

An Introduction

- When you think of Martin Luther King, Jr., what comes to mind?
- What people come to mind?
- What don't you know about him and wish you did?
- What and/or who influenced him?

- Our task in three weeks
 - Listen to an intellectual biography of a martyr of the church and a renewer of society.
 - Attempt to engage ourselves in some of its lessons and dynamics

- It is like looking at one side of a ball
 - Be aware of what is and is not in the room with us – gaps will be seen.
 - Life experiences – bring us into new life experiences
 - Education – takes us from our experience and adds to it...or deepens it.
 - Dialogue – happens internally, in relationships, with society, with ideas.

George W. Davis & Evangelical Liberalism

- Crozer Seminary
 - MLK first takes "Great Theologians & Christian Mysticism
 - MLK had a high regard for Dr. Davis
 - The range of course increased
 - MLK learns the tenets of Evangelical Liberalism

- **Theme one:** the existence of a moral order in the universe
 - Just as physical laws there are also laws that deal with purpose for the human race.
 - We are moving toward a moral goal – it may be slow – but the outcome is certain
 - "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera" still played out in the stubborn sheriff in Selma, Alabama who "stumbled against the future" - and helped pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Evangelical Liberalism Continued

- **Theme two: *God acts in history***
 - Integral to his affirmation of the existence of a moral order.
 - We are not moving in a repetitive cycle of life – it is given direction by God
 - Biblical faith sees God in the blood, sweat, & tears of human life. Not the meditation and solitude of the mystic
 - God is not looking on with 'cold indifference.' Like an ever-loving Parent, God is working through history for the salvation of God's children.
 - So...EXODUS – is a dominant theme in King's speeches and writings.

Evangelical Liberalism Continued

- **Theme Three:** The high priority assigned to the value of personality in Christian faith.
 - **Personal** didn't mean individualism or the difference that distinguishes one person from another.
 - Rather – the potential quality of life which separates *homo sapiens* from all other forms of creation and...lifts them above them.
 - Grounded upon a prior belief concerning the nature of God's relationship with us.
 - We are God's children - objects of God compassion and concern.
 - We must be supremely worthy and inherently valuable.
 - Davis lined his belief in the value of the personal with Jesus of Nazareth and the emphasis on the ethic of love.
 - Jesus' death on the cross attested to the fact that every person is a being of infinite worth.
 - King defined **personalism 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

Evangelical Liberalism Continued

- **Theme Four:** Human existence is fundamentally social in character and that human solidarity is the goal toward which history evolves
 - People are social animals – within a context of fellowship and cooperation an individual's character evolves. (cf. p.26)
 - The goal of human history is increasing sociality. Three major shifts noticed in history.
 - From external to internal (rite to inner attitude)
 - Impersonal to the personal (treating people as things...recognize them as persons)
 - Individual to society (from individualism to love that is inclusive and unites all of humankind)
 - **So...a universal human community it the end toward which history moves.**
 - Davis would say:
 - We know now that we must live together or perish . If we will not have one world , we may have no world.
 - King makes this of that:
 - *The choice of humankind is not between violence and nonviolence but nonviolence and nonexistence.*

Evangelical Liberalism Continued

- **Fifth theme:** Christianity is essentially a moral and ethical religion.
 - For Davis, the goal and test of the Christian faith are its ethical fruits.
 - He observes that Jesus "makes the goal of human character likeness in moral quality to God himself."
 - By entering into complete fellowship with God – "Sonship"
 - Love your enemies...that you may be (children)
 - King's emphasis on the Sermon of the Mount as the model for Christian behavior is explicit here.
- Major Themes for MLK come from evangelical liberalism
- He also had reservations about a "liberalism without depth."
 - To some, liberalism merely meant a higher criticism of the Bible.
 - Davis gave three "levels of Christianity"
 - The surface – the externals like ceremony, ritual, sacred books
 - The subsurface – the life of Jesus, history of the church, different expression of denom.
 - The depth – the roots of human experience out of which all the rest have to come.

The Social Gospel Movement

- Liberalism had many sides and the Social Gospel Movement was one.
 - In the U.S. this was a response to the new society (and not merely a result of adjusting Christian thought to the impact of science and biblical criticism)
 - It comes in response to the Industrial Revolution and the influence of the theology of Evangelical Liberalism.
- **A Major Theological Assumption** that inspired the movement
 - ***Salvation had a social as well as an individual dimension and that social institutions had to be “saved” as well as individuals.***
 - This means:
 - All economic problems had a moral dimension
 - In addition to charity, the church should be concerned about social justice and social structures
 - And...the individual morality of workers and business people.
- **Walter Rauschenbusch** (1861-1918)
 - His career as a pastor was in “Hell’s Kitchen” NYC. And raised questions about the adequacy of the individualistic approach of Protestantism
 - They failed to comprehend that sin and salvation were social facts not just theological
 - Three concepts that King will draw from this: prophetic model of religion, Relationships between the church and the world, the kingdom of God and human community.

The Social Gospel Movement

- **The Prophetic Model – Religion as Ethical and Social**
- The essence of this principle: *the affirmation of historical relativity.*
 - *Everything in history stands under the judgment of God.*
 - *So...the prophet cannot put a stamp of approval upon anything “as it is.”*
 - *The prophet must always point out the gap between the will of God and the present order of things. So...there’s no accepting things as they are.*
- ***This will include: religious fervor, a democratic spirit, a strong social conscience, free utterance of one’s belief***
 - As in the form of the Hebrew prophets and all radical Christian movements.
- A corollary: *the inseparability of religion and ethics* – any method of cultivating the spiritual life...must have an ethical outcome.
- A corollary: *the affirmation of the fundamental social character of religion.* This is the major norm for judging religion. Ex: Israel's prophets were not isolated – but an integral part of the covenantal community.
- Evils condemned: injustice & oppression.
- The Prophets greatly influenced MLK (after Sermon on Mount)
 - MLK had a prophetic insight to discern the difference between false and true peace. (Montgomery boycott – revealed surface peace, false peace.)
 - MLK was disheartened that the Church often supported false peace.

The Social Gospel Movement

- **The Relationship between Church and Society**
- Essential position toward society & church that Rauschenbusch fought:
 - *That the world (society “as it is”) is essentially evil and that withdrawal from it is the only way to practice the authentic Christian life.*
- There are only two alternatives to this position:
 - Condemn the world and seek to change it.
 - Tolerate the world and conform to it.
 - **He favored change – following the teachings of Jesus**
 - Christians are to be subject to the law of Christ in both their personal and social relationships.
- **MLK’s** way of using this thought:
 - *It has always been...the responsibility of the church to broaden horizons, challenge the status quo, and break the mores when necessary.*
 - He disagree strongly with those who held that the church should not become involved in social issues.
 - Ie; combat injustice (housing, education, employment, legal problems... be the peacemakers
 - MLK was somewhat embarrassed by the “silk stocking” image of Dexter Ave. Bapt. Ch., so he was anxious to open up its doors when he first arrived.