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The Theology and Agency of Love as the Substance of Kingian Non-Violent Philosophy and Activism.

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Recommended Citation

Quainoo, Matthew, "The Theology and Agency of Love as the Substance of Kingian Non-Violent Philosophy and Activism." (2015). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 449.
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/449>

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The theology of Love focuses on King's understanding of God as love:

A Research Abstract

Problem: Almost 50 years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., controversy continues to swirl around the motivational forces that inspired the nonviolence approach employed by King in his fight for equality for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and victims of injustice through peaceful protest. Some scholars argue that Kings was inspired by such advocates of nonviolence such as Mahatma Gandhi and Buddha Shakyamuni. Others believe that Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence was an expression of the Christian theology of God as Love.

Purpose/Abstract: This research project explored the Kingian hermeneutic of the Christian theology of God as Love as inextricably bound to the existentially redemptive agency of Love. After a literature review of several primary and secondary resources, the direction of this project was thematically shaped in an attempt to better understand the interconnectedness of theology and the agency of love evident in the religious practice and philosophical expressions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The agency of love also focuses on the praxis of King's theology in the unarmed enactment of political and economic justice, the mosaic liberation and restorative indemnification of the victimized, terrorized, and demonized, nonviolent civil disobedience and socio-economic legislative and institutional reformation, and the prophetic awakening of the moral consciousness in oppressors, for the sake of their repentance. Finally, this research project seeks to explore how King's theology and praxis of love contravenes contemporary vestigial social maladies.

Significance: The importance of this research project lies in the fact that it seeks to provide an understanding of the Judeo-Christian ethic of Love expressed in the thoughts and practices of Dr. King.

Methodology: This qualitative research project involved a series of in-depth interviews with three of the most renowned scholars on King's theological perspectives, including the Dr. Raphael Warnock, Senior Pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia; Dr. Lawrence E. Carter, professor of Religion and Dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Boston University; and Dr. Andre Willis, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. Each of these scholars was asked a series of questions, including:

1. How did King define and thus demonstrate love?
2. How was King's explication of love applied to social criticism as a discipline?
3. How was King's explication of love applied to civil disobedience?

Data collected during the interview process was analyzed thematically in an effort to acknowledge their interpretation of King's religiously and philosophically heterogeneous influence, while noting the Christological synthesis of King's influences as he ultimately sought to reveal the immanence of God.

Findings: Preliminary findings from this research suggest that King's theological anthropology of Love was the makings of a theoretical methodology for social criticism. This methodology can be an interdisciplinary model for examining and explaining social phenomena. Philosophically, writers such as Howard Thurman, Benjamin Elijah Mays, Cornel West, W.E.B. Dubois, and Mahatma Gandhi inform love as a form of "moral reasoning" (Cornel West, 1993) or social criticism.