



# God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Rufus Burrow Jr.*

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"This is a strong and sophisticated treatment of Martin Luther King, Jr., that makes an important contribution. It reflects Burrow's immense knowledge of personalist philosophy and the thought of King."  
—Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Chair of Social Ethics, Union Theological Seminary

"This scholarly, courageous, insightful work, which fuses so successfully King's academic career with his heritage from the Black Church, is a much needed addition to Martin Luther King studies and breaks new ground for all of us who pursue truth of the 'whole' King. No book more clearly illustrates how pervasive an influence the philosophy of personalism was on King's life and thought. It is an obligatory read." —Ira G. Zepp, Jr., Professor Emeritus, McDaniel College

Although countless books have been devoted to the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr., few, if any, have focused on King's appropriation of, and contribution to, the intellectual tradition of personalism. Burrow argues that King's adoption of personalism represented the fusion of his black Christian faith and his commitment not only to the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, but most especially to the social gospel practiced by his grandfather, his father, and black preacher-scholars at Morehouse College. Burrow devotes much-needed attention both to King's conviction that the universe is value-infused and to the implications of this ideology for King's views on human dignity and his concept of the "Beloved Community." Burrow also sheds light on King's doctrine of God. He contends that King's view of God has been uncritically and erroneously relegated by black liberation theologians to the general category of "theistic absolutism" and he offers corrections to what he believes are misinterpretations of this and other aspects of King's thought. He concludes with an application of King's personalism to present-day social problems, particularly as they pertain to violence in the black community.

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