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Draft of Chapter III,
“On Being a Good Neighbor”

[July 1962–March 1963]
[Atlanta, Ga.]

Expanding on a 28 November 1960 outline titled “The Goodness of the Good Samaritan,” this sermon draft hews closely to George Buttrick’s themes in his lecture on the Good Samaritan.¹ King lauds the Samaritan’s altruism, which enabled him to look beyond “accidents of race, religion and nationality” and applies the parable’s message to race relations, acknowledging that laws “may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless.” To effect true change, King submits, “Something must happen so to touch the hearts and souls of men that they will come together because it is natural and right.” Finally, in a passage deleted from the published version, he commends his readers to “go out with the conviction that all men are brothers, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

Luke 10 25–37

This morning I would like to talk with you about a good man. He is a man whose ~~exp~~ exemplary life will always stand ~~as the conscience of mankind~~ as a flashing light to plague the dozing conscience of mankind. His goodness was not found in his passive commitment to a particular creed, but in his active participation in a life-saving deed. His goodness was not found in the fact that his moral pilgrimage had reached its destination point, but in the fact that he made the love ethic a reality as he journeyed life’s highway. He was good because he was a good neighbor.

The ethical concern of this man is expressed in a magnificent little story. It is a story which begins with a theological discussion on the meaning of eternal life and ends with a concrete expression of compassion on a dangerous road. Jesus was asked the question by a man who had been trained in the details of Jewish law: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The retort is ~~promp~~ prompt: “What is written in the law? How readest thou?” The scribe thinks a moment and then recites articulately: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Then came the decisive word from Jesus: “you have answered right, this do, and thou shalt live.”

The scribe was left standing before Jesus and the people in a state of chagrin. “Why, the people could ask, “would an expert in law raise a question that even the ~~now~~ novice ~~could~~ could answer?” So, in order to prove that he was not to be minimized, the scribe sought to show Jesus that his reply was far from conclusive. “Desiring to justify himself,” he said, “And who is my neighbor?”² It was obvious that

1 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 148–156.

2 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 150. “Jesus’ reply, as he would demonstrate, was far from conclusive. So, ‘desiring to justify himself,’ he said, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

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the scribe was now taking up the cudgels of debate.³ It would have been so easy for the question inquiry to look to an end up in an abstract theological discussion. But Jesus immediately pulled the question out of mid-air and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jerico.⁴

He told the story of “a certain man” who went down from Jerusalem to Jerico. As he made his journey he fell among robbers [*who?*] stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain Priest appeared, but he left the wounded man to his fate by passing by on the other side. A few minutes later a Levite approached the scene, and like the Priest he passed by on the other side. Finally, a certain Samaritan appeared—a half-breed, a man of another race, a man with whom the Jews had no dealings. But when he saw the wounded man he was moved with compassion.⁵ He went to the man and administered first aid. He placed him on his beast, “and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

“Who is my neighbor?” “I do not know his name,” says Jesus. “He is anyone to whom you prove to be neighborly. He is anyone lying in need on life’s roadside. He is neither a Jew nor a Gentile, he is neither a Russian nor an American, he is neither Negro nor white. He is ‘a certain man’—any man lying needy on one of the numerous Jerico roads of life.” So Jesus ends up defining a neighbor not in a theological definition but in a life situation.⁶

We may well ask what constituted the goodness of the good Samaritan. Why will he always stand as an inspiring paragon of neighborly virtue? It seems to me that this man’s goodness can be described in one word—altruism. The good Samaritan was altruistic to the core. The dictionary defines altruism as “regard for, and devotion to, the interest of others.” Indeed, the Samaritan was great because he made the first law of his life not self-preservation, but other-preservation.⁷

Let us notice first that the Samaritan had the capacity for a universal altruism. He ~~looked beyond the accidents of~~ had the piercing insight to see beyond the [*eternal?*] accidents of race, religion and nationality. **He saw a fellow human being in need. He saw first a human being who became a Jew by accident.** One of the great tragedies of man’s long trek up the highway of history is has been his ~~ever-present~~ all too prevalent tendency to limit his neighborly concern to the race, the tribe, the class ~~and~~ or the nation. Not only was the god of early Old Testament days a tribal god, but the ethic was a tribal ethic. Thou shalt not kill meant thou shalt not kill a fellow Israelite, but for God-sake kill a Philistine. Greek democracy only applied to ~~the~~ a certain aristocracy, and not to the horde of Greek slaves ~~by~~ whose labors built

3 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 149. “Perhaps in self-confidence he was taking up the cudgels of debate.”

4 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 150. “He lifted the question out of the atmosphere of controversy, since in that atmosphere real questions can never be settled, and set it down—where? He set it down on a dangerous road in Palestine!”

5 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 151. “‘But a certain Samaritan . . . He was a half-breed, of a race which the Jews counted religiously in disrepute and with which they had ‘no dealings.’ But ‘when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.’”

6 Luke 10:25–37.

7 In the published version: “The Samaritan was good because he made concern for others the first law of his life” (King, *Strength to Love*, p. 17).

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the City States.⁸ [~~strikeout illegible~~] The universalism standing at the center of the Declaration of Independence has been shamefully negated by America's appalling tendency to substitute some for all **The ugly practices of our nation reveal that** numerous people north and south still believe that the affirmation "All men are created equal" means all white men are created equal Our unswerving devotion to monopoly capitalism makes us concerned about the economic ~~tribal god, but the~~ ~~ethic was a tribal ethic~~ security of the captains of industry, and not the laboring men whose sweat and skills keep the wheels of industry rolling

We can immediately see the devastating consequences of this narrow, group centered concern It means that one doesn't not mind what happens to the people outside his group If an American is concerned only about his nation, he will not be concerned about what happens to the peoples of Asia, Africa or South America. Isn't this why nations can engage in the madness of war without the slightest sense of penitence? Isn't this why it is a national crime to murder a citizen of your own nation, but an act of heroic virtue to murder the citizens of another nation in war? If members of the American Medical Association and the National Manufacturers Associations are concerned only with their interests, they will not be concerned about what happens to the working man They will pass by on the other side while thousands of people are stripped of their jobs and left displaced on some Jericho road as a result of the faces of automation They will see every move for a better distribution of wealth and a better life for the working man as an act of creeping socialism ⁹ If a white man is concerned only about his race, he will not be interested in what happens to the Negro He will notice the Negro being robbed of his personhood, stripped of his sense of dignity, beaten by hooded perpetrator of violence and left dying on some wayside road, and yet he will pass by on the other side ¹⁰ Some time ago an automobile carrying several members of a Negro college basketball team had an accident on a southern highway. Three of the fellows were severely injured An ambulance was immediately called On arriving at the scene of the accident the driver of the ambulance, who happened to have been white, noticed that the injured boys were Negroes. He quickly said in unconcerned terms that it was not his policy to service Negroes and off he went. ~~When a~~ The driver of a passing automobile was gracious enough to take the boys to the nearest hospital When the attending physician noticed that his incoming dying patients were Negroes he told the driver in rather belligerent terms, "we dont take niggers in this hospital." When the boys finally arrived at a "colored" hospital in a town about fifty miles away one was

8 Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p 150 "The Greeks held the 'barbarian' in similar contempt, they denied the title 'neighbor' even to the horde of Greek slaves (human goods and chattels) on which the City States were built "

9 The preceding three sentences were altered in the published version "If manufacturers are concerned only in their personal interests, they will pass by on the other side while thousands of working people are stripped of their jobs and left displaced on some Jericho road as a result of automation, and they will judge every move toward a better distribuon of wealth and a better life for the working man to be socialistic" (p 18)

10 The preceding two sentences were altered in the published version "If a white man is concerned only about his race, he will casually pass by the Negro who has been robbed of his personhood, stripped of his sense of dignity, and left dying on some wayside road" (p 18)

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dead upon arrival and the other two died thirty and fifty minutes later respectively. The lives of all three could have probably been saved if they had been treated immediately. This is just one of the thousands of inhuman incidents that are the every day occurrences of the south. It is an unbelievable expressions of the [~~strikeout illegible~~] barbaric consequences of any tribal-centered, national-centered or racial-centered ~~new~~ ethic.

The ultimate tragedy of this narrow provincialism is that it causes one to see people as entities, in short as things. So seldom do we see people in their true human-ness. ~~Our vision is so often limited to the external.~~ We suffer from a sort of spiritual myopia which so often limits our vision to external accidents. We see men as Jews or Gentiles, Catholics or Protestants, Chinese or American, Negroes or whites. We fail to see them as fellow human beings made out of the same basic stuff as we are, molded by the same divine image. The Priest and the Levite saw only a bleeding body, not a human being made in their own likeness.¹¹ But the good Samaritan will always stand before us as a nagging reminder that we must remove the cateracks of provincialism from our spiritual eyes and see men as men. If the Samaritan had seen the wounded man as a Jew first he would not have stopped. The Jews and the Samaritan had no dealings. He saw a human being first who became a Jew by accident. The good neighbor will look beyond the external accidents long enough to see those inner qualities that make all men human, and therefore brothers.

Let us notice second that the good Samaritan possessed the capacity for a dangerous altruism. He risked his life to save a brother. When we use our imagination concerning the reason why the Priest and the Levite ~~didn't~~ did not stop to help the wounded man, numerous things come to mind. Perhaps they were ~~too busy with~~ [~~strikeout illegible~~] in a hurry to get to an important ecclesiastical [~~strikeout illegible~~] meeting ~~and~~ for which they could not afford to be late [~~strikeout illegible~~]. Perhaps their temple regulations demanded ~~they~~ that they touch no human body ~~so many~~ for several hours before their temple function began. Or, they could have been on their way to a meeting to organize a Jerico Road Improvement Association. Certainly this was a real need. It is not enough to aid the wounded man on the Jerico Road. It is also necessary to work to change the conditions of the ~~Jerico~~ Road which made robbery possible. Philanthropy is marvelous, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the need for working to remove many conditions of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary. So maybe the Priest and the Levite felt that it was better to cure injustice from the causal source than to get bogged down with one individual effect. All these are probable reasons for their failure to stop. But there is another possibility which is often overlooked. It is possible that they were afraid. The Jerico Road ~~is~~ was a ~~de~~ dangerous road. Some month ago Mrs. King and I were in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove down from Jerusalem to Jerico. As we traveled ~~that~~ slowly down that meandering [~~mountainous?~~] road I said to my wife, "I can very easily see why Jesus used this road as the setting for his parable." Jerusalem was some two thousand feet ~~miles~~ above sea level.

¹¹ The phrase "made in their own likeness" was altered in the published version to "like themselves" (p. 19).

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and Jericho was some one thousand feet below it. This upward or downward climb was made in a distance of less than twenty miles. Its many sudden curves made the road conducive for ambushing and exposed the traveler to unforeseen attack. The road came to be known as the Bloody Pass.¹² So it is possible that the Priest and the Levite were afraid that if they stopped they too would ~~have~~ be ~~en~~beaten, for couldn't the robbers still be around? Or maybe the man on the ground was just a faker, using a pretended wounded condition to draw passing travelers to his side for quick and easy ~~seizure~~ seizure. So I can imagine that the first question which the Priest and the Levite asked was "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" Then the good Samaritan came by, and by the very nature ~~of the very nature~~ of his concern reversed the question "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?" The good Samaritan was willing to engage in a dangerous altruism. In his very life he raised the question that always emerges from the good man. We so often ask, "what will happen to my job, my pretige or my status if I take a stand on this issue? If I take a stand for justice and truth, will my home be bombed, will my life be threatened or will I be jailed? What will happen to me?" The good man always reverses the question. Albert Switzer [*Schweitzer*] did not ask "what will happen to my pretige and security as a university Professor and my status as a Back Organist if I go to work with the people of Africa, but what will happen to these millions of people who have been wounded by the forces of injustice if I do not go to them?"¹³ Abraham Lincoln did not ask, "what will happen to me if I issue the emancipation Proclamation and bring an end to chattle slavery, but what will happen to the union and millions of Negro people if I fail to do it?" The Negro professional does not ask, "what will happen to my secure position, my middle class status or my personal safty if I participate in the movement to end the system of segregation, but what will happen to the cause of justice and the masses of Negro people ~~who will never see the light of dignity or~~ who have never experienced the warmth of economic security ~~until the~~ if I do not participate actively and courageously in the movement?"

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of confort and moment of convinience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and moment of controversy. The true neighbor is the man who will risk his position, his prestige and even his life for the welfare of others. His altruism ~~is~~ will not be limited to safty places, but it will move through dangerous valleys and hazzardous pathways to lift some-bruised and beaten brother to a higher and more noble life.

Let us look at the neighborly Samaritan once more. He was good because he possessed the ability to engage in excessive altruism. He got down ~~from his beast~~ on the ground, bound up the wounds of the man with his own hands, and set him on his

¹² For King's account of his drive on the Jericho Road, see A Walk Through the Holy Land, 29 March 1959, in *Papers* 5:166. Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 150. "Jerusalem was some two thousand feet above sea level and Jericho over one thousand feet below it. The twenty miles between the cities wound through mountainous country, whose limestone caves offered ambush for brigand bands, and whose sudden turns exposed the traveler to unforeseen attack. The road became known as the 'Bloody Pass.'"

¹³ In 1913, Schweitzer established a hospital in Lambaréné, French Equatorial Africa and remained there for much of his life. In 1952, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work. Schweitzer was also an organist who specialized in the works of composer J. S. Bach.

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own beast. It would have been much easier for him to ~~have~~ pay an ambulance to take the unfortunate man to the hospital, rather than risk having his neatly trimmed suit stained with blood ¹⁴

True altruism is more than the capacity to pity one in need, it is the capacity to sympathize. Pity may be little more than an impersonal concern which prompts the sending of a material check. But true sympathy is personal concern which demands the giving of one's soul. Pity may arise out of a concern for a big abstraction called humanity. Sympathy grows out of a concern for "a certain man," a particular human being lying needy at life's roadside. Sympathy is feeling with the person in need—his pain, his agony, his burdens. Our missionary efforts have often failed because they were based on pity, rather than true compassion. Instead of seeking to do something with the African and Asian peoples, we have to often sought to do something for them. This expression of pity devoid of genuine sympathy leads to a new form of paternalism which no self-respecting person can accept. ~~Millions of dollars~~

Dollars may ~~be wonderful, but unless they~~ have the potential for helping some wounded child of God on life's Jerico Road, but unless those dollars are distributed by compassionate fingers they will enrich neither the giver nor the receiver. Millions of [*missionary*?] dollars have gone to Africa from the hands of Church people who would die a million deaths before they would [*strikeout illegible*] allow an African the privilege of worshipping in their congregations. Million of Peace Corp dollars are going to Africa as a result of the votes of some men who would fight unrelentingly to prevent African Ambassadors from holding membership in their diplomatic club or establish residency in their particular neighborhood. The Peace Corp will fail if it seeks to do something for the undeveloped peoples of the world; it will succeed if it seek creatively to do something ~~creative~~ with them.¹⁵ It will fail if it is a negative gesture to defeat communism, it will succeed if it is a positive thrust to wipe poverty, ignorance and disease from the face of the earth. Soon we will come to see that money devoid of love is like salt devoid of savor, it is good for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of men. **It may buy material bread, but the bread that it buys will soon decay.** True neighborliness requires [*strikeout illegible*] personal concern. The Samaritan not only ~~eased the hurt of the~~ used his physical hands to bind up the wounds of the robbed man's body, ~~with his physical hands,~~ but he released an overflowing love to bind up the wounds of his broken spirit ~~by his comforting love~~.

Another expression of the excessiveness of the Samaritan's altruism was his willingness to go far beyond the call of duty. Not only did he bind up the man's wounds, but he put him on his beast and carried him to an inn. On leaving the [*strikeout illegible*] inn he left some money and made it clear that if any other financial needs arose he would gladly meet them. "Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back,

¹⁴ Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 153. "It would have been easier to be compassionate by proxy—to have phoned the hospital and despatched an ambulance. But he bound up the wounds with his own hands. He himself poured in oil and wine. He placed the unfortunate on his own beast."

¹⁵ In this sentence the word "undeveloped" was replaced with "underprivileged" in the published version (p. 21). With Executive Order 10924, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps in 1961 "to help foreign countries meet their urgent needs for skilled manpower," maintaining that decent living standards are "the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace."

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will repay thee.” His love was complete. He could have stopped so much sooner than this and more than fulfilled any possible rule about one’s duty to a wounded stranger. He went not only the second, but the third mile.

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick has made a most impressive distinction between enforceable and unenforceable obligations.¹⁶ The former are obligations which can be regulated by the codes of society and the vigorous implementation of law enforcement agencies. These are the obligations which are ~~spread out over~~ spelled out on thousands of law book pages, and if they are the broken breakage of which has filled numerous prisons. But then are those unenforceable obligations which the laws of society can’t reach. They deal with inner attitudes, genuine person-to-person relations, and expressions of compassion which laws and law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify. They are obligations which can be ~~dealt~~ dealt with only by one’s commitment to an inner law, a commandment written on the heart. Man-made laws are needed to assure justice, but a higher law ~~must~~ is needed to produce love. No code of conduct ever written by man can make a father love his children and a husband have affection for his wife. The law court may compel him to provide physical bread for the family, but it cannot make him provide the bread of love. A good father must be obedient to the unenforceable. The good Samaritan will always remain the conscience of mankind because he was obedient to that which could not be enforced. No law in the world could have made him do what he did. No ~~made~~ man-made code could have produced such unalloyed compassion, such efflorescent love, such thorough altruism. ~~The ultimate test of~~ The ultimate test of a man’s goodness is whether he is obedient to the unenforceable.¹⁷

In our nation today a mighty struggle is taking place. It is a struggle to conquer the reign of an evil monster called segregation and its inseparable twin called discrimination—a monster that has wandered through this land for well-nigh one hundred years, stripping millions of Negro people of their sense of dignity and robbing them of their birthright of freedom. **A great deal of our so-called race problem will be solved in the realm of enforceable obligations.** Let us never succumb to the temptation of believing that legislation and judicial decrees can play no major role in bringing about desegregation. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless. The law cannot make an employer love me, but it [~~strike-out illegible~~] can keep him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin. The habits if not the hearts of people have been and are being altered everyday by legislative acts, judicial [*decisions*?] and executive orders from the President.¹⁸ So let

16 In Fosdick’s sermon “The Cross and the Ordinary Man,” he considered “enforceable and unenforceable obligations,” referring to a speech by Lord Moulton from July 1924 in which Moulton espoused the importance of being “obedient to the unenforceable” (Fosdick, *Successful Christian Living*, pp. 210–219, see also Lord John Fletcher Moulton, “Laws and Manners,” *Atlantic Monthly* [July–December 1924] 1).

17 The preceding three sentences were condensed in the published version: “No law in the world could have produced such unalloyed compassion, such genuine love, such thorough altruism” (p. 22).

18 President Kennedy signed Executive Order 11063 on 20 November 1962, which called for equal opportunity in housing. King wrote that “the housing order is a good-faith step in the right direction”

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us not be misled by those who argue that segregation cannot be ended by the force of law **It is already being ended by legislative and executive acts already presently in effect**

But acknowledging this we must go on to admit that the ultimate solution to the race problem lies in the ability of men to be obedient to the unenforceable Court orders and federal enforcement agencies agencies will be of inestimable value in achieving desegregation But desegregation is only a partial, though necessary, step toward the ultimate goal which we seek to realize Desegregation will break down the legal barriers, and bring men together physically But something must happen so to touch the hearts and souls of men that they will come together because it is natural and right In other words, our ultimate goal is integration which is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living Only by producing a nation committed to the inner law of love can this goal be attained A vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws can bring an end to segregated public facilities which stand as barriers to a truly desegregated society, but it cannot bring an end to the blindness, fear, prejudice, pride and irrationality which stand as barriers to a truly integrated society These dark and demonic responses of the spirit can only be removed when men will ~~listen to decency~~ become possessed ~~if~~ by that invisible, inner law which ~~says~~ will etch in their ~~souls~~ hearts the conviction that all men are brother and that love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation True integration will come only when men are true neighbors, willing to be obedient to unenforceable obligations

Today more than ever before men of all races and men of all nations are challenged to be neighborly The call for a good neighbor policy on the part of the nations of the world is more than an ephemeral shibboleth, it is the call to a way of life which will transform our almost cosmic elegy into creative fulfillment¹⁹ No longer can we engage in the luxury of passing by on the other side Such folly was once moral failure, today it can lead only lead to universal suicide **The alternative to a world of brotherhood to match [~~strikeout illegible~~] its geographical neighborhood may well be a civilization plunged into an inferno more devastating than anything Dante could ever envision.**²⁰ We cannot long survive living spiritually apart in a world that is geographically one **As you leave this place of worship my friends go out with the conviction that all men are brothers, tied in a single garment of destiny.** In the final analysis I must not ignore the wounded man on life's Jerico Road because he is ~~apart~~ a part of me and I am ~~apart~~ a part of him His agony diminishes me and his salvation enlarges me

In our quest to make neighborly love a reality in our lives we have not only the inspiring example of the good Samaritan, but we have the magnanimous life of our Christ to guide us ~~His death on the Cross of Calvary was a single event expressing a threefold altruism He died for all men, which made his death a uni-~~

toward "the fulfillment of a campaign pledge made by the then-Senator Kennedy," but he lamented that "the order does not go far enough" (see King, "JFK's Executive Order," *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 December 1962)

19 Cf Judges 12 5-6

20 King refers to Dante Alighieri and the first volume of his epic poem *Divine Comedy, Inferno* (1314)

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~~versal altruism. He died in excruciating pain which was an expression of his willingness to engage in the most dangerous altruism. Mankind had been robbed [strikeout illegible] of his virtue by demonic forces, and left inflicted with deadening wounds of sin.~~ He lived his days in a persistent concern for the welfare of others. His altruism was universal in that he saw all men as brothers. He was a neighbor to the publicans and the sinners. **When he addressed God in the Lord's Prayer he says said "Our Father" which lifts immediately lifted God above the category of a tribal deity concerned only about one race of people.** His altruism was willing to travel dangerous roads in that he was willing to ~~risk [strikeout illegible] popularity~~ relinquish fame fortune and even life itself for a cause he knew was right. His altruism was excessive in that he didn't have to die on a cross. His death on Calvary will always stand as history's most magnificent expression of obedience to the unenforceable.²¹

When I survey the wondrous Cross
Were the whole Realm of nature mine.²²

ADd MLKJP-GAMK. Vault box 3

21 The preceding three sentences were altered in the published version "His altruism was dangerous, for he willingly traveled hazardous roads in a cause he knew was right. His altruism was excessive, for he chose to die on Calvary, history's most magnificent expression of obedience to the unenforceable" (p 24)

22 King quotes Isaac Watts's hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (1707)