays was also a gifted administrator. Like contemporary institutional presidents, he was concerned about enrollment and the financial stability of the institution, especially during times of war. During his tenure, Mays created and developed a recruitment program to attract gifted high school students for Morehouse through early admission. It was through this program that Martin Luther King, Jr. was able to enroll at Morehouse after completing only two years of high school.

During King's years at Morehouse, required chapel was part of the community life. That tradition still continues to this day. It was during these times that Mays was able to reinforce his ideas of liberation to his students and be the staunch anti-segregationist. Lawrence Carter, Mays' biographer and present Dean of the Chapel at Morehouse points out the Mays believed that injustice triumphs only when good people are silent.<sup>28</sup>

One additional piece about Mays was the fact that by the time he became president of Morehouse, he had twice traveled to India, in 1936 and 1937. He made a third trip in 1950. Mays was fascinated with India,

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<sup>25</sup> Baldwin, *Balm in Gilead*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Edward Carter, Sr., ed, *Walking Integrity* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1998) 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26. See also Benjamin E. Mays, "The Moral Aspects of Racial Segregation," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 3 (Spring 2001) 118.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12.

and this trip allowed him to meet and converse with Gandhi. Mays wanted to see for himself the manner in which the Indian people used nonviolent resistance to win independence from the British. While King describes his interest in nonviolent resistance to a speech by Dr. Mordecai Johnson of Howard University who had just returned from India, I cannot help but think that the seeds for this interest were already planted by Dr. Mays through chapel talks, private conversations, and dinner conversation at the King family home.<sup>29</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Mays encouraged students at Morehouse to pursue graduate work. King heard this encouragement and went directly to do his theological studies at Crozer and, ultimately, graduate work for the doctorate at Boston University.

At Crozer, there are three pieces that need to be examined on this quest to find, define, and model a Kingian educational process: his encounter with racism, his hearing of the insights about Gandhi in India, and the continued reflective process of his religious development.

Attending Crozer Theological Seminary was a natural outgrowth of his encounter with his Morehouse professors who challenged his thinking and opened up the world of the Christian tradition that was beyond emotionalism and which demanded the use of the mind. In addition to the theological quest it was also a time to hone his preparation for parish ministry. King stated, “My call to the ministry was not a miraculous or supernatural something, on the contrary it was an inner urge calling me to serve humanity.”<sup>30</sup> Of particular interest was Christianity and the Social Crisis. He comments, “Any religion that professes concern for the soul of men and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting of the day to be buried.”<sup>31</sup> In his concern for the human creature, King was concerned about bridging the gap between the theological community and the world of the laity; making the complex claims of the faith intelligible to the least of his brothers and sisters; assisting people to relate their faith to their everyday encounters in the community and work. But the seminary was also a microcosm of the world that he thought he might have left behind in the south. Racism was there to greet him in the seminary community. Through a prank for which King was accused of being one of the instigators, a white southern seminarian pointed a gun at King with an order to rearrange the furniture in his room as well as apologize. Being steady and calm King engaged his attacker in conversation, and eventually other students came into the hallway. With so many other students present the white student put the gun away. What was the reason for this outburst from a student prank? At the predominately white Crozer, it was the fact that King was a southern black student. What was apparent to the students was King’s calm demeanor in the crisis.

In addition to student life King also was part of the community outside of the seminary. One of “Daddy King’s” classmates from Morehouse, Pastor Joe Barbour, was pastor of a congregation in the area. It was in that house that he enjoyed table fellowship, but the pastor also invited black seminarians to the house for conversation and debate and gave them spiritual support. King participated in various activities of the congregation including teaching Sunday school.

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<sup>29</sup> Richard R. McKinney, *Mordecai: The Man and His Message* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1998) 101, 116.

<sup>30</sup> M.K. King, “An Autobiography,” 363.

<sup>31</sup> Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 18.

It was during these years that he became more intrigued by the work of Gandhi. As stated previously, I would contend that he had heard of Gandhi before this time through his encounter with Dr. Mays. As a result, King was better able to grasp the impact of this revolutionary upon hearing a lecture by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, who had just returned from visiting this master of non-violent resistance.<sup>32</sup> It was here that he was able to begin the process of synthesis of the non-violent resistance and the radical love of God in Jesus.

It is also during this period that we get a further view of King's life and ideas on education through a small essay he wrote, "An Autobiography of Religious Development," for Dr. Davis' course, Religious Development of Personality. We learn as well about his parent's commitment to education.

So for this reason He has been able to provide us with the basic necessities of life with little strain. For the past three years he has had the tremendous responsibility of keeping all of us in school, (my brother in college, my sister in graduate school, and me in the Seminary) and although it has been somewhat a burden from a financial angle, he has done it with a smile.<sup>33</sup>

This also confirms the household stewardship that "Daddy King" demonstrated throughout the years of King's development.

While King's theological studies proved to be an intellectually exciting period for him, they only continued a lifelong quest for understanding or making sense out of his life and the lives of all humanity. Although he was a voracious reader, like any good educational experience these studies only opened up new questions for him. In addition his vocational goal appeared or seemed to lead him in the direction of the academic life, that is to say, King envisioned teaching at the college or seminary level. In order to prepare for such a career, doctoral studies were a necessity, and King decided to attend Boston University, known for its pacifist leanings. There King continued his interest and research in the area of non-violence, particularly with his work under Edgar S. Brightman and Harold DeWolf of the university faculty. These two men contributed to his interest in personalistic philosophy, which King describes as "the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality – finite and infinite – is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality."<sup>34</sup> His studies culminated in his development and acceptance of "a positive social philosophy," that is, "that nonviolent resistance was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice."<sup>35</sup> But King admits to himself and to us that this was framed in work in the academy. After twenty-one years of being in the academy it was time to undertake the demands outside the classroom. Although he had the fortune of considering several options for teaching positions at the college level, he received an inquiry from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. The congregation received his name from contact with King's father. After preaching the call sermon on April 4, 1954, King accepts the call to be the pastor.

Upon arriving at his first call he shared his vision, hope and dreams for the ministry there. It was an ambitious plan for someone new to full-time parish ministry. Although King listed thirty-four objectives for the coming year, I identify and summarize five of them which contribute to or reinforce King as educator. They are the following:

1) To increase the contributions to the building fund in order to construct a building for religious education.

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<sup>32</sup> Tony Chapelle, "A King Raised by Wise Men," *Black Collegian* 23 (Jan/Feb 93) 140.

<sup>33</sup> M.K. King, "An Autobiography," 360.

<sup>34</sup> Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

- 2) To welcome new members into the congregation through their incorporation into a department or circle or program where their spiritual and intellectual opportunities can be nurtured.
- 3) To establish a Scholarship Fund Committee to award a scholarship to a graduate from the congregation, intending to attend college, with the highest academic average along with social ministry activities and involvement within the congregation.
- 4) To establish a Board of Religious Education in order to implement the religious education program, the revitalization of the Sunday school, and the planning for a two to three week Daily Vacation Bible School.
- 5) To establish a Social and Political Action Committee in order to keep the congregation informed about the social, political and economic issues in the community with a particular focus on the work of the local NAACP.<sup>36</sup>

No matter how ambitious and clear the objectives of a program, the intentions remain mere intentions without an evaluative process. King shows his wisdom and in particular his educational leadership by reporting, evaluating, and giving feedback to the congregation about the outcomes of their objectives. A year and one month later, King commends the congregation on what they had achieved and of which they should be proud. To this end, King shared the following:

- 1) A scholarship of one hundred dollars had been awarded to a high school graduate from the congregation.
- 2) The Religious Education program was reinstated through the work of the Board of Religious Education, which developed and conducted a successful Daily Vacation Bible School.
- 3) The Social and Political Action Committee provided "special days" for the congregation by bringing some of the outstanding preachers and personalities of the nation for the congregation to hear.<sup>37</sup>

It should be noted that in addition to the above educational accomplishments within the congregation, King completed his doctoral dissertation, "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman."

These beginning years of King's parish ministry give us an understanding of the important role of the black pastor within the community. In addition to his concerns with the parish, King was also involved and immersed in the community in which the church was located. Once more, we see his educational interest. King joined the NAACP, but he also was involved in the Alabama Council of Human Relations, an interracial group that was dedicated to using educational methods for human relations. "Its basic philosophy recognized 'that all men are created equal under God. Interpreted into the life of our nation, this means that each individual is endowed with the right of equal opportunity to contribute to and share in the life of our nation. No individual or group of individuals has the privilege to limit this right in any way.'"<sup>38</sup> While legislation was a focus of the NAACP, many of his peers inquired into the reason for belonging to both organizations. King noted in his response to them that their fallacious opinion was only one way to solve the problem of race in the United States, and he thought differently. Legislation was important along side of education as well: through education we change attitudes, change internal feelings such as prejudice and hate, and break down the spiritual barriers to integration. Here again we see education performing its life transforming and life sustaining role.

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Recommendations to the Dexter Avenue Baptist church for the Fiscal Year 1954-1955," 5 September 1954, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. II, edited by Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 287-294.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Annual Report, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church," 1 October 1954 - 31 October 1955, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. II, edited by Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 578-5-82.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1958) 31.

But the hectic routines and demands upon King the parish pastor were dramatically heightened when on the first day of December 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a city bus so that a white male passenger could take the seat; she was arrested. This incident inaugurated the Montgomery Boycott and sparked a revolution in these United States. Spurred on by the arrest, empowered by the people and reflecting on a piece from his educational past, "Essay on Civil Disobedience," King asserted, "We were simply saying to the white community, "We can no longer lend our cooperation to an evil system."<sup>39</sup>

How does one keep the momentum going in the midst of false hopes and stalling tactics? Again, one sees a definite process of teaching and reinforcement through mass meetings or plenary sessions which, structured through set induction (introduction), variations of stimuli, and facilitating dialogue, included: songs, prayer, Scripture, remarks by the president, collection, reports, and the all important "pep talk." Its purpose was to give people the encouragement to continue with the struggle. At the same time it was also used for the inculcation of the non-violent philosophy. The participants were told to love rather than hate, and not to inflict violence but be ready to suffer from the violent acts upon them. King's years of study about and reflection on non-violence was now operationalized within his ministry and the Civil Rights movement. It was faith in action and not tomes relegated to library bookshelves. It took on flesh and blood with the women, men, and children who walked rather than ride. But to be able to transmit this commitment was an incredible achievement when most had not studied or even supported such action. For King, the achievement was realized because he and his cohorts demonstrated or modeled what they pleaded for others to do, to take on the cause of non-violent resistance.<sup>40</sup> From where we sit or stand today, we know that the boycott was successful with a commitment of the people who walked for over a year. But again, King and his associates were very conscious of a process that would assist people in the desegregated buses of Montgomery. Classes were held in which the use of role play and simulations were utilized. These were teaching sessions on non-violent strategies which also included feedback and discussion at the end. But they were not only within the mass meetings, they were also speeches within the school system to talk to them on the side of non-violence. Reinforcement was also done through the distribution of literature. "Suggestions for Integrating Buses" (i.e., For your help and convenience the following suggestions are made. Will you read, study and memorize them so that our non-violent determination may not be endangered).<sup>41</sup> This educational process was used to prepare for various strategies and can be seen in action in the documentary video, *Eyes on the Prize: Ain't Scared of Your Jails*.<sup>42</sup>

Non-violent resistance was the strategy used by King and his associates. The video documents the commitment to non-violent protest which joined the rich and poor, black and white, lettered and unlettered persons; easterners and west coast persons and young people. It was the framework for changing the North American world view. But it was a process, an educational process, and King was committed to it for the rest of his career.

In King's last major work, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, his commitment to a multicultural America is highlighted along with the educational imperative to bridge the gap between black and white. Again, quality educational opportunity is the goal. For King, it was a possibility. He reflected on a scene at the airport in Montgomery after a march where hundreds of people were stranded. King wrote:

...crowding together on the seats, the floors and stairways of the terminal building...I stood with them and saw white and negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shop workers brimming with

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>40</sup> King posits 6 tenets of non-violence in *Stride Toward Freedom*. Nonviolent resistance is: not a method for cowards, it does resist; does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win the friendship and understanding; the attack is directed against forces of evil and not the people who do the evil; a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation; it avoids internal violence of the spirit; it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice, and, therefore, there is faith in the future. For expanded explanations see *Stride Toward Freedom*, 102-107.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>42</sup> *Eyes on the Prize: Ain't Scared of Your Jails*. PBS Video, 1987, Videocassette.

vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship. I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the making of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood.<sup>43</sup>

We are able to see this rise above the local and national level and brought to the global level, as well as his call for a worldwide fellowship: to leave behind any race, tribe, national exclusivity or cultural encapsulation and bring about an “all embracing and unconditional love for all men.” The vision and reflection for this demands social, economic, and political change which King recommends, including community action, training groups, reading at home or in the streets, and communities of learning. While these are all true from King’s point of view, I think that he omits an important paradigm or process: his own life, which can be a model of a multicultural process. I say this because it was his own educational process that brought him from hate and suspicion to love and respect for the neighbor; departing from the known and familiar to embracing the unknown and unfamiliar. His own life demonstrates that there are possibilities for inclusivity, but it demands intentional work to bring down the barriers of suspicion and hate. I have suggested a way of starting that process, that of concentric rings:<sup>44</sup>

First Ring:	Place
Second Ring:	Family
Third Ring:	Church
Fourth Ring:	Schools
Fifth Ring:	Mentors

I see each ring interfacing and relating to the other, none more important than another but each varying in importance as the issues emerge and as we become more complex individuals over the course of the human life-span. It is an educational ecology, that is, a balance that can assist us to respond to life as the God-created creatures we are and help others to be a part of the human community, both formally and informally. Another way to express this is to say that the goal of our lives together is the Kingdom of God. The strategy of the rings is to keep that before us. Our feedback or evaluation clarifies how each of those rings has contributed or complicated the vision. In a country in which the gap between rich and poor is still there, where the disparity between city, suburban, and rural school districts is growing, we must ask ourselves, like King asked thirty-six years ago, “Where do we go from here? Community or Chaos?”

The end of the King seminar at Gettysburg asks students to give their post-immersion impressions. Again, I share some of their responses with you:

- we need to reinvigorate the Civil Rights Movement and begin to see in order to correct what has been brought to our minds.
- while I believe that my initial impressions of Dr. King were accurate, I feel like I have “come to know him” in a much more “real” way. I have a far better understanding of how he was shaped by his Southern roots, his family and his Christian faith – especially by his experience in the “black church.” I was particularly moved by the depth of Dr. King’s faith and trust in God – a piece of the person that I had not fully appreciated.
- I am ashamed to admit that before this trip I had only touched the fringes of the issues of segregation and discrimination, particularly as they relate to the African-American. Though I knew of Martin Luther King, Jr....I did not know the man and his work. More than anything, I have become aware of the range and extent of MLK Jr’s work.
- I do remember when Martin Luther King was assassinated and feeling very sad...but I was far removed from it and chose not to get involved.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?*, edited by James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) 561.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix.

--I am struck by the challenges that lie before us all.

--I am still sorting out my impressions and feelings from the trip. Overall I am frustrated.

--I think we all agreed that none of us would ever be the same again.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the future of Multicultural America? For King that involved the following:

- 1) taking time to study, read, and reflect.
- 2) respecting the human creature through dialogue with young and old.
- 3) commitment to the Kingdom of God which meant the liberation of all people.
- 4) intentional encounter with the other through Sunday school, higher education, theological institutions.
- 5) being rooted in self-identity with the black community.

It was an educational process that involved the five rings. Where do we in North America go from here? Do we embrace community or chaos? The dream is still before us.

Appendix

**A Kingian Educational Process**

