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CHAPTER NINE

"A Change Is Gonna Come": Spiritual Leadership for Social Change in the United States

THAD WILLIAMSON

On Suffering and Justice

The religious impulse has three distinct dimensions. The first consists of humanity's efforts to *name, confront, and comprehend the ultimate*: that is, the fundamental questions of why anything exists, how that which exists came to be, who or what has set this process in motion (and perhaps even guides it now).

The second consists of humanity's efforts to *come to terms with the conditions of our own existence.* These conditions in turn can be described as falling into two major categories. The first category has to do with the specific attributes of human beings, including our capacity for communication, reflection, abstract thought, and moral language and behavior, as well the limits of these same capacities. The second category has to do with our status as mortal creatures whose very existence is contingent, temporary, and frequently characterized by suffering.

The third dimension consists simply in the effort *to find or make collective meaning out of our peculiar situation* as creatures thrown into a life situation that alternates between the beautiful and wondrous and the absurd and cruel, often in almost the same breath. The existence of multiple religious traditions that have provided human beings of all ranks, from humble illiterates to learned philosophers, with coherent

frameworks for not only addressing these questions but also relating them to the practical question of how we are to live must be counted as one of humanity's most magnificent achievements.

It is well beyond the scope and resources of this chapter to delve into these dimensions with equal depth, or to adequately explore the vital question of how the different dimensions relate to one another. Here I focus attention specifically on the concepts of suffering and justice, both as they are found in religious traditions and as they inform secular understandings and practice. To narrow the inquiry yet further, my primary reference point will be instances of Christian social theology as practiced in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States.

The problem of suffering is a primary theme in biblical literature, as in religious literature generally. Suffering in turn may have two faces. The first consists of, simply put, bad things happening to people: deaths of husbands, wives, parents, children, entire villages, cities, or even nations; disease; hunger, pain, and poverty. The second consist of inward pain—that is, the pain a human being feels "on the inside," internal to their "soul" or "state of mind." This pain can be concealed and may rarely be manifest through behavior or visible (mental) illness, yet it still permeates the moment-to-moment, day-to-day existence of human beings. What is the source of this pain? Often, the Buddha teaches us, it is frustrated desire: the solution to which must be to learn to restrain and then extinguish desire. Plato's account of the harmonious soul in *The Republic* offers a similar assessment, but a comparatively modest prescription: the well-formed soul, the one that is happy on the inside, is one in which lower-order desires are restrained by reason and rational impulses. (The presumed inability of the majority of persons to achieve the level of self-control needed to be happy without external assistance in turn provides a major justification for Plato's sophisticated scheme for achieving social justice through enlightened aristocratic rule.)

Suffering as such is endemic to the human condition. But the existence of moral language and, in particular, terms such as "justice," presumes that not *all* suffering is necessary, even given the constraints of mortality. Sin, evil, injustice, oppression: these terms name (and condemn) the varieties of suffering that human beings inflict upon one another or upon themselves, needlessly, that is, via avoidable human choices.

Doctrines of Christian social responsibility, in particular the Social Gospel tradition, claim in effect that being faithful witness to Jesus Christ requires concerted effort to reduce needless human suffering perpetuated by unjust social institutions. Here J. S. Mill's account of

the evolution of the concept of justice can help clarify terms: in Mill's narrative, the emergence and subsequent evolution of basic social institutions (in particular, law) reflected the functional imperative to establish peaceful conditions of basic human security while minimizing rape, murder, and ransacking. Yet these laws and institutions may create problems of their own and typically become, at least in part, mechanisms for some members of a given community to dominate over others. In Mill's view, it is the responsibility of each generation to critically assess its institutional inheritance, to sort out what practices truly promote utility as opposed to being mere vestiges of outdated traditions, and sift practices that truly promote the common good from those that institutionalize prejudice or reflect the power of vested interests.[1]

In short, social institutions and practices have, even when deeply flawed, a functional utility in establishing and sustaining civilized human life. On the presumption that the primary alternative to civilized human life is continuous violent conflict, this is a good thing from the point of view of reducing needless human suffering. But social institutions can and have evolved in ways that perpetuate suffering. Race-based slavery and oppression, the domination of men over women, class domination, and imperial domination are crucial examples (both in Mill's time and our own).

What's worse, institutionalized forms of oppression in fact normalize suffering, by presenting such suffering as inevitable, a "natural" part of how the world works, and as necessary to prevent yet greater evil. Indeed, the task of figuring what counts as a reasonable institutional practice or policy and what counts as socially unnecessary and unjust is often a demanding one, requiring considerable practical knowledge about both the relevant facts and achievable alternatives. To make a claim that a given practice is unjust and should be reformed is to make a political claim. And even once this work is completed, it is sure to be scrutinized and contested—both by the beneficiaries of existing practices as well as fair-minded observers. Indeed, as a general rule, the more complex the judgment that is required, the less moral certainty is warranted from those engaged in the debate.

The slow machinery of democratic politics stands in stark contrast to the fiery moral passion of the pulpit and related expression of religious moral convictions. The art of getting things done is quite different, and often less pretty, than the work of identifying and expressing what should be done. But this is not, as one might expect, a reason to separate religion and spirituality from democratic politics. It is important to

acknowledge that the work of discerning justice and exhorting others to act on behalf of justice is a distinct activity from political negotiation. But the former type of work can and must be connected to the latter if systemic injustices are ever to be addressed and reduced; only passion and deep moral conviction can motivate actual politicians that the slogging through to make a difference is actually worth it.

This chapter examines the role of religious motivations, historically and in the present, in leadership for social change and social justice. Two case studies focus on the historical context of the nineteenth and twentieth century United States by examining the centrality of theological identity and commitment in the writings and actions of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin Luther King, Jr. on behalf of ending slavery (Stowe) and advancing racial equality (King). The final section considers what role religious motivation might—or must—have in twenty-first century movements for fundamental social change.

Nineteenth-Century America: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Antislavery Crusade

In the case of the United States, the paradigmatic case to consider is that of the injustice of slavery and subsequent racial oppression. The social ideas of competing brands of Christianity had a profound impact on the way the relevant issues were understood by mid-nineteenth-century Americans. Simply put, secession and war would have been far less likely results had not a vocal, significant minority of voices within the North taken the view that slavery was an abominable evil abhorrent to God and that a revolution in the slaveholding South was required to put an end to the institution.

Consider the theological-political arguments forwarded by Harriet Beecher Stowe in the most influential antislavery text of the 1850s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's novel offered plenty of melodrama in its depiction of slavery, but it also offered pointed argument and subtle insight. At the philosophical level, Stowe's story turned the traditional (quasi-Platonic) justification of slavery on its head: rather than a kindly system in which the best sorts of people rule over lesser kinds of people to the benefit of all, it was a system that permitted the kindest, bravest, and best souls (Uncle Tom) to be ruled over by the worst kinds of souls (the sadistic overseer Simon Legree).[2] At the political level, Stowe dramatized the contrast between the urgency of offering the basic privileges of humanity to fleeing slaves and the "normal" political calculus that produced

the Fugitive Slave Act: normal democratic politics as known in nineteenth-century America, Stowe's depiction of an Ohio senator shows, was incapable of treating the issue with the moral gravity required. At the interpersonal level, Stowe depicted how various white Americans who thought of themselves as decent people possessing a moral compass nonetheless were complicit in both the perpetuation of slavery *and* the worst abuses associated with the system. The financial problems of an undisciplined Kentucky farmer-businessman sets in motion a chain of events in which families are broken apart and Uncle Tom is sold down the river.

Stowe's storyline and framing of slavery was aimed to shock the nation into action—and to appeal to deeply held religious impulses, particularly of women readers. Stowe describes slavery not primarily as a machine for exploiting black labor, but as a cruel mechanism that tears apart families and hence undermines the most natural of human emotional bonds, that between family members and in particular between mother and child. Stowe's account also stresses the way the slave trade appealed to and rewarded greed, violence, and dehumanization—thereby producing not only black victims but wicked white people.

Yet the real target of the book was not "wicked" white people, but complacent white people. Part of the task was simply educational and cognitive: to show readers what slavery actually entailed at the human level. Importantly (and in contrast to the subsequent "Uncle Tom" caricature), Stowe's narrative emphasized the dignity, bravery, and potential for accomplishment of enslaved black Americans, thereby undermining racial stereotypes held nearly as deeply in the North as the South. Stowe's book also illustrated the Underground Railroad and depicted the role of whites in its operation, with the strong implication that supporting the railroad would be a helpful practical step for the white reading public.

Importantly, Stowe also held open the possibility of moral and spiritual redemption, even within the South. She depicts a New Orleans aristocrat whose ill-fated young daughter's friendship with Tom transforms his view of blacks and the problem of slavery, and then a young Kentucky squire, who, showing a courage of which his father had proved incapable, stands up to Tom's tormentor in an effort to reunite Tom with his family and redeem a litany of wrong.

These appeals to conscience and the possibility of moral transformation banked on commonly shared Christian beliefs. More precisely, Stowe intended to show that one could not tolerate, let alone participate in, the evil of slavery and be considered an honest Christian. At the same time, only piety and deep spiritual convictions could possibly sustain individuals (at any level) in efforts to change the system.

Left unstated in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the possibility that failure to redress the moral evil of slavery might bring divine judgment upon the nation. Sympathetic readers of Stowe's novel would have comprehended, perhaps for the first time, that blows from a terrible, swift sword might become a worthy price to pay for extinguishing the evil of slavery. (This view would soon be enthusiastically endorsed from the pulpit by Stowe's brother, the prominent revivalist preacher Henry Ward Beecher.)[3] Indeed, Abraham Lincoln himself would go on to depict the Civil War and its fields of blood as just payment for the sin of slavery.

The crux of the issue, from the standpoint of this chapter, is that the anger and passion that fueled antislavery activity in the 1850s cannot be divorced from the theological views of antislavery agitators; nor can the views they expressed be divorced from the theological frameworks in which they were rooted. Stowe is one relatively genteel example of this point; the full-blooded ferocity of John Brown is another. In neither case (Stowe nor Brown) could the motivating theological framework be regarded as liberal (in modern terms), or even as fully rational. But in both cases, these frameworks moved participants to take historically meaningful actions leading ultimately to radical change.

Twentieth-Century America: The Cosmopolitan Christianity of Martin Luther King Jr.

The hope of some antislavery writers that the mass of white Southerners might undergo a fundamental transformation in their views about race were only rarely realized in the South, even after the Civil War. The Reconstruction period brought some remarkable instances of multiracial cooperation in civic and political affairs in the Southern states, but the retreat of federal troops in 1877 was followed by a systematic attack on blacks' political and civil rights over the next generation. The commitment of most whites to a doctrine of white racial superiority found new institutional expression in the combination of legalized Jim Crow regimes and frequent episodes of anti-black terrorism and violence throughout the South over the first half of the twentieth century. The core legal basis for Jim Crow (though certainly not its material effects) was dismantled over an approximately 25-year time period following the end of World War II, primarily as a result of a powerful Civil Rights movement that moved from the margins of Southern society to claiming the moral, legal, and political high ground in a remarkably short period of time.

It is impossible to make sense of the Civil Rights movement in mid-twentieth-century America without reference to the role of religion

and the institutional church. The most prominent and influential leader in the movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was not simply a pastor skilled in community organizing. He was a creative religious thinker, rooted deeply in the African American Baptist tradition but strongly influenced by contemporary cutting-edge Christian theologians and social thinkers like Reinhold Niebhur and deeply impacted by Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence.[4] For King, religious conviction impacted all three layers of social change: the individual's personal responsibility for enacting social justice; the specific tactics appropriate for use in advancing social justice; and the conviction that God is at work in the world, through the collective agency of human beings.

To be sure, King was more than just a religious thinker; he was also an organizational leader, and by the 1960s had become, in effect, an independent political force who understood and embraced the necessity of operating in political contexts. But a considerable part of his political strategy rested on the assumption that the use of religious language alongside appeals to secular American ideals would find a welcome reception among a significant part of white Americans. As pointedly depicted in the important film *Selma*, King's explicit tactical goal in local struggles was to get on to the front page of national newspapers as well on television news, in expectation that exposing the brutalities of segregation would increase political pressure for more rapid change. But this strategy could not work without the maintenance of a high degree of internal discipline, including a commitment to nonviolence, on the part of civil rights activists. As that film also depicts, even nonviolent strategies impose challenging moral dilemmas upon leaders. King knew that in publicly challenging local police forces in public spaces, unnamed individuals in the movement would likely experience violence, brutality, possibly death. No less than a leader of an army, he knew his tactical decisions could cost the life and limb of the civil rights soldiers—often ordinary persons—enlisted in the cause.

Heavy is the moral weight that falls on any leader entrusted with such responsibility. Near the very end of his life, in March 1968, King offered from the pulpit some extraordinary reflections on both his own personal journey and on his conviction that God was acting in history, then in there in the America of 1968:

> Whenever you set out to build a creative temple, whatever it may be, you must face the fact that there is a tension at the heart of the universe between good and evil....
>
> Now not only is that struggle structured somewhere in the external forces of the universe, it's structured in our own lives. Psychologists

> have tried to grapple with it in their way, and so they say various things. Sigmund Freud used to say that this tension is a tension between what he called the id and the superego. Some of us feel that it's a tension between God and man. And in every one of us, there's a war going on. It's a civil war. I don't care who you are, I don't care where you live, there is a civil war going on in your life. And every time you set out to be good, there's something pulling on you, telling you to be evil. It's going on in your life. Every time you set out to love, something keeps pulling on you, trying to get you to hate. Every time you set out to be kind and say nice things about people, something is pulling on you to be jealous and envious and to spread evil gossip about them. There's a civil war going on. There is a schizophrenia, as the psychologists or the psychiatrists would call it, going on within all of us. And there are times that all of us know somehow that there is a Mr. Hyde and a Dr. Jekyll in us... We end up having to agree with Plato that the human personality is like a charioteer with two headstrong horses, wanting to go in different directions. Or sometimes we even have to end up crying out with Saint Augustine as he said in his Confessions, 'Lord, make me pure, but not yet. (Carson 1998, 357–358)[5]

Here King acknowledges the internal struggle that even leaders for social justice continually battle (and by implication, sometimes succumb to). The most important point, however, is King's conclusion:

> In the final analysis, God does not judge us by the separate incidents or the separate mistakes that we make, but by the total bent of our lives. In the final analysis, God knows that his children are weak and they are frail. In the final analysis, what God requires is that your heart is right. (Carson 1998, 358)

This conclusion is important for three reasons. First, because actual action for social change requires many, many decisions in real time, not all of which will prove wise or fruitful, no social change agent could be productive if he or she thought God would condemn every failure and misjudgment. Second, the actual work of social change places extraordinary stress on leaders that may induce moral lapses; it is nearly impossible not to read King's comments as a personal confessional, an acknowledgment of his own moral lapses (i.e., extramarital affairs). Third, and most important, it speaks to King's vision of a God who acts on the big stage—the big stage of history.

Indeed, in the extraordinary "I've Been to the Mountaintop" sermon of April 3, 1968 (the eve of his assassination), King imagines a conversation between himself and the "Almighty," in which he is given the opportunity to visit any era in human history. King concludes that given the chance, he would tell the Almighty, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy."

King elaborates:

> Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick; trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled... the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."
>
> And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men for years now have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today. (Carson 1998, 359–360)

King's comments thus reveal the convictions that: (1) there is an Almighty God who is involved in human history, even now; (2) that this God is involved in working through human hands and actions; (3) but the course of history is still contingent on human actions, not predetermined, and hence human beings (including King himself) have the obligation to discern God's intention for humanity and then act on it despite (4) the fact that humans are flawed, frail creatures prone to mistakes and moral weaknesses.

But there is still an ambiguity about King's historical-political theology. On the one hand, he famously stated that the "arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."[6] This thought is comforting, and indeed probably necessary, for social justice advocates confronting setbacks, mistakes, internal moral failures. We may mess this particular campaign up, but God is still on our side.

Yet on the other hand, King is completely serious about the possibility the human beings may succumb to the war mentality and induce total annihilation of humanity via nuclear war. He cannot help but consider this as a real historical possibility. Such annihilation, if it took place, would clearly stand at odds with his sober but optimistic faith in the arc of the moral universe. But for King, this is precisely the point. The entire project of humanity *and* of God's relationship to humanity is tied up in whether human beings can choose nonviolence over nonexistence.[7]

Twenty-First-Century America: Fueling Passions for Justice in Pluralistic Contexts

Are Martin Luther King Jr. and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* merely instructive historical examples of the relationship between faith and social justice, or might they still have some relevance today? Today we live in a "disenchanted" world in which religion helps define the background of public culture but in which literal theological claims rarely enter the public culture—and when they do, they are almost never attached to attractive, human visions of social justice.

The stakes attached to this question could not be higher, at least from the standpoint of prospects for democratic social justice in the United States. Consider John Rawls's famous 1971 articulation of principles of justice appropriate for a democratic society:

- a commitment to a stable scheme of basic liberties accessible to all, with the political liberties in particular being of "equal worth" to all;
- a commitment to maintaining a social structure in which there is "fair equality of opportunity" for all to obtain "office and positions" (i.e., get ahead), regardless of one's starting point or any ascriptive characteristics; and
- socioeconomic inequalities are limited to those that actually benefit the least well off group (i.e., inequalities resulting from economic incentives that produce a superior standard of living for the entire group may be justified if attempting to remove them would hurt the least well-off group).

John Rawls in 1971 knew that the United States did not then come close to realizing these principles, but he also could not have suspected that the United States of 1971 would come far closer to realizing the

third of these principles (distributive justice) than the United States of the late 1990s (date of his last published writings) or of today. Instead, Rawls confidently asserted his principles as the logical implications of commitments he took to be broadly shared in liberal democratic political culture, in particular the commitment to the equality of worth of all persons.

In fact, the achievement of relatively just polities of a social democratic nature in the advanced nations does not rest on principles or ideologies alone, but rather on the presence of adequate social and political forces to advance and sustain such schemes. The well-established consensus among political scientists studying the welfare state is that relatively small state size, a highly organized labor sector, and ethnic homogeneity are the most favorable conditions in which to implement and sustain robustly egalitarian arrangements.

Those conditions are quite nearly the opposite of the fundamental structural features of the United States. Indeed, in the United States, apart from its written principles enshrined in the founding documents, the most promising vehicle for promoting egalitarian social change has often been the religiously motivated social reform movement. While this is quite a heavy weight to place on American religiosity, the historic salience of religious language in reform movements has, at times, been a counterweight to the structural forces militating against social democratic, inclusive politics.

Without the cultural currency of Christianity, and indeed without a convicted faith in God, there could not have been a Harriet Beecher Stowe or a Martin Luther King Jr. But now that shared religious commitments, or even basic biblical literacy, are no longer a binding thread in the dominant political culture, is it still possible that a religiously motivated reform movement with egalitarian commitments could gain substantial traction in the United States? And if such a movement were not to have a strong religious character, on what common threads would it be based? Probably not an academic political philosophy of justice. And probably not on a simplistic concept of "class interests," or on vague concepts of the "American Dream."

Perhaps the best-thought out, most influential answer to this question in contemporary political thought has been provided by, again, John Rawls, in his conception of "political liberalism" (1993). Stated simply, political liberalism takes as its starting point the fact of "reasonable pluralism" about "comprehensive doctrines," including religious worldviews. That is, Rawls takes it as given that in a culturally diverse world that permits freedom of thought and religious expression,

different persons will reasonably come to quite different views concerning fundamental questions of meaning and religious belief. To achieve justice in this context thus requires establishing an "overlapping consensus" of shared moral convictions concerning justice that believers (and nonbelievers) can accept and endorse as consistent with their own comprehensive doctrines. To take a straightforward example, Christians, Jews, and nonbelievers alike can easily find reasons internal to their own worldview to endorse the free exercise of religion as a basic tenet of a just society.

Rawls's arguments for political liberalism are compelling, yet they face major obstacles as a general solution. First, as an empirical matter there is a little to suggest that consensus about contested conceptions of (secular) social justice can coexist with deep disagreement about comprehensive doctrines within a given society.[8] Instead, deep-seated disagreements about controversial moral questions often undermine or destroy the possibility of consensus on allegedly less contentious matters of economic distribution.

Second, as Michael Sandel has persistently argued over the past two decades, Rawls's insistence that participants in a liberal democratic society frame public argumentation in terms that all citizens can reasonably comprehend regardless of their comprehensive commitments creates the possibility that some citizens will be forced to "check at the door" fundamental components of their identity. Third, with respect to demands for social justice, removing religious conviction from the debates often will rob arguments for social justice of their motivating moral passion. Sandel thus argues, contra Rawls, for a public sphere in which participants are freely encouraged to draw on their deepest moral commitments, be they of a religious nature or not.[9]

The review of the example of King is instructive on two further points as well. First, in considering the connection between religious conviction and justice, we must consider not only the content of the moral claim, but the motivation and conviction of the individual making the claim. Put another way, putting into practice robust commitments to social justice is an intensely demanding and draining experience. Individual religious conviction as well as relationships with individuals sharing one's moral and religious convictions are typically integral and essential for the sustainability of long-term activist activity, particularly on the scale on which King operated. Spiritual strength thus is typically a prerequisite for actually creating justice in the world.[10]

Second, religious convictions and religious communities historically often have played a critical role in the survival and subsequent liberation

of oppressed peoples. The black church in the United States has not simply been a convenient meeting place for organizing civil rights activism. It has been a fundamental source of meaning and support, a bulwark against white oppression (political, economic, spiritual), and a major source of positive black identity, including belief in the very possibility of social change and emancipation in challenging times.

Historically speaking, significant advances in social justice in the United States, particularly with respect to race and class, have been deeply tied to the work and efforts of religious communities. It is hard to imagine a transformational social movement in the United States of the twenty-first century finding the motivation and spiritual will to sustain itself that does not both draw on existing religious communities and express theological commitments. Yet is also hard to imagine a transformational movement in which any single religious view or institution claims a right to lead or guide the entire movement.

This chapter offers no solution to the dilemma presented, save for the insistence that religious convictions be given their due respect in both motivating individuals and communities to fight for a more just society and sustaining them in those fights. But religiously motivated social justice leaders, to be effective and inclusive in the context of pluralism, must be competent and fluent in speaking in multiple idioms—that is, using language and concepts that are explicable to both believers and nonbelievers, as well as believers of multiple religious traditions. Martin Luther King Jr., again, provides an example ahead of his time as a thinker deeply familiar with work from another religious tradition (Gandhi's thought) and who regularly referenced the diversity of world religions in his speeches and sermons, without diluting his distinctively Christian identity.[11]

King's example foreshadows the kind of social justice leadership that will be required in the pluralistic conditions of twenty-first-century United States: thoroughly embedded in a core tradition as well as in a religious community capable of providing an individual with the psychological and spiritual support to sustain arduous, risky tasks; capable of making justice claims in ways legible to nonreligious believers; and capable of building bridges and dialogue across multiple philosophical and religious traditions. The hardest part of this recipe to replicate, however, may not, as in the past, be a comfort with diversity and pluralism; but rather, the character and spiritual formation that comes with being raised in a religious tradition sufficiently robust to counter the saccharine consumerist individualist tendencies in contemporary American culture.

Put another way, the weakening and decline of Christian theological hegemony in the United States has had numerous welcome benefits from the standpoint of the evolution of a more tolerant, inclusive polity, but also significant costs in the weakening of an independent vantage point for providing an internal critique of American culture, a critique that might motivate action for change. In the twenty-first century, serious adherents of religious traditions from across the full spectrum of human religiosity must make common cause with each other—and of course with committed secular humanists—to insist on a higher vision and purpose for human life than that of the disaggregated consumer. Success in that effort is a prerequisite for more ambitious social movements aimed at social transformation to take root in twenty-first-century United States.

Notes

1. See J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1859), and many related writings.
2. See, among other sources, William B. Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom: The Political Philosophy of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).
3. See Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 198–207, for discussion.
4. For a short summary of King's theological formation, see James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 53–73.
5. These quotations are taken from a March 3, 1968, sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.
6. King made this memorable claim in a February 26, 1965, sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood.
7. This conception of the relationship between humanity and God corresponds to the broader branch of religious thought known as "process theology," in which God's very being is in some sense tied up in the course of events. This stands at sharp odds with the view of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and unchanging God. Among other reasons why the process theology view is attractive is that it provides a potential solution to the "theodicy" problem—the problem of why God allows suffering and injustice—without having to sacrifice the conviction that God is good. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, and knowingly allows the evils of human existence, how can it also be said God is good? But if God's power and knowledge, even who God is, is in some sense contingent on the unfolding of God's relationship with humanity, this also allows one to consistently hold that God and God's intentions are good.
8. In this context, "comprehensive doctrine" refers to a complete theory of the good, which would imply firm views about the nature of human beings and purpose of human life. To simplify greatly, Rawls argued that it is possible to have society-wide agreement of justice based on merely a "thin" account of the good. Even if we do not agree on the ultimate goods or purposes of life, Rawls believed we can agree that everyone has interests and plans, a desire to pursue them, and need certain things (i.e., resources, education) in order to do so. Michael Sandel, in contrast, believes that an appeal to instrumental self-interest cannot (at least taken alone) be the basis for a robust account of social justice. Specifically,

Sandel argues that a commitment to egalitarian social justice is most securely rooted in an understanding of the human self as intrinsically shaped by communal contexts and communal commitments. Instead of asking what discrete individuals would choose in an abstract, initial situation of fairness, we should instead approach distributive justice by asking what *we owe each other* as fellow citizens, whose fates are intertwined with our own. Taking this approach, in turn, necessarily commits one to a more robust account of the good life. Without a prior commitment to the moral claim that life goes better when it is lived together and that we all have a stake in one another's flourishing, we cannot understand why citizens would agree to enter a procedure like Rawls's original position in the first place. See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 77–81.
9. See Michael Sandel, "A Response to Rawls's *Political Liberalism*," in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, ed. Michael Sandel, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 184–218.
10. As James Cone puts it with respect to King, "Where he turned when his back was up against the wall and when everything seemed hopeless will tell us far more about his theology than the papers he wrote in graduate school. Engulfed by the 'midnight of despair,' where did he receive the hope that 'morning will come'? The evidence is clear: Whether we speak of the Montgomery bus boycott, the Birmingham demonstrations, the Selma March, Black Power, or Vietnam, King turned to the faith of the Black Church in moments of frustration and despair." Cone, *Risks of Faith*, 60.
11. This point is stressed by Robert James Scofield in a helpful essay, "King's God: The Unknown Faith of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." *Tikkun*, November–December 2009.

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