To Coretta Scott

[18 July 1952]
[Atlanta, Ga]

In Atlanta to serve as associate pastor of Ebenezer after completing his first year at Boston University, King corresponded with Coretta Scott, whom he began dating during the spring of 1952. This letter from King refers to a possible trip by Scott to Atlanta to meet his parents, a trip she made during August. He also comments extensively on Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward 2000—1887, a book Scott had given King. King calls Bellamy a “social prophet” and a “social scientist” and offers reflections regarding the relative merits and shortcomings of capitalism, communism, and socialism, writing, “I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic.”

Friday Morning

Dearest,

Fortunately, I am in a better mood today your letter was sweet and refreshing to my heart, which had well-nigh grown cold toward you. Of course I have become convinced in the last few days that my love for you is based on such a solid foundation that the stormy winds of anger cannot blow it assunder. Love is such a dynamic force isn’t it? It is the most inexplicable and yet the most beautiful force in life. How joyous it is to be in it! 

Darling I miss you so much. In fact, much too much for my own good. I never realized that you were such an intimate part of my life. My life without you is like a year without a springtime which comes to give illumination and heat to the atmosphere which has been saturated by the dark cold breeze of winter. Can you imagine the frustration that a King without a throne would face? Such would be my frustration if I in my little kingdom could not reign at the throne of Coretta. Excuse my darling I didn’t mean to go off on such a poetical and romantic flight. But how else can we express the deep emotions of life other than in poetry? Isn’t love too ineffable to be grasped by the cold calculating heads of intellect?

By the way (to turn to something more intellectual) I have just completed Bellamy’s Looking Backward. It was both stimulating and fascinating. There can be no doubt about it Bellamy had the insight of a social prophet as well as the fact finding mind of the social scientist. I welcomed the book because much of its content is in line with my basic ideas. I imagine you already know that I am much more

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1 Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward 2000—1887 (New York: Modern Library, 1951). Bellamy’s novel, originally published in 1888, envisions Boston in the year 2000 as part of a world that had experienced a moral and material transformation. In this new society, capitalism has been replaced by a more socialist form of production and distribution, society has become classless, and individuals acknowledge their common bond and responsibility for all members of society.

2 In a previous letter, King had reacted angrily when Scott implied she was against staying with the King family during a visit to Atlanta (King to Scott, 14 July 1952).
During their courtship, Coretta Scott gave King a copy of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000–1887* and wrote this inscription (7 April 1952).
socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic. And yet I am not so opposed to capitalism that I have failed to see its relative merits. It started out with a noble and high motive, viz., to block the trade monopolies of nobles, but like most human systems it fell victim to the very thing it was revolting against. So today capitalism has outlived its usefulness. It has brought about a system that takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. So I think Bellamy is right in seeing the gradual decline of capitalism.

I think you noticed that Bellamy emphasized that the change would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. This, it seems to me, is the most sane and ethical way for social change to take place. This, it will be remembered, is one of the points at which socialism differs from communism, the former emphasizing evolution and the latter revolution. Communist would insist that the means justify the end. So if killing a thousand people will bring about a good end, the act is ethically justifiable. It is at the point that I am radically opposed to communism. Destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends. The means does not necessarily justify the end, for, I would insist that the end is preexistent in the mean.

Also I am quite bitterly opposed to the metaphysical structure of communism as well as Marxism. It is based on what is known as Dialectical Materialism.$^{3}$ I, being an idealist, rather than materialist, would therefore reject Marx at this point.

There is one point however, that I have learned from reading Marx and books like Bellamys, and that is that religion can so easily become a tool of the middle class to keep the proletarian oppressed. To often has the church talked about a future good "over yonder" totally forgetting the present evil over here. As a theologian and one deeply convinced that the way of Christ is the only ultimate way to man's salvation, I will try to avoid making religion what Marx calls the "opiate of the people."$^{4}$

On the negative side of the picture Bellamy falls victim to the same error that most writers of Utopian societies fall victim to, viz., idealism not tempered with realism. In other words, such systems are impractical. Bellamy with his over optimism fails to see that man is a sinner, and that he is give better economic and social conditions he will still be a sinner until he submits his life to the Grace of God. Ultimately our problem is the theological one. Man has revolted against God, and through his humanistic endeavors he has sought to solve his problem by himself only to find that he has ended up in disillusionment.

Again Bellamy fails to see that social systems don't die overnight. I don't think he gave capitalism long enough time to die. It is probably true that capitalism is on its deathbed, but social systems have a way of developing a long and powerful deathbed breathing capacity. Remember it took feudalism more than 500 years to pass out from its death bed. Capitalism will be in America quite a few more years my dear.

Yet with his basic thesis I would concur. Our economic system is going through a

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$^{3}$ King later preached a sermon in which he elaborated on these thoughts (King, "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," 9 August 1953, pp. 140–150 in this volume)

$^{4}$ Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction" (1844)
radical change, and certainly this change is needed. I would certainly welcome the
day to come when there will be a nationalization of industry. Let us continue to
hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world, a better
distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color. This is the
gospel that I will preach to the world. At this point I must thank you a million times
for introducing me to such a stimulating book you are sweet and thoughtful
indeed.

As to your visit to Atlanta, I would rather not go into a detail discussion over it
because I see that it can break up a beautiful relationship. I see that you are much
more influenced by other people than you are by me, as maybe you would rather
spend your vacation with them since they have all the answers. Nevertheless [?] still
extend to you the invitation and hope that you will come. It hurt me very much to
know that you believe that I would invite you to Atlanta and then mistreat you, espe-
cially as nice as I’ve been to you in the past. Oh well I guess all of us have a little of the
unappreciative attitude in us.

If you are coming let me know so that I can make the arrangements. If you don’t
desire to come also let me know soon and I assure you that [?] won’t mention it to
you any more. Of course if you don’t come I will know that you have no confidence
in me and I will proceed to think out our courtship in those lines. I hope [strikeout
illegal] we won’t have to break up about this trip.

Give my regards to [Scott?] and the other member of the gang. Be sweet and
remember that daddy still loves you.

Eternally yours

[signed] “Martin”

P.S. Hope you can read my bad writing.

ALS CSKC

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5 King may refer to Scott’s sister Edythe Scott

“Loving Your Enemies”

[31 August 1952]
[Atlanta, Ga]

In this handwritten outline, the earliest known version of this oft-given sermon, King
invokes Jesus’ call for people to love their enemies as a solution to the problems facing
modern society. He contends that Jesus’ teaching was not “the pious injunction of a

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1 “Loving Your Enemies’ Rev. King, Jr’s Subject,” Atlanta Daily World, 30 August 1952. For a later
example of this sermon that follows this early outline, see King, “Loving Your Enemies,” Sermon Delivered