



THE SOCIAL ENGINEER AND THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

By Dante Ché

The contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr. to mankind are without question. He was a man whose leadership was pivotal to turning an oppressive society into one more receptive to the inherent value of all human beings.

Through his courage, the power of his intellect, the charisma of his personality and eloquence of his language, he revealed to a nation steeped in the history of racism that people of color are of worth as God's children; that the arguments of past generations to suppress them were without merit; that there was constitutional obligation set forth by the founding fathers that all men are created equal and thereby entitled to the largesse of America.

There have been many observations concerning the life of Martin

Luther King, Jr. However, to appreciate his vision, one must explore the exegesis of his philosophy. In a simplified approach, one may conclude that there were two profound influences on Dr. King's construction of what has come to be known as the "Beloved Community" which was the destination of his vision, as expressed in the "I Have A Dream" speech. They are the evangelical liberalism school, tempered by the insights of Christian realism school of thought as elaborated on the Rheinhold Niebur. As a student of Crozer Seminary, Martin Luther King, Jr. took a number of electives from professor George W. Davis, a proponent of evangelical liberalism. His interpretation of Christianity had a definitive effect.

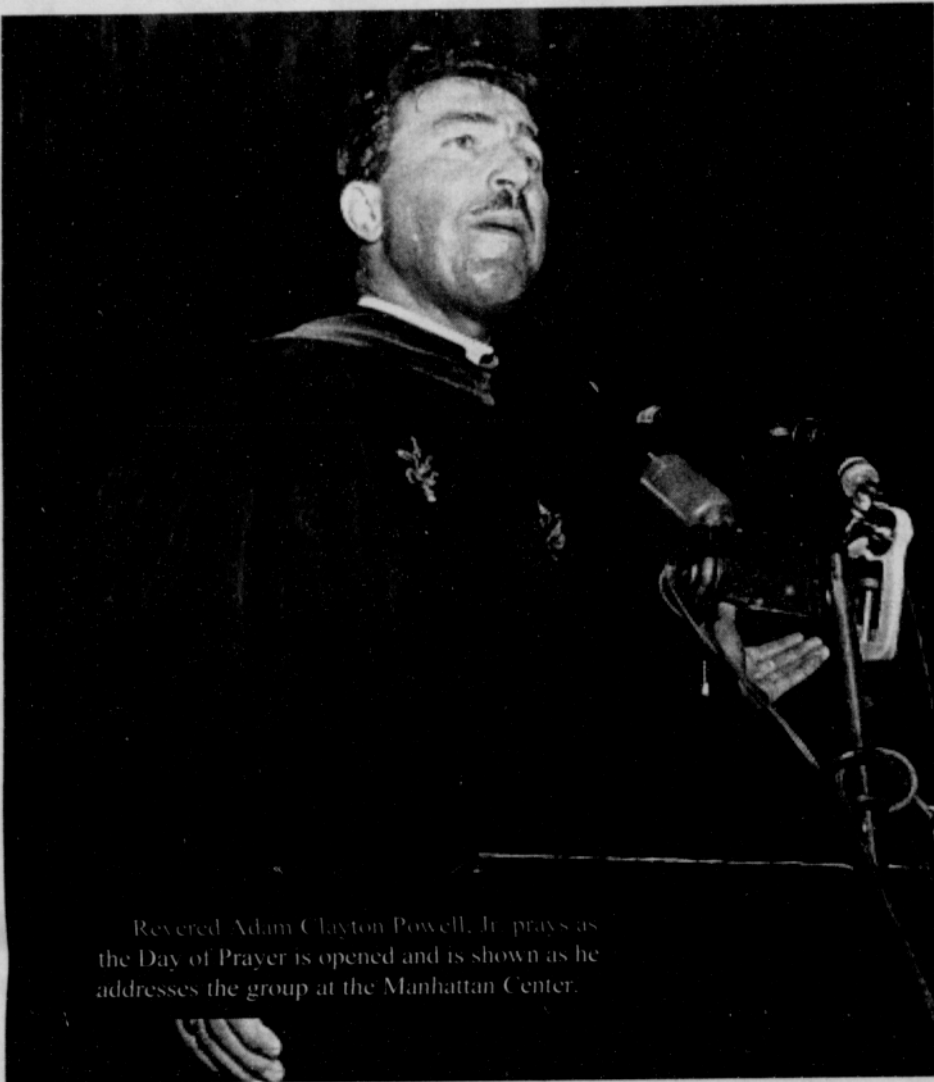
In brief, there are five major tenets which Davis espoused which may be considered the gist of evangelical liberalism. (1) The existence of a

moral order in the universe. A congruent universal rule that moves man from the malaise of chaos toward an existence which is governed by a higher order of community. (2) God acts in history. In short, divine revelation is seen as essentially historical in nature. The Biblical view of history sees God work within earthly events... historical events do not just happen. They are done by God. (3) A high priority is assigned to the value of personality in Christian life. That the highest "cognito ergo sum" is that of God. Since man is made in the spiritual image of God, the implication is that God is the source of rational truths of philosophy of religion as well as that revealed of theology. So it follows... personalism is the belief that conscious personality is both supreme and the supreme reality in the universe." (4) That human existence is fundamentally social in character and that human solidarity is the goal toward which history evolves... The spirit of mature religions is social and socialness does not stifle individuality or suffocate the personal. To the contrary, it nurtures healthy interrelationships and interdependence. That is what we should expect, because God's intention is that human life will become increasingly social and that humanity will achieve solidarity. (5) Christianity is essentially a moral and ethical religion. Davis maintains,

"Love your enemies... that ye may be sons." The Christian ineradicable interest in the good life for all human beings stems from the ethical nature of Christian faith and moral foundation of Christian foundation. These precepts lie at the base of King's philosophical underpinnings that he so eloquently expressed in his speech "I Have A



At the Apollo Theatre, Mrs. Gertrude Ward, mother of Clara Ward, and Rev. Thurman Ruth, gospel disc jockey, took time out to pray for the success of the Montgomery bus boycotters.



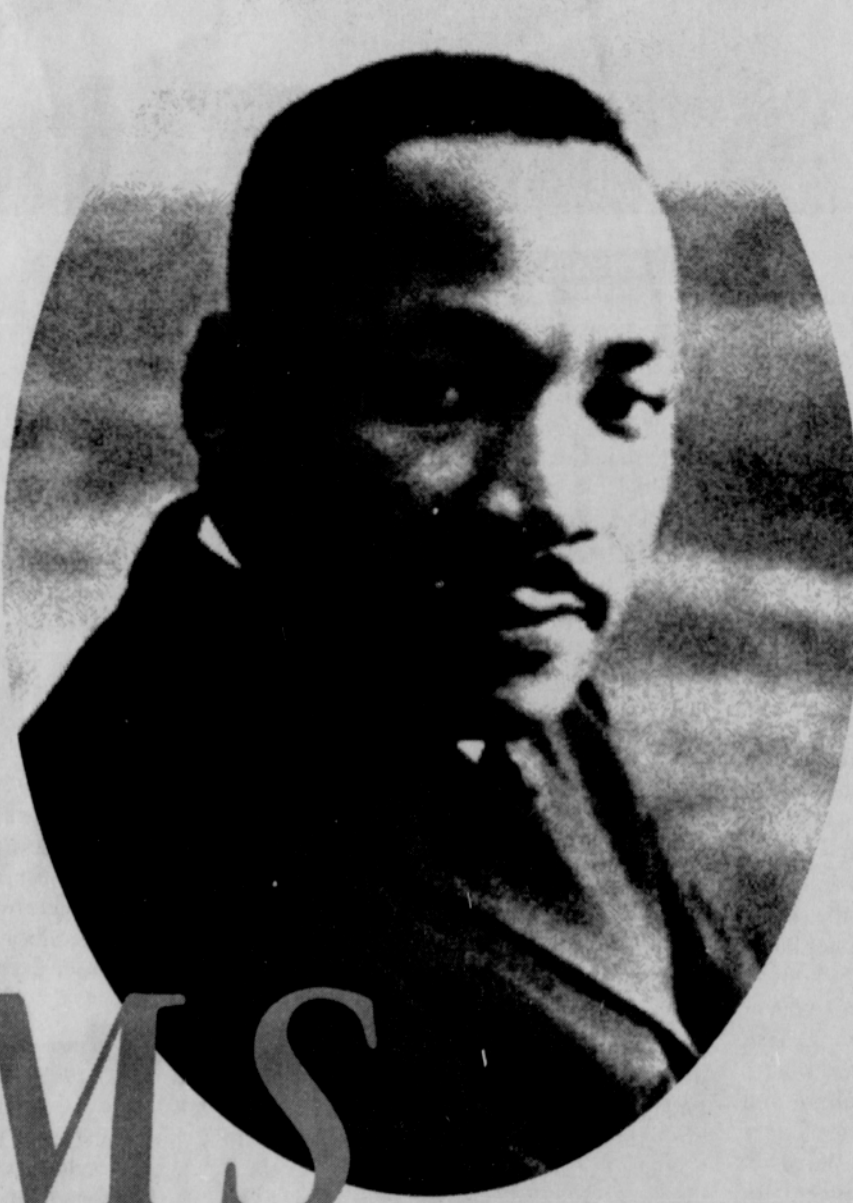
Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. prays as the Day of Prayer is opened and is shown as he addresses the group at the Manhattan Center.

Dream" in which he spoke of the constitutional promissory note of our founding fathers, the vision of the beloved community and the Christian principles that every person has God-endowed divine worth.

However, as King's thought matured, he was given over to influences of Rheinhold Niebur. In that, man is a creature of nature as well as a spiritual being, limited by original sin. The three operative tenets of Rheinhold Niebur were: (1) the relationship between spirit (anima) and nature (i.e. form); (2) the nature of individuality (free will); (3) the origin of evil. The outcome of the influence of Niebur on King as he evolved as a social activist was to temper his views of the relationship between power and the oppressed. Also, it affected the view on love and power.

In response to the rise of the "Black Power Movement" and the violence associated with it, King wrote "...Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social change, political, or economic changes. In this sense, power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice. One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power is that power and love are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."

King as a social engineer was a pivotal conductor in steering America toward reconciliation and consequently affecting the world in terms of race relations. The impact he had on the day-to-day human condition can be said to be no less than profound. He engendered to a post-war generation a heightened sense of human worth and, although he was committed to non-violence as a tactic, he came to realize that the struggle between justice and abuse of power as vested in those who control the power is inevitable. The beloved community... the Promised Land is still in the distance as we travel toward the future. Mankind more so than ever holds his destiny in his hands. The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. leaves us a map of which we all should take heed.



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