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Protest and Politics: A Biographical Theology of Bayard Rustin, Friendship, Charity, and Economic Justice

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**PROTEST AND POLITICS:
A BIOGRAPHICAL THEOLOGY OF BAYARD RUSTIN, FRIENDSHIP, CHARITY,
AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

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**PROTEST AND POLITICS:
A BIOGRAPHICAL THEOLOGY OF BAYARD RUSTIN, FRIENDSHIP, CHARITY,
AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

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Dedman College

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in

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

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by

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and Economic Justice

Advisor: Professor D. Stephen Long

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Bayard Rustin is largely an unknown name in theology and ethics, but this dissertation brings him into those conversations with a focus on an ethics of peripatetic friendship as an appropriate response to unjust wealth inequity. I explore how the life of Bayard Rustin, particularly his friendships, was a catalyst for much of the civil rights movement as well as broader justice movements that included charity and economic rights. Rustin, via his friendships, made possible many revolutionary changes in American society and beyond. After examining his life and contributions, I tie his life together with insights from the broader Christian tradition in order to create a moral theology that I am calling a Rustinian friendship response to wealth inequity. I suggest that friendships provide their own sort of wealth, but that they also contribute to spreading God's abundance-wealth for the sake of human flourishing, and ultimately a witness to friendship with God.

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INTRODUCTION

Bayard Rustin's Theological and Ethical Significance

James Cone once wrote that in spite of Reinhold Niebuhr's influence on Martin Luther King, Jr., King saw love and justice in a different way because "he spoke to and for powerless people," which enabled him to lead a revolution, even of values. Thus, King "often achieved what Niebuhr said was impossible."¹ Of course, for Niebuhr, love as political nonviolence that would bring about great social change did seem impossible. It may seem odd to use a quote by someone, about someone who is not the focus of this work, but one man stands at the intersection of Cone's observation and King's approach and achievements, and his life exemplifies the important connections between friendship and charity, and the corollary of economic justice. That man is Bayard Rustin. Rustin united charity, friendship, and justice, bringing about broad and relatively swift social change, which Niebuhr could not have imagined. Niebuhr did not envision the type of radical and widespread gains of the civil rights movement as a social possibility, but as only possible by individuals or small groups, yet Rustin held them together in a way that was politically significant by any measure. I explore how the life of Bayard Rustin, particularly his friendships, was a catalyst not only for the civil rights movement but also for a broader vision of justice that included charity and economic rights. Rustin, via his

¹ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 72.

friendships, made possible the revolution that Niebuhr thought impossible, and that King achieved largely because of Rustin’s friendship, influence, and mentoring.

Before I delve into Rustin’s life, I must point out that I am straight and white; Rustin was gay and Black. The differences in our social locations matter a great deal, and, no doubt, my own social location will cause me to misunderstand some realities about Rustin’s experiences. I, however, chose to write about him because I just could not let him go, or rather his life was so compelling that it would not let me go. I did not set out to write a project on Rustin, but as I talked about the ideas that enlivened me—like friendship and fighting wealth inequity—stories of Rustin kept entering the conversation until it became undeniable that I had to write about this remarkable man, all the while knowing that I could never do his life or legacy justice.

I propose to investigate the specific life of Rustin as an exemplar of friendship, charity, and economic justice. This investigation will show how a Christian account of friendship can be a faithful and appropriate response to wealth inequity. In short, his life reveals, or better, evidences truths about who God is, what God is like, and how relating to this God, particularly in friendship, should shape our moral lives. Rustin’s life is a tangible example of Kelly Johnson’s claim that “the opposite of poverty is not plenty, but friendship.”² I examine how that claim works out in relationship to a concern for the connection of friendship and charity to justice generally, and to massive wealth inequity specifically. For instance, Brian Edgar has argued that societies with more friendships are healthier than societies without them.³

² Kelly Johnson, *The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 209.

³ Brian Edgar, *God Is Friendship: A Theology of Spirituality, Community, and Society* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Seedbed Publishing, 2013), 156.

This dissertation intends to make a twofold contribution to the field of Christian ethics by 1) bringing largely forgotten civil and economic rights leader Bayard Rustin explicitly into the conversation of Christian theology and ethics, and 2) then utilizing a biography-as-theology approach, primarily using James McClendon, one focused on Rustin's friendships, showing how such an account shapes discussions on theology related to justice in the contemporary world of wealth disparity.

Throughout the literature, there are many definitions of friendship that I could have used for this dissertation, but I have decided to define friendship for my purposes here as *two or more people seeking virtue together*. Even with this fairly broad definition of friendship, friendship necessarily entails a set of concomitant virtues that will be discussed later. Furthermore, this definition removes some unnecessary restrictions on the concept of friendship and therefore makes friendship a practice available to all people who want to live a morally good life. This project will clarify and justify my definition's usefulness for theology and ethics as it delves into narrating and analyzing a few of Bayard Rustin's friendships.

I will claim Rustin matters for theology and ethics because he is a practical, virtuous example that "peripatetic friendships," a term to be explained momentarily, are possible and politically and ethically significant. More succinctly put, I seek to answer the question, What does Rustin's life reveal about the relationship among friendship, charity, and economic justice from a Christian perspective? And more precisely, Can Rustin's life demonstrate that friendship across various societal lines provides a theologically-informed paradigm for Christian charity and a just response to wealth inequity?⁴

⁴ See Nicole Hirschfelder, *Oppression as Process: The Case of Bayard Rustin* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2014). In this first attempt at a systematic analysis of Bayard Rustin's life, Hirschfelder looks at the role of oppression in Rustin's life and legacy, or, as she points out, his largely forgotten

I will now set up some of the methodological considerations including an explanation of McClendon's biography as theology connected with the work of other scholars like Nicole Hirschfelder and Sarah Azaransky, along with some of Rustin's own writings, as well as a brief discussion of my own framework that I am calling "peripatetic friendship." It will be these lenses through which we look at Rustin's life to evaluate his contributions to justice movements of the last century and his importance for similar work today, especially in the fields of Christian ethics and theology. While there are myriad areas of Rustin's life that could be explored, I will focus on his intellectual development via an intellectual biography, then focus on how his friendships were a catalyst for justice and, particularly for my concerns, economic justice.

Biography as Theology: The Theological Significance of a Person's Life Story

One might raise the issue of using a white scholar's work to look at a Black activist's life and contributions. I hope to assuage that concern by noting four points. First, Rustin himself seemed to embrace a similar framework for addressing truth claims, as should become evident as this work goes on.⁵ Second, McClendon notes that the rise of Latin American liberation theology

legacy. She rightly claims that continuing to neglect Rustin as a source of knowledge about a great many topics, is a continuation of oppression. In other words, Rustin's legacy needs remembering and study because to do otherwise not only continues oppressing Rustin but oppresses others who would benefit from his life and ideas. In this dissertation, I am only addressing a sliver of the information available on Rustin and offering my voice to the growing chorus of those who cry, "Listen to brother Bayard."

⁵ See Sarah Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 156–57. She argues that Rustin has a distinctly Quaker variety of moral reasoning that focuses on "the relationship between practice and moral reasoning" and points to Rachel Muers who argues, "Theological reasoning is primarily enacted; interpretation is primarily interpretation-in-practice." There is a lot of connection here with McClendon's understanding of theology as enacted truth. Also, both are distinct from utilitarian thought because it was not simply the calculus about outcomes that drives decision making, but rather an interpretation of the tradition informs how one considers the role of outcomes and includes it in the process of discernment. This is why friends, those who share a will for the good, are necessary because they help one another process, discern, and reflect throughout decision-making and action-taking and whatever may come in response. Azaransky also points Rustin's reasoning regarding effectiveness further separates this approach from a utilitarian one (see Azaransky, 157).

around the time of his own work in this book “with its homage to *praxis*, was making a bold claim similar to my own practice rather than a priori theory.” As such, it is fair to say that while African-American liberation theology is not identical to its Latin American counterpart, it does share that basic assumption and is thus readily compatible with McClendon’s basic thesis and thus McClendon’s work is as fitting as any to serve as the framework for trying to understand Rustin’s life theologically.⁶ Third, it is right to use a theologian who shares with Rustin the historical lineage from the Anabaptists as well as many of the same theological and ethical convictions as Rustin to evaluate him. Fourth, I intend to use the work of a variety of scholars like James Cone, Terrance Wiley, and other scholars of color, along with Rustin’s biographers like John D’Emilio, Jervis Anderson, and Daniel Levine to help focus on the fact that Rustin was indeed a Black man, and thus his life, friendships, and insights were shaped by that fact. Overall, this approach, even with the privileged assumptions I bring to the discussion, is deeply compatible with the methodologies of theologians like Cone and Gutierrez and other varieties of liberationist scholars. Hopefully, this approach will highlight Rustin as an exemplar of what McClendon calls an ethics of character. Such an approach will also necessarily highlight places of agreement and disagreement between Rustin and some popular Black liberation theologians, but not for the sake of placing Rustin outside that tradition but rather as a progenitor of it. For example, Rustin was making theological justifications for revolutionary and liberatory work long before Cone.⁷

⁶ James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), ix.

⁷ For more on Rustin’s broader theological vision, see Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 103–4: “In workshop notes, Rustin described the theological basis for his work: ‘Such convictions as these grow out of our study of the life and teachings of Jesus and the “Way of the Cross” and also of the prophets of the Old Testament and such conceptions as that of “The Suffering Servant of Jehovah.” The Gandhian Non-Violent Action strategy and techniques furnish the best current example of the effort to develop non-violence into an effective revolutionary

McClendon's *Biography as Theology* is intended to not only illumine the details of an exemplary figure's life for the purpose of imitation—which itself could be a worthy goal—but also to glean information about who God is and what God is like. As a question this method asks something like, What does a given Christian disciple's life teach us about God, about Christian doctrines, and about moral theology and Christian ethics? The method is a way to test the veracity and viability of Christian doctrines and commitments, in this case those regarding friendship, charity, and (economic) justice.⁸ In McClendon's words, "The truth of Christian faith is made good in the living of it or not at all; that living is a necessary condition of the justification of Christian belief. There is no foundational truth available apart from actual life, no set of timeless premises acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike, upon which Christian theology can once and for all found its doctrines."⁹ In other words, examining Christian doctrines or commitments through the lens of a given life, namely a life that purports to be Christian, and perhaps especially if that life is in some way exemplary, allows us not only to test whether or not Christian teachings are true, but to evaluate how they function in relationship to practical rationality and the lived experience of human beings.

instrument in a large-scale social and political situation. We do not, of course suggest a mechanical . . . copying but an imaginative and creative adaptation of the Gandhian method in conflict situations of various kinds in the United States." She analyzes Rustin's Quaker Christian faith and theology throughout chapter five, 153–84.

⁸ It is important to note that for McClendon, as well as for me, "Biographical theology need not repudiate and should not ignore the propositional statement of theological doctrine. What it must insist is that this propositional statement be in continual and intimate contact with the lived experience which the propositional doctrine by turns collects, orders, and informs. Without such living contact, theological doctrine readily becomes (in a pejorative sense) objective—remote from actual Christian life, a set of empty propositions more suited to attacking rival theologians than in informing the church of God. With this living contact, theology may develop its propositions in the confidence that their meaning is exemplified in contemporary Christian experience." McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 149.

⁹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, viii.

McClendon explains the importance of biography as theology while noting that biography itself is insufficient to the task of theology; rather, examining biographies in Christian community can help Christians test their convictions and see whether their lives truly embody those convictions.¹⁰ In short, the approach of biography as theology goes beyond mere moral exemplarism by utilizing the lives of exemplars as a way to test truth claims, both of the moral and the theological sort. Rustin seems to agree with McClendon's basic approach, arguing himself that "the proof that one truly believes is in action."¹¹ Recognizing that Christian beliefs are not mere propositions

but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one that begins by attending to lived lives. Theology must be at least biography. If by attending to those lives, we find ways of reforming our own theologies, making them more true, more faithful to our ancient vision, more adequate to the age now being born, then we will be justified in that arduous inquiry. Biography at its best will be theology.¹²

In other words, biographies help us adjudicate theological claims, especially as they test the meaning of a tradition in contemporary settings.¹³ Thus, a life like Rustin's might cause

¹⁰ McClendon, x. McClendon writes, "Biography, to be sure, can be conceived of in many ways. . . . Undertaken in Christian community, it can be a mode of communal self-scrutiny: this describes the writing of the lives of the saints, hagiography, at its best. And if that self-scrutiny, the exercise in which the community holds a mirror to those it finds its finest in order to discover what God has been doing in its midst—if such communal self-scrutiny is undertaken under the eyes of and the light of God, then it may be a prime example of what we properly call theology. This is biography as theology." Regarding the reference McClendon makes to p. 22 of this same book, the closest he comes to using the phrase "theology as biography" is to write, "Theology must be at least biography."

¹¹ Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), inside cover page.

¹² McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 22.

¹³ Of course, the person narrating the biography brings their own questions, convictions, privileges, and experiences, and thus that factors into how they choose to tell the story. In my telling, for instance, I have focused my questions on those about friendship and wealth inequity, but no doubt Rustin's story could and should be narrated in other ways that interrogate other realities like racism, homophobia, and patriarchy. Thus, a single biography as theology is not sufficient, and this project is an invitation to others to continue the story of Bayard

Christians in this era to ask the question, Can the Christian convictions passed down to us by Augustine, Ambrose, Aelred, and Aquinas about friendship, charity, and justice be jettisoned, adjusted, or bolstered if we examine them in relationship to a more contemporary life? Can the life of Bayard Rustin help us revisit the teachings they, along with Jesus, have given us, in order that we may better understand these precepts from the past in the present and for the future?¹⁴

“The key point here is that saints serve as models for new styles of being Christian, opening paths which many others will follow.”¹⁵ That others will follow was certainly true of Rustin, as at least a quarter of a million people followed him in the March on Washington, and countless others, before and after that event, have followed Rustin’s lead in the work of peace and justice, charity and reconciliation, not least of them Martin Luther King, Jr.

Though McClendon uses his method to begin exploring the Christian doctrine of the atonement, a standard loci of Christian systematic theology, I will be using it to investigate Christian claims about friendship, relating them to Christian claims about charity and (economic) justice, ideas that run transverse through multiple doctrines.¹⁶ While I will touch on these various doctrines, my purpose is to better understand the relationship among Christian claims regarding friendship, charity, and justice through the examination of the life of Bayard Rustin. I am perhaps using McClendon’s approach in a slightly modified way, calling it “biography as moral

Rustin, asking how his life might inform our own stories and how his convictions about God might help the church reflect on its own beliefs and praxis.

¹⁴ A discussion on the Christian tradition on friendship is conducted below in the section The Promise and Problems of Friendship in Classical and Christian Understanding.

¹⁵ McClendon, 157.

¹⁶ See Justin Bronson Barringer, “Jesus Is Not Just My Homeboy: A Friendship Christology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 10, no. 1 (January 2021): 158–75. In that essay I examine the role friendship plays in Christology, for instance.

theology,” which is not too far afield from McClendon’s work given that he is interested in a “theology of character,” noting that “the problems of ethics lead to the problems of theology and back again.”¹⁷ I am focusing on what might be considered lesser Christian theological and doctrinal commitments for the majority of this work, as well as moral commitments, but ultimately this is faithful to McClendon’s claim that a life can give us both moral and theological information. He writes,

It is plain that these [exemplary] lives may serve to disclose and perhaps to correct or enlarge the community’s moral vision, at the same time arousing impotent wills within the community to a better fulfillment of the vision already acquired. But the same example may serve also to stir up other convictions of the community—its understanding of God, its doctrine of human nature, its appreciation of the earth and all that is in it. These convictions, too, may be negated or enlarged, altered or reinforced, by the lives of such significant persons. Such lives, by their very attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for the Christian thinker, enabling her more truly to reflect upon the tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all. To engage in such reflection, however, is the proper task of Christian theology. That the task can be fulfilled in this way is the thesis of the present book.¹⁸

Further, in my final chapter, I begin a constructive project that I am calling “a friendship theology in response to wealth inequity.” It will use the exemplary life of Rustin as a way of pointing to Christlikeness as a call for Christians to follow the Apostle Paul’s injunction, in this case arguing that we should imitate Rustin as he imitates Christ. This claim also follows McClendon’s lead. He writes, “Christianity turns upon the character of Christ. But that character must continually find fresh exemplars if it is not to be consigned to the realm of mere antiquarian lore. That is one good reason...why in Christianity there have been ‘the saints,’ not merely in the original, biblical sense of all members of the Spirit-filled community, but in the historic sense of

¹⁷ Barringer, 2. Sarah Azaransky argues for something like a biography as moral theology on pp. 10–15 of *This Worldwide Struggle*.

¹⁸ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 22.

striking and exemplary members of that same community.”¹⁹ Christians should look at Rustin because so much of his life helps us also to look past him, or in him, to see Jesus Christ.

It is appropriate here to critically examine McClendon’s proposed method because it seems to suggest two contradictory approaches. Firstly, not only the truth but the formulation of Christian doctrine depends upon the witnesses who best embody it. So, we do not begin with doctrine; we begin with ethics and see how doctrine arises from it. And secondly, exemplars must also be tested according to the measure of Christ, which comes with its own doctrinal and ethical standards. Can these two approaches fit neatly together? And, if they can fit together, where does one begin, or enter the seeming circular flow between the approaches? Finding a potential solution to this quandary will require an examination of not only McClendon’s book *Biography as Theology* but other works of his as well.

With this in mind, I also follow McClendon in his caveat, “Let it be remembered that our goal is not to accept as dicta the convictions of our subjects. Rather, our attempt must be to ask what it means to the received heritage of theology to have the witness of this particular life, lived as this life was lived.”²⁰ In other words, for my project, I will try not to pull any punches regarding my own qualms with various aspects of Rustin’s beliefs and actions. In fact, I hope to show that in the places where I think Rustin’s life veers away from the character of Christ are the places where there is a significant shift in or dissolution of Rustin’s friendships. This serves two purposes. First, it shows that I am not making Rustin a messianic figure. Second, it will help me present more clearly my argument about the way in which Rustin’s particular life offers us

¹⁹ McClendon, 23.

²⁰ McClendon, 140.

insight as it relates to the “received heritage of theology,” particularly the parts of the tradition that focus on friendship, charity, and justice. Rustin’s life is most charitable and just when his friendships are the strongest with other virtuous people, and his life is most vicious when he moves away from those friendships to friendships with less virtuous people.²¹ In short, I argue that Christlike friendships are the best basis for, as well as the ultimate result of, charity and (economic) justice. This claim will be fleshed out in chapter four, when I talk about Rustin, friendship, and the Black church.

Following McClendon again, I want to emphasize the role of community both as communities relate to the life of the exemplar and in the life of those interpreting that life. About the former, McClendon says, “The character we investigate in a biographical study is always character-in-community. None of the persons we examine can be understood unless we understand their participation in communities of faith, and other human communities as well.”²² For Rustin of course we will discuss particular friends, but he was in communities ranging from American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and many others, each of which influenced him in marked ways. This raises questions relevant for understanding the exemplar and our own communities.

²¹ Related to this is the recognition that in evaluating his whole life we can see that even his gradual move away from Christian faith (though he never directly disavows it) is a result of his convictions about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and in some way, it is a fact that the lives of those around Rustin failed to demonstrate truths about Christianity that Rustin needed to see, and thus he began to doubt their veracity because others claiming certain beliefs failed to share his convictions. Also, rather than looking at friendship, charity, and justice precisely as doctrinal matters, they will be seen as a part of the loci of moral theology and throughout the dissertation find places where they connect with other doctrinal loci as well. Perhaps, for McClendon it could be said that an exemplary life of friendship, charity, and justice helps us better understand various theological loci or at least to understand them in a new way.

²² McClendon, 170.

With the community in mind, McClendon is also concerned about the relationship between belief and character, and the ways the connection is discovered in biography. He asserts, “For as men or women are convinced so will they live.”²³ Thus biography as theology not only inspires but helps convince and convict folks to adopt true doctrines and the virtuous lives those doctrines demand and enable. A brief interjection is appropriate here to note that McClendon has seemingly given us a cyclical explanation in which conviction justifies action and action justifies conviction, and they are tied together by contemplation. The questions for McClendon thus become where or how one enters the cycle and then whether the cycle is virtuous or vicious. Herdt points us, potentially, toward friendship as the response to both questions. If one, as Herdt claims, overcomes the habituation gap, and thus enters the cycle, then that happens through being known and loved by an exemplar. In Rustin’s case, as with many others, it is his friends who serve as exemplars and thus help him enter the cycle. Likewise, it is friendship that, largely, determines the virtuousness or viciousness of the cycle because it depends on the way friends influence one’s convictions, provoke one to action, and participate in contemplation on both. This might be the key to McClendon’s quandary, which he states as, “Thus, character is paradoxically both the cause and consequence of what we do,” because that cause and consequence is not sequestered from others as if any person lives unaffected by other persons, and thus it is those who are friends that help shape both the cause and consequence of what one does.²⁴ In this way, the very act of growing in virtue is itself peripatetic, more precisely

²³ McClendon, 20. I think McClendon sees a cyclical movement between beliefs and actions. As folks are convinced at a given time so they will live, for the most part, at that time, but as they are convinced otherwise so will their lives follow. This is part of how Rustin’s story unfolds, in that later in his life some of his commitments seem to waiver and so then do his actions, and vice versa.

²⁴ McClendon, 16.

peripatetic friendship. He describes it this way, “The best way to understand theology is to see it, not as the study about God but as the investigation of the convictions of a convictional community, discovering its convictions, interpreting them, criticizing them in the light of all that we know and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.”²⁵ In decidedly Christian terms, we might refer to this process as discipleship.

McClendon rightly draws a connection not only between belief and character, but recognizes the role of contemplation in strengthening both. One key choice that stands out in McClendon is that each of the people he chooses to write about had both a robust contemplative life and active life. This demonstrates his conviction that faith must have both intellectual content and lived evidence. That is, one’s convictions—both affective and intellectual—should have consequences in the life of the one that holds those convictions.²⁶ McClendon writes in a way that is reminiscent of folks in the Black radical tradition like James Cone and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor who are asking why or how it is that Christian convictions have led so many white people in particular toward nefarious rather than righteous actions. McClendon writes, “religious convictions, like others, are fully expressed only in the range of actions of the person or community that is convinced by them. . . . Our method of investigation requires that we attend to the way that the religiously convinced express their convictions in the full context of their utterance.”²⁷ Thus, in the vernacular I am using, and this may be too on the nose, the one who is

²⁵ McClendon, 20.

²⁶ McClendon writes, “Convictions, as well as traits, are integral to character and to the existence of [Christian] community. . . . We may roughly define convictions as those tenacious beliefs that when held give definiteness to the character of a person or community, so that if they are surrendered, the person or community would be significantly changed.” McClendon, 19.

²⁷ James Wm. McClendon and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, Revised edition (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 17.

religiously convinced must walk their faith, not simply talk it. So, again, religious conviction is, according to McClendon, as well as much of the Black theology tradition, necessarily peripatetic. And, thus, in this project Rustin's life will be examined as much or more based on what he did and with whom and how than it will be on what he said and wrote, though the latter must also play a part.

Rustin was one who had a deeply intellectual understanding of his faith and deep convictions about it, and both were evidenced in the choices he made in his life, ranging from whom he chose to befriend to what consequences he was willing to face as he fought injustice. McClendon argues, in alignment with Quaker theology, "The other primary aspect of confessing is witnessing—the term we believe most nearly does justice to the signaling quality that coheres with stance in the act of confessing. The witness is called not to lecture, or to argue, but to testify."²⁸ A related aspect of McClendon's work here that is crucial for examining a life lived in peripatetic friendship is that the person's life cannot only, or perhaps even primarily, be examined based on what the person said but what they did. McClendon writes, "And confessing entails bearing witness, not only taking a stand but showing it, which is different, as we have said from stating it."²⁹ That is to say, one must literally (though I do sometimes also use in a metaphorical sense) walk the walk if talking the talk is to be intelligible in any substantive way.

For Rustin, the contemplative as well as the confessing life was largely guided by the active life, and the action was often of a peripatetic nature as he walked, marched, and struggled for justice for himself but more so for countless others. For instance, Rustin wrote, "The major

²⁸ McClendon and Smith, 64.

²⁹ McClendon and Smith, 65.

aspect of the struggle within is determined without. If one gets out and begins to defend one's rights and the rights of others, spiritual growth takes place. One becomes in the process of doing, in the purifying process of action."³⁰ For McClendon and Rustin, then, such a life is the unity of the "*via activa* and the *via contemplativa*."³¹ Cicero and others talk about how friendship offers us the chance at bringing these two together, and we can in some sense call these exemplars or saints with whom we get acquainted as we study their lives as our "friends" inasmuch as their lives similarly provide us with this opportunity. We can learn from their exemplary lives for sure, but we can also come to love them and thus be transformed by "knowing" and loving them.³²

A large part of McClendon's argument is that each of these Christian exemplars had distinctly theological images that governed the way they lived— or at least attempted to live—their lives faithfully as followers of Christ. As McClendon puts it,

The point of this book is to show one way in which theologians may do better work. That way is through a certain attention to other people's lives. Now let us consider the suggestion that a key to biographies is the dominant or controlling images which may be found in the lives of which they speak. . . . I take it that the convergence of such images in a particular person helps to form his characteristic vision or outlook.³³

He later clarifies, "By images I mean metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such they

³⁰ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, inside cover page.

³¹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 42.

³² This is part of Jennifer Herdt's argument in *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

³³ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 69.

bear the content of faith itself.”³⁴ McClendon says that the images employed by these saints must show us the truth of, or least content of, their religion.

So, the question is, What, if any, theological images governed Rustin’s life and help us both better understand him as well as those images and the God to whom they point? I will show that the concept or image of friendship was central to Rustin’s life, in ways that both seem incidental and more consequential. For now, I will simply list some of the ways the image, or language of, friendship shaped him. The image of friendship was central to Rustin’s life in at least four significant ways. First, he was raised in and spent most of his life associated with the Society of Friends (Quakers). Second, he started an organization called “In Friendship” to help southern civil rights leaders do their work. Third, he summarized Jesus’s social teachings to four concepts that support the formation and maintenance of friendships. Fourth and most importantly, he formed friendships with people across all sorts of spectrums and those friendships made possible his own work in charity and justice, along with the modern civil rights movement.

Although Hirschfelder’s choice to focus on Rustin was for a different purpose than mine, specifically on oppression, she makes some similar observations regarding why Rustin ought to be a part of more scholarly discussions across disciplines. One of those reasons, for which I argue throughout this project, is that Rustin recognized, embraced, and proclaimed the importance of social interdependence. Hirschfeld is working in the field of figurational sociology, which rightly argues that individuals cannot be fully analyzed on their own merit or faults, achievements or failures, but rather “emphasis is placed on their interconnectedness,

³⁴ McClendon, 75. Also see, 85 and 103 for more description of what McClendon is arguing.

which also implies, however, that the ‘homo clausus,’ or in other words, an *essential*, personal identity that is completely independent from society does not exist. . . . As Rustin’s case shows on the other hand, the (posthumous) discussion of an actual person’s life immediately tends to fall back to the very notion of an individual . . . rather than taking the aforementioned social and long-term dynamics into account.”³⁵ When this insight is combined with McClendon’s argument for biography as theology, it becomes clearer that a biography as theology approach must not merely consider the story of the individual but of the individual-in-community. I have chosen friendship as the premier type of relationship to be the basis for my work, but other relationships could and should be considered in various narrations of Rustin’s life with others. Also, it is right, given the theological framing I am using, to consider not only Rustin’s relationship to other mere humans but also Rustin’s relationship to God, which is explored by looking at the commitments Rustin formed due to his Quaker faith.

Regarding Rustin’s Quaker socialization, Hirschfelder argues that understanding his uniquely Quaker commitments can make him seem like an enigma to those unfamiliar with Quaker logic. Therefore, it is important to understand Rustin as a Quaker, a tradition that values friendships, social justice, and a unique way of thinking about and living theology that could be summarized as testimony, an idea that will be explored via the work of Rachel Muers in chapter one. The way that Rustin understood friendship and justice must be examined in light of his being a part of the Society of Friends.

Peripatetic Friendship in Classical and Judeo-Christian Tradition

³⁵ Hirschfelder, *Oppression as Process*, 25–26.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle is known for founding the Peripatetic school at the Lyceum in Athens. The original Greek for *peripatetic* suggests the idea of walking or marching, while learning, building virtue, and growing friendships infused with wisdom and justice. It is not only Aristotle that provides us with such an idea, but the narrative arc of Scripture does so as well, culminating in Jesus walking with his disciples and gifting us with the Holy Spirit who walks with us as the God of friendship in us.

God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. God almost as literally as we can imagine walked with Israel as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire and communicated with them primarily through God's friend Moses. In Micah, we are told that the godly life requires walking humbly with God, which is connected with justice and mercy. Of course, Jesus walked with his disciples and they with him for three years as they befriended him and one another. Then he sent them out walking in pairs of friends to tell other people about the friendship they could have with God, even those who were sinners could be friends of this God-Man. Peter even walked on water, if only for a moment, with Jesus. In the New Testament, we see several mentions of the disciples walking together, and we of course see after his resurrection when he was walking with some of his friends on the road to Emmaus when they realized who he was and that the resurrection was true. Now, after Pentecost, the Spirit walks with us, and often does so through our friends. Friends in that way are a means of grace, almost a sacrament, in which we meet God in another person. Even when a Christian walks with a non-Christian friend the Spirit walks with them as prevenient grace for one and sanctifying grace for the other if they are pursuing virtue together.

While it could be fruitful to flesh out any of the biblical references above, one story in particular needs further discussion. The Exodus, an important story in African-American theology generally and Black liberation theology in particular, is not simply about God's

deliverance from slavery, though it is certainly about that; it is about God walking with a people as their chief friend so that they could be prepared to be a wise and just people both on their way to and once they inhabited the promised land.³⁶ With that notion in mind, that God freed Israel from slavery then walked with them in peripatetic friendship so that they would be a just people, unlike their enslavers, it becomes clearer why God would call Israel to be a nation set apart for the sake of the nations, and why God would powerfully use African-Americans and other oppressed peoples to teach the church, or at least remind the church, of its place in the world also as a nation that walks with and learns from God in order to be a transnational nation that, too, is set apart for the sake of the nations. When the church loses its way, as it does often, folks like Rustin remind us of our peripatetic friendship with God and our duty to build peripatetic friendships with others across dividing lines in order to be a wiser and more just and faithful people declaring God's glory and human flourishing as we walk, march and struggle together against the powers and principalities that rain down injustice.

So, it is by looking at Bayard Rustin walking, marching, and struggling together with his friends and God against oppressive powers that we might see clearer how God is walking or wants to walk with us as we too walk with our friends. Now, we might rightly call this discipleship, just as Jesus walked with his disciples not as servants but as friends. This is peripatetic friendship, that which is formed as we walk together in good times and perhaps especially in struggles together to bear witness to the better world Christ is making, the world into which we will walk at the Parousia.

³⁶ See Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), in which he offers an extended commentary on the way Exodus has been used in revolutionary political discussions.

This peripatetic struggle—and I use *struggle* here because marching for justice often requires overcoming many obstacles—is a key theme in Rustin’s life, especially as it relates to friendship, charity, and wealth inequity. In a very real way the marches of the civil rights movement were their own sort of peripatetic schools, wherein marchers walked and learned together.³⁷ Their Lyceum, as well as their Exodus route, was the combination of blacktop and Black churches.³⁸ As a way of narrating Rustin’s life, exploring “peripatetic friendship,” and concerns about charity and economic inequity, this project will narrate key friendships in Rustin’s life, especially those friendships shaped during the struggle, the metaphorical and literal marches for justice. These friendships will show how Rustin’s concerns for various justice issues were shaped and how he, in turn, shaped the justice commitments of his friends.

If not synonymous with discipleship, peripatetic friendship is a key aspect of discipleship in the way of Jesus, and thus I sometimes use the two terms interchangeably throughout this work. I want to emphasize that discipleship is not so much about a program of teaching delivered to an audience sitting comfortably in a church building. Rather, it becomes Christian discipleship as it makes its way into places of struggle, walking with those who are marching, protesting, and doing acts of civil disobedience to bring about more just conditions that ultimately bear witness to the fullness of justice and friendship that will be consummated when Jesus returns.

³⁷ See, for example, Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 242–43. I especially love that Rustin uses the language of “prepare the path” in his reflections on what the NAACP did to make the rise and work of folks like King possible.

³⁸ Aram Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014). Goudsouzian provides a host of documentary evidence regarding the interactions of the marchers both as they walked the roads by day and as they had speeches, and rallies, and debates by night.

I will return to peripatetic friendships throughout the dissertation, so it is helpful to have a definition, one that follows from the discussion above, to build on in later sections. Peripatetic friendship as I am using it has two different but related meanings. The first refers to the companionship of people literally marching and learning virtue together. The second is a metaphorical use that describes the way people journey together through life. Peripatetic friendship in either use has no demands on how long folks walk together, what type of friendship they may have in other categorizations, nor on excellence in virtue. In both senses, all that is required is that two or more people walk toward virtue together, whether it be the virtue of justice or of prudence or any number of virtues. This requirement has a sub-requirement, notably learning together what virtue is and how it is best expressed in the world. This understanding of friendship is comparable to the way discipleship is described in the New Testament from when the Apostles first walked and learned virtue from Jesus to the many journey metaphors used in the epistles. Further, this vision of Christian life has been described by great theologians, appears in many of our hymns and songs, and even in the church calendar that invites us to journey with Jesus through his life every year. In this way, while not precisely synonymous, peripatetic friendship might be one way of describing discipleship and catechesis.

Dissertation Chapters Layout

This project has four chapters, three of which look at Rustin's life via different angles all related to friendship and justice, narrowing in on the particular work for economic justice. The first chapter will be an intellectual and theological biography of Rustin that centers around his friendships and how they shaped him from childhood through his adult life of activism. The second chapter will more fully develop the idea of peripatetic friendship by zeroing in on a couple especially important friendships that Rustin had with other activists, namely A. J. Muste

and A. Philip Randolph. This exploration will help expose the ways that Rustin lived into classical versions of friendship and ways in which he eschewed them as well as illumine how his Quaker Christian faith aligned with myriad Christian notions about friendship. It will also briefly examine some of Rustin's commitments to a variety of justice related issues, primarily as a way into the particular focus of this work, namely economic justice.

Chapter three will examine Rustin's friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr. It will also draw out the ways in which Rustin connected wealth inequity with everything from war-making to racism, and it will expand the discussion on peripatetic friendship by discussing the effects of Rustin and King's friendship on the friends themselves as well as on the world around them. It will then show how Rustin's ideas traveled with King along the Meredith March as King acted as a Rustinian disciple seeking to bear witness to the truths Rustin had taught and shown him.

In the fourth and final chapter, I will draw together the intellectual biography, reflections on Rustin's friendships, and his activism for justice generally and economic justice specifically to create a "Rustinian" friendship theology in response to wealth inequity. This theology will serve as another angle on African-American liberation theology. Notably, I will argue that Rustin's ideas about liberation do not necessarily make him an alternative to Black liberation theology. Rather, they instead put him within the ongoing argument that makes up the tradition. Ultimately, I am suggesting that he was part of that tradition yet has been largely ignored within it. One outworking of this theology will be Rustin's advocacy of a version of universal basic income, a part of his larger economic vision that included an economic bill of rights. This chapter will argue that Rustin's life was a tangible example of Kelly Johnson's claim that "the opposite of poverty is not plenty, but friendship" in that his friendships were not only his source

of “wealth” but that they were the catalyst for the twentieth century’s boldest ideas about radical economic justice for an America in which all people could flourish.

Finally, in the conclusion I will note how Rustin is being recognized in many arenas, and then argue that he should be an important interlocutor or person worthy of study in Christian theology and ethics. Here I will once again attempt to drive that point home by suggesting that the Rustinian friendship theology, in response to wealth inequity, provides a helpful way to approach economic injustice. I will point toward a future project, namely a book that addresses a wider variety of Rustin’s friendships that will look back at Rustin’s life one more time so that even I, too, may be reminded of the need for what Rustin called “angelic troublemakers” in this world, those who pursue virtues like justice, charity, truth, and friendship that they might achieve what some call impossible.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 An Intellectual and Theological Biography of Bayard Rustin

Rustin was undoubtedly among the most interesting and important figures of the twentieth century, yet his life has received little attention, particularly among religion scholars. This omission, tragic as it is, is starting to be rectified among scholars and activists who are now drawing on Rustin as a source of inspiration, information, and imitation. Yet, even as new Rustinian scholarship is produced, little of it has asked about the role of Rustin's Quaker commitments or considered the other influences in his intellectual, spiritual, and political development. This chapter will illumine those who influenced Rustin as a way of starting the discussion on his influence on others. Rustin's Quaker faith will be centered since it is typically decentered in discussions about his life, and because it is among the most important driving forces in Rustin's activist life and peripatetic friendships.

1.2 Rustin's Upbringing

Rustin was an oddity in the civil rights movement. He was a Quaker lay person from the North rather than an evangelical or mainline clergyperson from the South. He was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania where his grandparents, Julia Davis Rustin and Janifer Rustin, raised him. The woman Bayard thought was his older sister was actually his mother, who had Bayard at the age of seventeen. Rustin's father played no role in his life. His grandparents thought it would be best if they raise him as their own. His grandmother particularly influenced Bayard's formation

as a child. Although she was officially African Methodist Episcopal, she received a deep Quaker faith from her mother who was a servant in a Quaker household of the Butler family. She instilled Quaker faith into Bayard in ways that shaped the rest of his life. He was even named after the Quaker leader, Bayard Taylor, a famous writer and diplomat. Bayard Rustin recalled, “I think my earliest influences were those of the Quakers, the belief in non-injury, non-violence, respect for other people, and the like.”³⁹ It is that faith that I want to highlight in this chapter as it was evident at different stages in Bayard’s life and career, and as it shaped and was shaped by his experiences both in the academy and in his activism. I especially will be looking for themes of friendship, charity, and wealth inequity as they pop up constantly throughout Bayard’s life.

Rustin told several stories that showed both his fondness for his grandmother and a clear appreciation for what she taught him.⁴⁰ An anecdote shows how Julia inculcated Bayard with a sort of virtue ethics focused on practical wisdom learned through the difficulties of friendship. At

³⁹ Bayard Rustin, *The Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin*, Oral Interview by Ed Edwin, Interview One, Transcript, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1988, 2–3. He also notes that his great-grandmother was a contemporary of Smedley Butler, the Quaker General who became a staunch anti-war activist. Butler wrote *War is a Racket*, a book that criticized the economic motivations for American war-making, a tack that Rustin took often in his own activism.

⁴⁰ For example, he recounts a moment at a community-wide gathering that Julia taught him one of the important lessons he took with him through life. He said, “To give you some feeling about my grandmother, I nudged at her and I said, ‘Did you see who just came in?’ And she said, ‘Quiet, now. Who was it?’ And I said, ‘It’s John Hopkins.’” And, John Hopkins was the town drunk. And I said, ‘I’m really quite shocked to see him come here.’ And she said to me, ‘When we get home, we will talk about it.’ And when I got home, she chastised me, but in a very nice way, by saying, ‘You must not judge other people, because if, as you say, he is the town drunk and is no good, then it must have taken much more energy for him to have come than it took for us.’ And I don’t know how, but somehow that one event seems so typical of her attitude to people and things.” On another occasion, later in her life, Julia was being celebrated for her contributions to the community, and someone asked how she helped so many people while all the time facing racism and prejudice. The person asked, “How is [it] you never lost your bearing, your dignity?” Julia responded, “Oh, there are two things. One is, it’s just too tiresome to be hateful.” They then asked what was the second, and she said, “Oh, I decided long ago that I was not going to let people mistreat me, and in addition give me indigestion.” Both of these examples speak to the inherent dignity that Rustin came to believe every person had, which made every person worthy of friendship and financial stability. Likewise, Bayard remembers that no one was complaining about segregation at that time in West Chester, that is, except his grandmother. See John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 13.

a young age Rustin got into a fight with an Italian-American friend named Pascele, whom he called his best friend at the time. During the fight Pascele said to Bayard, “You’re acting like a n____r.” Naturally, Rustin was upset, so when he came home he told Julia that he did not want his dinner. She first asked him if that was a wise choice, and then she told him to walk across the street to Pascele’s house and look in the window to see if Pascele was eating dinner with his family after the incident. Bayard did so then came home, at which point Julia asked “Was Pascele eating?” When Bayard said Pascele was eating, Julia responded, “Well, now, if you think he mistreated you and you are not going to eat, does that make sense?” Rustin, “decided that it didn’t” and he then ate his supper.⁴¹ This story illustrates that Rustin learned the difficulties of friendship early, especially as an oppressed minority, but he also gleaned some practical wisdom that when he was mistreated that he should not let that mistreatment make him feel less-than or give up on something that is right and good for him.

1.3 Rustin’s Childhood Navigating Poverty

The Rustin family was poor, but thanks to some relationships Bayard’s grandfather had built while catering at the country club, a wealthy Italian family rented their large house in an expensive neighborhood to the Rustins for a price they could afford. Thus, from his childhood Bayard saw the possibilities in friendships across socio-economic lines, especially because the Rustins used their large house as a sort of community center where various meetings took place, local kids hung out, and shelter was offered to African-American travelers who were migrating North. Rustin remembered that “very often we would be hustled out of our beds late at night to

⁴¹ Rustin, Oral Interview One, 3–4.

make room for a family which didn't have anywhere to go and was passing through town.”⁴² This poor family, with a rich family’s home, took in even poorer folks in many acts of hospitality. On one occasion, a family was staying at the house, and they were used to using an oil lamp rather than one hooked up to a gas line. So, the family blew out their lamp that night, not knowing any better. Bayard smelled the gas and alerted his grandfather, who then removed everyone from the house. Rustin recounted that this traumatic experience was “one of my earliest interests in trying to recognize the need to help people and be concerned about people.”⁴³ He discovered that friendships, including those that reach across lines, including a socio-economic one, can and do have a ripple effect, making communities stronger via networks of friends.

While recognizing his own family’s poverty, Rustin also acknowledged the plight of African-American migrants after World War I. He wrote, “They were very poor...[Because] after the war, when the machines were coming into the fields to do the work that they had done, very often they'd put shotguns to their backs and told them to get the hell out. They were not only poor, very often they left with only the clothes they had on their back, depending on white people of good will to help them, on black ministers and church congregations to help them, on families who had come north.”⁴⁴ Bayard’s memories offer insight into the foundations of his commitments to reconciliation, friendship, and charity.

Bayard wrote, “my family were always integrationists. They were members of the NAACP. . . . Therefore, our family was very, very against Marcus Garvey. They felt he had no

⁴² Rustin, 5.

⁴³ Rustin, 5–6.

⁴⁴ Rustin, 16–17.

real social or economic program,” which is precisely the criticism that Bayard had of Black separatists years later like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael.⁴⁵ He saw no hope for folks who wanted to separate themselves from others, doing so, at the very least, made poor economic sense, and at most rent asunder the human family. Julia, among others, instilled in him a belief in the possibility of friendships forming even between former enemies, of oppressor and oppressed. Biographer John D’Emilio states,

He wished more than anything else to remake the world around him. He wanted to shift the balance between white supremacy and racial justice, between violence and cooperation in the conduct of nations, between the wealth and power of the few and the poverty and powerlessness of the many. He believed that the most antagonistic human relationships—between white sheriff and black sharecropper, between the European colonizer and the Africans he lorded over, between the filthy rich and the struggling poor—could be transformed. He believed that ordinary individuals could make a vast difference in the world, and he communicated this conviction widely.⁴⁶

Rustin transformed relationships, making enemies into friends, bringing together the rich and the poor, Black folks and white folks, and demanding that they work together for a more just society, lessons he learned initially from his grandmother.

Julia Rustin organized a Bible school in a local park each summer. On these summer mornings Bayard learned the biblical stories of the Jewish people in the Old Testament so deeply that he recalled “my Jewish friends often say to me that I know more about the first five books of the Bible than they do.” Julia insisted that he learn these stories because she believed, according to Bayard, “that when it came to matters of liberation of black people, that we had much more to learn from the Jewish experience than we had to learn out of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So

⁴⁵ Rustin, 18–19. Stokely Carmichael later changed his name to Kwame Ture, but I will use “Stokely Carmichael” because it is historically accurate as Rustin knew him by that name, but I did not want to miss noting this important decision concerning the way his name reflected his identity.

⁴⁶ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 2.

I learned that. And it has stood me in very great stead, and I'm very thankful that sometimes when I didn't really want to read and learn the Psalms and catechisms, and other things I was required to do, as is so often the case, years and years later you look back and realize what a godsend it was that they insisted. So that I got a very real grounding in the Biblical stories and the application that they made to my life and experience."⁴⁷ In this sense, Rustin seemed to be learning African-American liberation theology four decades before it was recognized as such in the academy.

Rustin also told a story similar to Augustine's famous theft of an apple. A Chinese family moved to town. "I remember that a group of us went, all white except me, to this Chinese laundry and threw open the door and threw pebbles in and began to chant something that the kids taught me, 'Chick chick Chinaman, eat dead rats, hit 'em in the head with a baseball bat.'" He said, "I can't account for how it happened," which resembles Augustine wrestling with his motives and relationships with people he thought were his friends. His grandparents made Bayard go work for free at the laundry for two weeks as penance, about which he remembered, "I was very happy, years later, that I had been forced to do that because it impressed upon me how important peers can be."⁴⁸ Rustin recognizes, like Augustine, that not all friendships are truly friendships, but only those, as Aelred of Rievaulx said, that "prudence directs, justice rules, fortitude guards, and temperance moderates."⁴⁹ Rustin was learning to discern what makes for a friendship and what does not. These peers were not his friends because they pressured him into

⁴⁷ Rustin, Oral Interview One, 6.

⁴⁸ Rustin, 7.

⁴⁹ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2008), 41.

an uncharitable and unjust action. I cannot say for certain, but an event like this might have helped shape Rustin in his later choices of friends who were, generally, of a high moral caliber even though they came from many different walks of life.

During his high school years Rustin struggled through the realities of segregated theaters, restaurants, and YMCA, yet Rustin still maintained friendships with a number of white folks. And, at a time when Black males were seen as threats to white females, a couple of Rustin's close friends were white girls who shared his love of poetry.⁵⁰ His main friend group included two other young Black men, a French guy, and a young Jewish man, who were brought together because of shared interests in either sports or academics. Rustin was making friends across boundaries, boundaries that he noted were clear when he could not sit with them at the movie theater or lunch counter. One of these friends, a white guy named Jean, would not go into the YMCA whenever they told Bayard he could not come in, of which Bayard said, "the first protest a la Martin Luther King that I ever saw was not on the part of a black, but on the part of Jean Cessna who sat in on the director of the YMCA until he would at least come and give me an explanation."⁵¹ Rustin's first exposure to nonviolent protest was not from Gandhi or A. Phillip Randolph but from one of his high school friends.

Bayard also had frank conversations with this same friend about racism. Jean's aunt, with whom Jean lived, did not want Bayard coming over to their house, so Bayard suggested that they hang out at the Rustin family home, but Jean said his aunt would find out and punish him.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that our society still often perceives Black males as a threat, especially to white women. I noted this reality about the historical moment for Rustin, because although he lived in the North, he was still living in the middle of the lynching era.

⁵¹ Rustin, Oral Interview One, 12.

Eventually they settled on spending time together at the public library.⁵² This friendship testifies to the power of friendship to bring people together even when others want to keep them apart, a lesson important to Rustin's later work when he was battling any number of factions who wanted to separate the folks he believed needed to be together to work for the changes they wanted to bring about. He likewise recognized the possibility for a natural affinity among oppressed or outcast groups by talking about his family's friendships with the Italians in town, who were also Catholic, at a time when Italians and Catholics were mistreated minorities in America. About the Rustins and the local Italians, he said, "There was a real camaraderie."⁵³

Bayard also befriended a Jewish young man, a relationship that opened his eyes to anti-Semitism, something he then fought against for much of his life. On one occasion, he and his Jewish friend were passing out campaign materials at the local country club made up mostly of Baptists and Episcopalians, and the members there abused them, focusing most of their ire on the Jewish guy. Rustin again recognized an affinity among oppressed groups, noting that "very often Jews were treated worse than blacks."⁵⁴ Particular friendships and general affinities helped Rustin throughout his life, as is probably the case for most people, and that showed him the possibilities of bringing together people from different walks of life for the sake of more charitable and just communities.

1.4 Rustin Learns about His Quaker Heritage

⁵² Rustin, 21.

⁵³ Rustin, 22.

⁵⁴ Rustin, 23.

While he was in school, Bayard also learned of the unique role of Quakers in both abolition and the underground railroad, noting that his town of West Chester was a popular stopover on the Underground Railroad not only because of its location between major cities but because it had a high concentration of Quakers. He said, “the Quakers, even Quakers who were not necessarily abolitionists, were thought to be by the slaves because the word would be passed along. You may not be able to trust them all, but you can probably trust the Quakers.”⁵⁵ He seemed especially proud of his Quaker faith and heritage when reflecting upon it in moments like this. Perhaps foreshadowing Rustin’s later life, his sister said that when he was a kid, “Bayard used to say that he wanted to be a minister or teacher. And when he got to talking, you’d think he *was* a minister.”⁵⁶ Devon Carbado and Donald Weise note the beginnings of his faith and thus his activism came primarily from one place. They write that “it was Julia’s Quaker teachings above any other influence that determined her son’s notions of nonviolent social protest.”⁵⁷ Like many Christians, Rustin’s faith had its ebbs and flows, but looking back at his childhood he noted how important his faith was for the whole of his life.

My activism did not spring from being black. Rather, it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing and the values instilled in me by the grandparents who reared me. Those values were based on the concept of a single human family and the belief that all members of that family are equal. The racial injustice that was present in this country during my youth was a challenge to my belief in the oneness of the human family. It demanded my involvement in the struggle to achieve interracial democracy, but it is very likely that I would have been involved had I been a white person with the same

⁵⁵ Rustin, 15–16. Also, see Anderson, who writes, “Many of the escapees were rescued and sheltered temporarily by those Quakers—not all—who, honoring the ethics of their religion had an abhorrence of chattel slavery. Hence West Chester, not very far from the Mason-Dixon line, was one of the earliest and more hospitable ‘stations’ on the Underground Railroad.” Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 21.

⁵⁶ Anderson, 9.

⁵⁷ Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, “Introduction,” in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), xi.

philosophy. I worked side-by-side with many white people who held these values, some of whom gave as much, if not more, to the struggle than myself.⁵⁸

Carbado and Weise clarify by pointing out that

the Quakers, or Society of Friends, taught the concept of a human family within which everyone was equal, contrary to the politics of Jim Crow, which were predicated on a belief in black inferiority and inhumanity. It was the contradiction between Quaker beliefs and Jim Crow politics that got Rustin involved in the struggle for racial equality. More importantly, his grandmother impressed upon him that it was his social responsibility to combat racial subordination nonviolently.⁵⁹

Two of Rustin's earliest published writings, *Nonviolence and Jim Crow* and *The Negro and Nonviolence*, both from 1942, indicate the power of his grandmother's influence, even as others came into Rustin's life to help him nuance and test these basic convictions.

At this point in his life, one can see in Rustin's theology and moral framing what Quaker scholar, Pink Dandelion, calls two of the "four key theological ideas still held in common by Friends everywhere," namely "the spiritual equality of everyone and the idea of the 'priesthood of all believers,'" which produces "the preference for peace and pacifism rather than war, and a commitment to other forms of social witness."⁶⁰ Before Rustin had read about Gandhi, before he had met A. Phillip Randolph, and before he worked for A. J. Muste (all famous pacifists and believers in human equality), Rustin had grasped these theological and ethical commitments because he had taken up his grandmother's Quaker faith. Other of his Quaker commitments, among those some that Dandelion mentions among his four distinctives, will also become

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 19. Julia "also emphasized the 'simple idea' that no one was unimportant, that it was 'our duty to treat each person as a complete human being.'" Anderson, 24.

⁵⁹ Carbado and Weise, *Time on Two Crosses*, xi.

⁶⁰ Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–2.

prominent at other times of Bayard's life, but he never loses these two theological and ethical commitments, both of which also inform his friendships and economic views.

1.5 Early Experiments with Nonviolence against Racism

Another important aspect of Rustin's childhood was the famous company his family kept. His grandmother's involvement in the NAACP meant that activists like W.E.B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, and Mary McLeod Bethune spent time in his home, and because they were not far from Lincoln University, a school that educated many African leaders, Nnadi Azikiwe, the first president of Nigeria, Kwame Nkruma, the revolutionary founder of Ghana, and others were also visitors at the Rustin's house.⁶¹ Bayard would later join the ranks of the former group and advise world leaders like those in the latter group.

Bayard began putting his lessons into practice fairly early on. In high school he had a number of encounters in which he chose to test the ideas of his faith that he had been taught by Julia, and the lessons about resistance that he had learned from his friend Jean Cessna, and no doubt, the socio-political wisdom that he had gleaned from his family's houseguests. As a high schooler, Bayard was arrested for the first time— his arrest tally eventually grew to more than twenty-five arrests— for refusing to sit in the designated section for Black people and instead sitting closer to the front in the white section. At that same time, he pulled his Black football teammates together to refuse to play unless they could stay in the same accommodations as their white teammates. These were the first of many “experiments” in nonviolent civil disobedience

⁶¹ See D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 12, and Rustin, Oral Interview One, 19.

that Rustin carried out over the course of his life. His courage and thoughtfulness garnered the attention of many of his classmates, who Anderson says, “rallied behind his progressive leadership—a rare phenomenon in the town’s African American community. . . . The young Rustinites followed him into restaurants, soda fountains, movie houses, department stores, and the YMCA; they were usually intercepted and thrown out into the street. Not even the local NAACP risked itself in such militant direct action.”⁶² Here, it is important to reemphasize that at this point Rustin had not yet learned this type of action from Gandhi or Randolph, but from his Italian friend, Jean Cessna.

Yet, D’Emilio rightly notes, “Friendships created another set of problems,” which raises an important question about the cost of friendship.⁶³ This sort of discussion is reminiscent of Aelred’s famous work *Spiritual Friendship*, in which one of his friends and mentees suggests that friendship might be too much trouble to be worth it, but Aelred responds that virtue cannot be “acquired or preserved without solicitude.”⁶⁴ Folks must care enough about other people in order to be vulnerable if they are going to be able to live the good life. Of course, other philosophers like Aristotle and Cicero argued, as well, that essentially life is not worth living without friends. Rustin bore through the difficulties in his friendships learning more about charity and justice along the way. “It was customary at the time for students to develop close friendships only with members of their own race or ethnic group. Bayard refused to let social

⁶² Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 28.

⁶³ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 18.

⁶⁴ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, 68.

custom decide who his friends could be.”⁶⁵ One such friendship, which has already been mentioned, was Bayard’s friendship with Jean Cessna. The duo ran track together and spent time in and out of school together, but Bayard was not welcome in most places Jean was. Nonetheless, the two were close and were such an odd pairing because it was unusual for a cross-racial friendship. Folks even called them “whitey” and “blackey.”⁶⁶

Their friendship and similarities worked well for them as friends, but the rest of the world certainly did not see them as equals. When they graduated Jean was headed to the University of Pennsylvania. Bayard, however, had similar or even superior bona fides, yet he had no college prospects in a time when graduating high school was considered the pinnacle of achievement for most Black men.⁶⁷ His achievements, however, were not only scholastic. D’Emilio notes that Rustin had already proven himself to be a capable activist.

In the interviews that aging West Chester residents gave after Rustin’s death, stories of his resistance abound. They tell how, denied service one time in a restaurant that he and his teammates had entered, Bayard refused to budge until he was finally ejected. In another incident, he violated custom by sitting in the main section of the downtown Warner Theater. These events and fragments of many others survive as memories reshaped by the knowledge of his later rise to prominence as a civil rights activist. None can be firmly corroborated. But their recurrence, whatever the particulars might have actually have been, alludes to a larger truth: even before he had finished high school, Bayard had formed a decision, made a moral resolve, not to accept from white America the restrictions it sought to impose. He would go in town where he pleased. He would have anyone he chose as his friend and intimate.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Jacqueline Houtman, Walter Naegle, and Michael G. Long, *Troublemaker for Justice: The Story of Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the March on Washington* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2019), 22.

⁶⁶ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 18.

⁶⁷ Among Rustin’s achievements, D’Emilio notes that Rustin was one of the speakers at his high school graduation where he gave a speech on the power of music and “performed a solo before the assembled graduates and their families, he received special recognition for winning letters in more than one sport, and he scored second highest among the graduates in ‘honor points.’” D’Emilio, 20.

⁶⁸ D’Emilio, 19.

Even with all of this it did not appear Bayard would have a chance to go to college. However, “At the last minute, an opportunity came to Bayard through the good offices of Dr. R. R. White,” the new president of Wilberforce University and a wealthy AME leader.⁶⁹ Julia approached him and was able to talk him into offering Bayard a music scholarship. So, off Rustin went to Ohio, his first time away from home.

1.6 Bayard’s College Years

Rustin arrived at Wilberforce in the fall of 1932. At Wilberforce, Rustin enjoyed sharing his musical talent, singing regularly in front of crowds on campus and all around the East Coast, in part to raise money for the school. He traveled with other singers and musicians representing the university, and they held concerts to promote the school’s work of offering Christian higher education to African-Americans, a relative rarity at the time. Therefore, these schools, which often struggled to find big donors or collect enough tuition, often had to raise money in order to keep their doors open. These performance trips included Rustin’s first experiences in the Deep South, and likewise he befriended students from the region who taught him more about African-American culture including music like work songs and the blues. “These songs expressed everyday frustrations of African Americans living and working in the South, who wanted a better life here on earth, not just in heaven.”⁷⁰ Wilberforce was affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and its leadership wanted Bayard and the group to stick to “spirituals,” but the

⁶⁹ D’Emilio, 21.

⁷⁰ Houtman et al., *Troublemaker for Justice*, 28.

friends insisted on singing work and blues songs as well. Strengthened by one another, they were able to stick to their conviction that people needed to hear songs of liberation during this corporeal existence, not just waiting around for the next life.

Although he delighted in the Wilberforce music program, Bayard was not fond of the school's required ROTC program. He had already committed himself to pacifism, in part because "Julia's influence was strong." Bayard embraced his Quaker roots and opposed the ROTC program.⁷¹ The historical record is unclear, but it is possible that Rustin was asked to leave Wilberforce because of his outspoken opposition to forcing students to receive military training.⁷² He left Wilberforce in 1933 and then enrolled in Cheyney State Teachers College, a Quaker institution close to home. While there, Rustin began to "focus [on] Quaker spirituality, observing daily periods of quiet contemplation, and delving more deeply into Quaker beliefs about human dignity, the unity of the human family, and nonviolence."⁷³ Jerald Podair writes that it was in 1936 when Rustin "officially declare[d] himself a Quaker and pacifist."⁷⁴ One way Bayard shared his pacifist commitments with others by arguing for it as part of the school's debate team. He also joined the Quaker organization the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).

While Rustin was at Cheyney State, the college hosted the Institute of International Relations. Rustin was the only Cheyney student who participated, and it gave him the chance to

⁷¹ Houtman et al., 28.

⁷² Whatever the case, all the possibilities point to Rustin's commitment to his convictions, attempting to improve people's lives.

⁷³ Houtman et al., 30.

⁷⁴ Jerald Podair, *Bayard Rustin: American Dreamer*, The African American History Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), ix.

meet college students and peace activists from institutions all over the country. D’Emilio writes that “institute teachers attributed the drift toward war to nationalism, economic imperialism, secret alliances, and the stockpiling of armaments. They urged class consciousness be substituted for nationalism, and blamed the divisions incited by capitalism for the tensions that led to war.”⁷⁵ These lessons grabbed hold of Rustin, pulling him into the activist work that defined the rest of his life. D’Emilio, like Podair, also notes that this was at the same time that Rustin “formally decided to declare himself a Quaker.”⁷⁶ D’Emilio further writes that Rustin began exploring Quaker faith through reading, discussing, and listening to lectures, all of which aided his “spiritual development, and by the time of the Cheyney Institute, Bayard was, in Quaker fashion, ‘depend[ing] on my daily quiet periods for guidance.’”⁷⁷

Soon after, Rustin spent his summer working with the AFSC through a program called the Friends student peace brigade, paid for by a \$100 award from Cheyney State. “With a few other college students, Bayard joined what was then still a relatively new experiment among the activist wing of the Quakers: peace education through immersion in the life of a local community.” This was clearly a formative time for him as later he reminisced, “I would have never come to certain social concerns had I missed the experience with the AFSC.”⁷⁸ At the same time his life served as a testimony to others, including one of his early mentors, Norman Whitney. A mutual friend of Rustin and Whitney said about the latter “that if he ever doubted the existence of God, he always thought of Bayard because Bayard had come from nowhere, had no

⁷⁵ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 25.

⁷⁶ D’Emilio, 25.

⁷⁷ D’Emilio, 26.

⁷⁸ D’Emilio, 26.

opportunity as a young man and he really educated himself. He was so brilliant and so articulate. Norm always said this was beyond human comprehension that anyone could rise to that level.”⁷⁹ Yet, Rustin did rise to that level and beyond, thanks, in part, to good friends.

1.7 From College to the Big Apple

Once again, the historical record lacks clarity, but not long before he was supposed to graduate, Bayard was dismissed from the university. Not sure what to do next, Bayard headed to the New York City, landing in Harlem to stay with his Aunt Bessie. He found a job as a teacher with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and even performed at the famed Apollo Theater. His experience with the WPA likely influenced his later work on an economic bill of rights in which he argued that the government should work to provide full employment or a universal basic income for those who could not work. In the meantime, all signs seemed to point to a career in showbusiness as Rustin sang in *John Henry* on Broadway, and joined a group called Josh White and the Carolinians, who (ironically, as we shall see later) released an album called *Chain Gang*.

Even during this foray into New York City’s entertainment scene, Rustin never lost sight of his commitments to justice or faith. He joined the New York Monthly Meeting, a gathering of local Quakers. Norman Thomas convinced Rustin during this time that focusing on civil rights was not actually the best way to achieve civil rights. Rather, Rustin recalled, “We change the economy to a socialist economy and automatically blacks will get their rights.”⁸⁰ Bayard joined

⁷⁹ D’Emilio, 27.

⁸⁰ Rustin, Oral Interview One, 29. In the final chapter I will go into more discussion about this idea in Rustin’s later life and clarify that he was not a crass Marxist who believed that fixing class issues would automatically fix racism, as his very participation in the civil rights movement demonstrates. Nonetheless, he did not

Josh White in exploring communism because it was the communists that Bayard and White heard preaching economic justice on the street corners and embodying racial integration in their organization. Bayard joined the Young Communist League (YCL) because, at the time, he thought they were the group most actively fighting racial discrimination and poverty.⁸¹ He also enrolled in free classes at the City College of New York where he could spar with other intellectuals about issues that concerned him. As Rustin recalled it, “One of the reasons that I did not really do much studying those two and a half years I was at City College was because I was really organizing all over the State of New York for the Young Communist Party, the Young Communist League, it was called.”⁸² It was while he was at the YCL that Bayard began learning how to be an organizer, but it was also at this time that he first registered on the radar of the FBI, both realities that were a part of his life for decades to come.

In one encounter when Bayard was to be interviewed by an FBI agent, after they had already been questioning his friends and neighbors, “[Bayard] met the agent in the hallway of his apartment building. In the spirit of Quaker openness and truth, he announced so that the other residents could hear, ‘This is an FBI man. He’s here to question me. I refuse to say anything to him. I will have no relationship with him whatsoever. You are free to tell him whatever you want, but I just want you to know who he is and what his purpose is.’ That was the last Bayard

believe that people really had freedom to do something if they could not afford to do so, therefore in order for freedom of choice to be a reality, economic considerations were essential.

⁸¹ It should also be remembered that this was before the end of World War II and the start of the Cold War. Although suspect to many Americans, both socialism and communism were not as broadly feared in the way that many Americans fear them today due to their association with the Cold War.

⁸² Rustin, Oral Interview One, 28.

saw of that FBI agent.”⁸³ This may have been a bit of an obnoxious way of showing it, but this demonstrates Rustin’s commitment to his Quaker faith even in the face of FBI harassment.

1.8 Rustin and Randolph Begin Working Together

Once America entered World War II, the communists with whom Rustin had been working started to shift their focus away from racial justice and toward supporting the global communist cause, centered in the Soviet Union, so Rustin left after only a couple of years with them. He was an outspoken critic of communism for the rest of his life. Still hungry for justice, Rustin set up a meeting with A. Philip Randolph who was already known for his work in racial and economic justice work as the leader of the largest labor union for African Americans, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.⁸⁴ It was at the start of this friendship, in 1941, when Randolph and Rustin first talked about a march on Washington. That idea eventually came to fruition in 1963, but along the way, the two worked on many other projects and marches together. In fact, Rustin joined Randolph’s March on Washington Movement, which at that time was focused on persuading the government to integrate the defense industry and federal government. Rustin and Randolph took on this project even though they were pacifists, because they realized it would help poor people, particularly poor Black people, get decent paying jobs. That original march was canceled because President Roosevelt conceded and gave into the demands before the march took place. Nonetheless, they hoped for a march in the future to demonstrate solidarity among working class folks, black and white. The concessions given by

⁸³ Houtman et al., *Troublemaker for Justice*, 37.

⁸⁴ See Houtman et al., 37. It was Milton Kramer, one of Rustin’s Jewish friends, who introduced him to Randolph.

Roosevelt, according to Rustin, marked “the symbolic inauguration of the modern civil rights movement.”⁸⁵

While working for Randolph, Rustin’s role changed a bit from that of his childhood. When he was a child his family offered hospitality, meaning they were the ones with relative wealth and power, even though they were poor. Now, however, Rustin became the guest, the one without money or power in many of his relationships, especially while traveling.⁸⁶ For instance, Rustin recounted that when he was traveling in the early 1940s for his work with Randolph, “this meant that I was essentially traveling around the country. When I say traveling around the country, I mean hitchhiking, because there was no money available, occasionally going by train, and occasionally getting in one city by train but not knowing when I was going to get out to go to the next place, because it very often required taking up a collection at meetings.”⁸⁷ In his childhood, Rustin, with his family, had often been the distributors of charity to their friends, but in this part of his life Rustin was the recipient of charity from his friends, and in both cases the friendship and charity were offered as part of work toward a more economically just society.⁸⁸

1.9 Rustin and Muste at the Fellowship of Reconciliation

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 61.

⁸⁶ For an explanation of the meaning of my use of “host” and “guest” see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁸⁷ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 49.

⁸⁸ The same was true in Rustin’s work for the FOR in which he made subsistence wages even though he could have made more money elsewhere because he believed in the pacifist and racial reconciliation cause. Rustin only complained when married employees were paid more than unmarried employees. See Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 72.

Around that same time, Rustin met and was hired by A. J. Muste, thanks to a connection made by Rustin's close friend, Norman Whitney, at the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a branch of the international pacifist movement, thus turning Rustin's amateur activism into professional activism that would become his career. For a time, Rustin put his time and energy into a largely white-led Christian pacifist movement.⁸⁹ At this stage, just like we saw in Rustin's childhood and college years, Rustin was building friendships across socio-economic and racial lines all centered around a shared concern for justice. His old friend and mentor, Norman Thomas, was also working with the FOR. Only a few years before, famed theologian Reinhold Niebuhr had left the FOR and written a public statement about his reasons for doing so. In response, Muste doubled down on pacifism, insisting that "nonviolence was not for them a tactical or pragmatic option but a total way of life," which is precisely the argument Rustin had with King years later.⁹⁰ Also, in 1941, right as Rustin came to work for him, Muste made more trouble for himself among most American clergy by declaring, "If I can't love Hitler I can't love at all."⁹¹ Of course many of his Quaker Brethren were understanding and appreciative, because they "subscribed to the ideal of radical human brotherhood, who believed, as he did, in hating the sin and not the sinner, but those outside of the Friends were not so welcoming to this message."⁹²

⁸⁹ Notably, the movement's name focused it on reconciliation, which was essentially the basic goal that Rustin hoped and worked for most of his life. He wanted to see enemies, even enemies in war, become friends. Rustin knew what many academics and activists are arguing now, as many have before, that reconciliation requires justice, and this begins to make sense of Rustin's life in which he connected issues like racial reconciliation with economic justice. Rustin envisioned a society of equity in which people care for one another in a network of friendships.

⁹⁰ Anderson, 65.

⁹¹ Anderson, 65.

⁹² Anderson, 65. One person in attendance, Milton Mayer, wanted to confront Muste, but ultimately decided not to because he recognized the depth and sincerity of Muste's convictions. Instead he wrote, "I thanked God (a la Swinburne) that I was not a Christian. . . . It was hard enough to be a Jew, even in America, and

It was also at his time at the FOR that Rustin met some of his lifelong friends, and sometimes sparring partners, George Houser (founder of the Congress on Racial Equality—CORE), James Farmer, and Glenn Smiley, the latter of whom played a big part in the Montgomery bus boycott. Most of the activists working at FOR were Gandhians, thanks, in part, to “their reading of such influential texts as Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience; Gandhi’s autobiography; *My Gandhi*, by John Haynes Holmes; *The Power of Nonviolence*, by Richard Gregg; *The Conquest of Violence*, by Bartholomeus de Ligt; and *War Without Violence*, by Krishnala Shridharani.”⁹³ Thus, it was that a bunch of American Christian pacifists, inspired first by their faith in Christ, came to embrace the teachings and example of an Indian Hindu and combined the two not only for the pacifist movement but later for the civil rights movement. Muste and Randolph, in particular, saw the value of nonviolent civil disobedience for improving racial conditions in the United States, but that realization did not bear much fruit until years later.

1.10 Rustin and Growth Through Quaker Testimony

In the meantime, some of Rustin’s friends and Christian Gandhian compatriots opened an ashram in New York for pacifists of all sorts to gather, including many who “had refused to register for conscription.”⁹⁴ These were the waters in which Rustin swam for the next several years, and whose currents eventually landed him in prison for his conscientious objection to any participation in World War II. In fact, Rustin said about Muste, “I learned more about

desperately hard in Germany; but anything was better than having to be a Christian and love your enemies.” Anderson, 65.

⁹³ Anderson, 69.

⁹⁴ Anderson, 69.

nonviolence from him than in all my subsequent reading. . . . I carried over his lessons to my work with Martin Luther King.”⁹⁵ This is how discipleship works, how peripatetic friendship works. One friend passes on knowledge and wisdom to the next generation of friends, with each generation hopefully maturing in virtue and continuing the journey on and with the way.

Rustin boarded a bus in Louisville headed for Nashville in 1942. He was thirty years old.⁹⁶ As he walked toward his seat in the back of the bus a young white child reached out to touch Rustin’s tie. The child’s mother immediately scolded the child saying, “don’t touch that n____r.” Rustin went back, found his seat, and sat down. After a while sitting at the back of the segregated bus he had an epiphany. Rustin asked himself, “how many years are we going to let that child be misled by its mother? . . . I vowed then and there I was never going through the South again without either being arrested or thrown off the bus or protesting.”⁹⁷ Rustin began living out that vow immediately by moving to the front of the bus. Eventually the driver called the police, even as Rustin protested “that his conscience would not allow him obey an unjust law.”⁹⁸ When the four police officers told him to get up, using multiple racial slurs, Rustin writes that he responded by saying, “I believe I have the right to sit here. . . . If I sit in the back of the bus I am depriving that child’—I pointed to the little white child of five or six—‘of the knowledge that there is injustice here, which I believe is his right to know. It is my sincere

⁹⁵ Rustin in Anderson, 66.

⁹⁶ Rustin both wrote about this incident in his short essay “Nonviolence vs. Jim Crow” and he talked about it in his Oral Interviews near the end of his life, now in the Columbia Oral History collection. Bayard Rustin, “Nonviolence vs. Jim Crow (1942),” in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 1–6.

⁹⁷ Rustin in D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 46.

⁹⁸ This is notably a well-worn position of the Christian tradition that was expressed by folks like Augustine and Aquinas before Rustin, and of course, Martin Luther King, Jr. after him.

conviction that the power of love in the world is the greatest power existing. If you have a greater power, my friend, you may move me.”⁹⁹

The four cops, whether they had a greater power or not, beat him where he sat and then dragged him into a police car. The beating and harassment continued at the station, but Rustin remained nonviolent. The police captain said to him, “N____r, you’re supposed to be scared when you come in here,” followed by mutters of “I believe that n____r’s crazy.”¹⁰⁰ Rustin’s response was simply to declare, “I am fortified by truth, justice and Christ. There is no need for me to fear.”¹⁰¹ In the end, the incident caused at least one white passenger to come to the station to speak up on Rustin’s behalf, and the assistant district attorney referred to Bayard as “Mister,” both unusual occurrences in the South at that time. This series of events helped more clearly set out Rustin’s path and made him well-known among the activist community.

This experience is an example of what Rachel Muers refers to as Quaker testimony.¹⁰² In short, Rustin knew propositionally and theoretically that nonviolence and equality of persons

⁹⁹ Rustin, “Nonviolence,” 2. I might be making too much of it, but Rustin’s connection between calling love the greatest power existing, and his use of “my friend” to refer to the police officer is not insignificant. Here he brings together *agape* or *caritas* with *philia* or *amicitia*, holding together the idea of universal non-preferential love with that of particular, personal, and preferential love, in that he sincerely believed in the possibility of friendship with the officer because of his Quaker commitment to equality. Thus, the material content of his comments about love is the concrete offer of friendship to the officer. This seems to become clearer as the story goes on. While he was sitting between two officers in the back of the police car, Bayard began writing something from memory from one of Paul’s epistles (one can perhaps imagine it was something like 1 Cor. 13). One officer took it from him, read it, and then crumpled it up and shoved it into Rustin’s face. Rustin started writing it again and about that time he noticed that the young officer in the front looked as if he realized that this was all an injustice. Rustin wrote about what happened next, “I began to write again, and after a moment I leaned forward and touched him on the shoulder. ‘My friend,’ I said, ‘how do you spell “difference”?’” Here, again, Bayard’s offering an invitation to friendship, the kind in which justice is included, and depends on truth, as Rustin demanded of the young man later in the courthouse as Bayard was testifying, he pointed to the young officer and asked that he tell Bayard and the court if Bayard’s story deviated from the truth even a bit.

¹⁰⁰ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 46–47.

¹⁰¹ Houtman et al., *Troublemaker for Justice*, 44.

¹⁰² This project not only sets Rustin in James Wm. McClendon’s *Biography as Theology* framework to be addressed in a later chapter but also within the realm of Quaker testimony, showing that the two are nearly identical,

were true, but he also came to know them experientially and experimentally as truth. This is a significant part of Quaker testimony, that is coming to know something experimentally and experientially, with a second aspect of such knowing being in the sharing of that knowing, which Rustin did professionally for many years afterwards.¹⁰³ Sometimes it can be difficult, according to Muers, to nail down a Quaker theology or ethic, saying that neither is “often systematized.”

She continues,

When we look more closely we find that in Quaker communities and Quaker literature, the basis for a particular course of action is not sometimes explained; or it is explained in a way that does not obviously relate to other explanations; or it is explained in a way that does not obviously refer to God, or to conventional sources of theological authority or patterns of theological reasoning. This is true especially of contemporary ‘liberal’ Quakers in the West. . . . As we shall see, from every era of Quakerism there are numerous examples of powerful and prophetic writing, articulating and advocating distinctive Quaker perspectives on the issues of the day; but there are fewer works that articulate any underlying coherence to these ethical positions.¹⁰⁴

Thus, one can see both the difficulty and the promise of looking at a particular life of a specific Quaker, in this case that of Bayard Rustin. I am trying to trace a coherence to his moral and

but using Quaker testimony as a way to break into the loop of McClendon’s arguments about the relationship between believing, knowing, and doing. Muers puts her work this way, “I attempt to show how Quaker ways of living and acting—an ethos, a pattern of life—relate to theology, to ways of thinking and reasoning about God and all things in relation to God,” and I am attempting to do some of that work specifically as it relates to Rustin’s life, addressing how his life, along with his speech and writing, showed his understanding of his relation to God. Rachel Muers, *Testimony: Quakerism and Theological Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁰³ Hirschfelder argues that Rustin’s Quaker identity makes him a great subject of study regarding friendships and Quakerism’s epistemological emphasis on process. She writes, “[One] reason for singling out Rustin’s specific example for analysis is that Rustin was a Quaker. . . . This spiritual belief profoundly impacted Rustin’s life and career and constitutes a highly formative aspect for many facets that are often casually referred to make up someone’s personality. Thus, taking [the development of] this religious community into account lays open the influence of [long-term] social relations in an individual’s life. What marks yet another interesting aspect for this inquiry is that particularly orthodox Quakers—to which Rustin adhered—place a strong emphasis on the concept of process.” Hirschfelder, *Oppression as Process*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Muers, *Testimony*, 2. Perhaps this dissertation will provide a way of thinking coherently about ethical positions in a Quaker frame by considering the role of friendship in moral development and in bringing about a more just society that could itself find some coherence in ethics by allowing traditions to be communicated via friendships, especially peripatetic friendships in which the friends learn along the journey together learning justice, courage, peaceableness, and other virtues while practicing them.

theological commitments over the course of his life, which could help in understanding, to a small extent, Quaker theology and ethics. Conversely, the messiness of Quaker theology might also explain the complicated realities of Rustin's life as he tried to live and speak his testimony even as the circumstances around him changed and as some friendships grew and others drifted apart.

I will offer Muers' thesis as an interjection at this point to help the reader understand why it is especially apt to review Rustin's life as a Quaker to help us arrive at some theological material. Muers writes,

Quaker approaches to theological ethics—to the relationship between patterns of acting in the world and patterns of thinking about God and the world-in-relation-to-God—are, in fact, distinctive and interesting in their own right. I do, however, think that in order to appreciate Quaker approaches to theological ethics, we have to suspend several common assumptions about how ethics works, and hence about what a distinctive contribution to theological ethics might look like. We have to refrain, at least temporarily, from looking for surprising new principles or rules, or even surprising new interpretations of biblical or traditional texts. Rather, we have to pick up on the idea of 'not words but a way,' and carry it through to its conclusion at least as far as Quakers do. We have not only to say that the primary form of response to God is in life and action but also to think through the implications of that idea for how both ethical reasoning and theology are done. To some extent, we have to avoid assuming that the ethical life of religious communities is about 'putting belief into practice,' and consider instead the implications of 'putting practice into belief.'¹⁰⁵

This describes well what Rustin did in the bus incident: he experimented with his belief to test its veracity by putting his practice into belief. In this case, we see that for Rustin it proved that the practice of a life of nonviolence was worth his believing. At the end of his essay "Nonviolence vs. Jim Crow," Rustin wrote, "I left the courthouse, believing all the more strongly in the nonviolent approach. I am certain that I was addressed as 'Mister' (as no Negro ever is in the South), that I was assisted by those three men, and that elderly gentleman interested himself in

¹⁰⁵ Muers, 3–4.

my predicament because I had, without fear, faced the four policeman and said, ‘There is no need to beat me. I offer you no resistance.’¹⁰⁶ After this incident and its cohering power to bring practice into belief, Rustin continued to travel regularly throughout the country giving speeches trying to persuade folks to become pacifists, and he also gave fiery speeches on racial oppression and reconciliation. Anderson claims that Rustin “came to be recognized as probably the most militant civil rights advocate in the United States.”¹⁰⁷ Azaransky likewise recognizes the role of Rustin’s Quaker faith in his contributions to the Civil Rights cause. She argues that Rustin is rightly situated among significant Black Christian figures of the early and mid-twentieth century, and adds to the case that Rustin should be considered a theologian of sorts who taught many of his friends about the connections among friendships, nonviolence, and justice, all in response to the work of God in the world.¹⁰⁸

1.11 Rustin’s Conscientious Objection

Bayard Rustin came to prominence on the national scene when he got a call from the draft board. Rustin informed them that because of his Quaker faith he believed war is wrong and thus he wanted to be listed as a conscientious objector, an appeal that the board accepted. At that

¹⁰⁶ Rustin, “Nonviolence,” 5.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 10. She writes, “By centering black God-talk, the Christian Gospel as a manual of resistance against Jim Crow, and black Americans as international orphans, these black American Christian intellectuals made critical contributions to ideas about blackness and black religion that were also in flux and formation. In short, they examined what it meant to be black, American, and Christian, when each category in itself was unstable and its meaning became less certain when modifying the other two. They also called on white colleagues to understand how changing the subject is significant, because it raises questions about who we do and do not know about, to whom we are accountable, and, indeed, what it is that we know. These epistemological questions are also moral ones because they shape theological imagination about God’s justice, God’s love, and God’s parenthood of all people.”

time, it was the expectation that draftees who were conscientious objectors would work in jobs at Civilian Public Service camps, notably without pay.¹⁰⁹ The idea was that these men would support the war effort without being called to use violence themselves.

Rustin had been traveling the country speaking against war and for nonviolence for about two years, but at home in New York he learned “that his Quaker friends were thinking about the possibility of providing US soldiers with hospitality services.”¹¹⁰ His response primarily for his local Quaker meeting, written in August of 1942, less than a year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, provides early evidence for his later decision to refuse being drafted.¹¹¹ He was especially upset about churches who were complicit in the government’s recruitment and training of military personnel. Rustin wrote,

At a time when the creation of a military training program is providing a vast problem, the government readily encourages the church and other civil institutions to assist in building morale and in providing recreational facilities. The government is also pleased when the church offers spiritual assistance—if such assistance is consistent with the military’s final aim. The problem before us is not an easy one. We must decide whether or not we wish to assist the government in making men into efficient soldiers. We must decide whether we wish to cooperate in an essential phase of war waging. We must face with reality the fact that rights we now enjoy as a society came because of our traditional peace testimony. We must discover our peculiar world task in these times and answer this question in light of this duty. . . . The primary social function of a religious society is to ‘speak truth to power.’ The truth is that war is wrong. It is then our duty to make war impossible first in us then in society. To cooperate with the government in building

¹⁰⁹ Bayard Rustin and Michael G. Long, *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin’s Life in Letters*, ed. Michael G. Long (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2012), 1. Long notes that these camps were the result of lobbying by peace churches that led to the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act, which formally allowed for conscientious objectors to do nonmilitary work that was still considered of “national importance.”

¹¹⁰ Rustin and M. Long, 1.

¹¹¹ It is also notable that in this letter Rustin coins the phrase “speak truth to power,” or at least begins to popularize it. A few years later he joined a number of other Quakers leaders to write a whole pamphlet with that title. According to Long, and others, “Rustin credits Patrick Murphy Malin, a professor of economics at Swarthmore College, for having used the phrase at the Friends General Conference at Cape May, New Jersey, in July 1942. But [Swarthmore] scholar Wendy Chmielewski points out that Malin’s speech did not include the exact phrase, and that ‘it is possible that it is Rustin himself who standardized the phrase in his 1942 letter, distilling Malin’s message that truth may be proclaimed in the midst of power.’” Rustin and M. Long, 1–2.

morale seems inconsistent with all we profess to believe. Indeed, from the professional militarist's point of view, 'morale' is that which makes it possible for one willing to do without moral qualm, if not with some moral justification, many things he previously felt wholly wrong. If morale and recreation are essential military needs for waging battle effectively let us avoid relieving the government of its responsibility. Let us avoid the possibilities of spiritual suicide. The moral letdown following the last war was due in part to the lack of faith the world had in a church which had cooperated in waging war.¹¹²

It was important to include this extended quote in order to get inside Rustin's thinking, especially his theological ruminations, which soon landed him in prison. Those ruminations, which I write about below, were about ideas about how Christians should make war impossible because war denies Jesus, and about how war supports racism and exacerbates class issues.¹¹³

Although Rustin declared himself a conscientious objector in 1940, it was not until 1943 that he wrote to the draft board to let them know that he would not participate in the work camps for conscientious objectors.¹¹⁴ In this letter we see Rustin's Quaker faith on full display, as he himself speaks truth to power. Rustin wrote to inform his local draft board that he would not only act as a conscientious objector but that he would also refuse to participate in the civilian work camps as well. This follows from his admonition to his Quaker meeting quoted above, namely

¹¹² Rustin and M. Long, 2.

¹¹³ Pastor John Haynes Holmes also influenced Rustin's thinking at the time. Holmes argued that exemptions for the draft should exist for all conscientious objectors regardless of their religious status. This helped Rustin to decide to not even participate in the civilian work camps because he did not want to take a privilege not granted to everyone who objected to participating in war-making. See Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 97–98.

¹¹⁴ Michael Long points to the way that Jesus informed Rustin's thought at the time. He writes, "An extant outline of a workshop he conducted during this period [around 1943]—'Five Kinds of Nonviolent Direct Action Jesus Used'—depicts Jesus of Nazareth as practicing civil disobedience ('He deliberately violated the Sabbath laws'), noncooperation ('He refused to answer "quisling" Herod when questioned by him'), mass marches ('Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem with a large procession of his followers shouting revolutionary statements'), and even personal nonviolent direct action ('He drove by drastic action the exploiters from the temple')." Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 9. Yet as Azaransky points out, Rustin is, unfortunately, not thought of as a theologian. She writes, "Rustin is often described in terms of his personality and physical gifts—he was charismatic, a rousing speaker, tall and lean with the physique of a former athlete, he had a mellifluous tenor voice, and he was kind to children. He is also recognized as a skilled organizer and an expert tactician of nonviolence. Less heralded have been his sharp intellect and keen theological mind." Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 153.

that it is the Christian responsibility to “make war impossible,” which meant Bayard could not participate even in nonviolent actions of “national importance” because those roles were part of the effort at home to make war possible abroad. He had already stated that he believed war to be a violation of the social teachings of Jesus, which Rustin summarized as

“(1) respect for personality; (2) service the ‘*summum bonum*’; (3) overcoming evil with good; and (4) the brotherhood of man.”¹¹⁵ Believing this, and having before me Jesus’ continued resistance to that which he considered evil, I was compelled to resist war by registering as a conscientious objector in October 1940. However, a year later, in September of 1941, I became convinced that conscription as well as war is equally inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. I must resist conscription also.”¹¹⁶

Here we see the consistency between what Rustin was speaking to his church and what he was speaking to the government. In both cases, following the example of Jesus, he spoke and acted in a way that resisted the immoral actions of both religious and government leaders.

Rustin continued his letter, writing,

“I wish to inform you that I cannot voluntarily submit to an order springing from the Selective Service and Training Act for War. There are several reasons for this decision, all stemming from the basic spiritual truth that men are brothers in the sight of God:

1. War is wrong. Conscription is concomitant of modern war. Thus, conscription for so vast an evil as war is wrong.
2. Conscription for war is inconsistent with freedom of conscience which is not merely the right to believe, but to act on the degree of truth that one receives, to follow a vocation which is God-inspired and God-directed.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 10. For extended commentary on the relationship between these four social teachings of Jesus and friendship, see my forthcoming chapter, “Transgressive Friendships, Subversion, and Fluid Hierarchies” in Justin Bronson Barringer and Maria Kenney, eds. *Practicing the Kingdom: Essays on Hospitality, Community and Friendship in Honor of Christine D. Pohl*, (Eugene: Cascade, forthcoming 2021).

¹¹⁶ Rustin and M. Long, 10–11.

¹¹⁷ This reads like it could have been written by McClendon, as he and Rustin shared the concern that belief must be accompanied by action in the search for and witness to truth.

Today I feel that God motivates me to use my whole being to combat by nonviolent means the ever-growing racial tension in the United States. . . . I am compelled to follow the will of God. If I cannot continue in my present vocation, I must resist.

3. The Conscription Act denies brotherhood—the most basic New Testament teaching. Its design and purpose is to set men apart—German against American, American against Japanese. Its aim springs from a moral impossibility—that ends justify means, that from unfriendly acts a new and friendly world can emerge.¹¹⁸

In practice further, it separates black from white—those supposedly struggling for a common freedom. Such a separation also is based on the moral error that racism can overcome racism, that evil can produce good, that men virtually in slavery can struggle for freedom they are denied. This means I must protest racial discrimination in the armed forces, which is not only morally indefensible but also in clear violation of the Act. This does not, however, imply that I could have a part in conforming to the Act if discrimination were eliminated. Segregation, separation, according to Jesus, is the basis of continuous violence. It was such an observation which encouraged him to teach, ‘It has been said to you in olden times that thou shalt not kill, but I say unto you, do not call a man a fool’—and he might have added: ‘for if you call him such, you automatically separate yourself from him and violence begins.’ That which separates man from his brother is evil and must be resisted.”¹¹⁹

The extended quotation is necessary to show the various aspects of Rustin’s ambivalent anarchism as well as to offer a glimpse into Rustin’s fundamental commitments, in his own words, that guided so much of his decision making. It serves as a manifesto of sorts that clearly and relatively succinctly declares Rustin’s fundamental moral commitments.

1.12 Rustin’s “Ambivalent Anarchism”

It is appropriate here to point out an important theological-political angle on Rustin’s beliefs about the state along with the church’s and the general population’s relation to it.

¹¹⁸ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 11.

¹¹⁹ Rustin and M. Long, 10–2.

Religion scholar, Terrance Wiley calls Rustin an “ambivalent anarchist.”¹²⁰ In this letter Rustin essentially argues that the state simply does not have the right or moral authority to conscript people for the purposes of labor generally, but especially when it benefits a war effort.¹²¹ As will become clear over the course of this dissertation, especially in the final chapter, the idea of Rustin as an anarchist seems implausible, but when one adds the modifier “ambivalent,” then not only does one have a way of navigating the tension, but also a way to connect Rustin with the Christian anarchist movement.¹²²

For the early part of his life, he was most often opposing various state actions or inactions, but even in his later partisan years, he was concerned about using the state because it exists, and since it exists the church’s job is to remind the state of its limitations (like forcing people to participate in war) and its obligations (like helping enable an equitable distribution of resources). Rustin had more political success, that is achieving just goals, as a nonpartisan

¹²⁰ A. Terrance Wiley, “The Dilemma of the Black Radical: Bayard Rustin’s Ambivalent Anarchism,” in *Angelic Troublemakers: Religion and Anarchism in America* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 107–54, <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/angelic-troublemakers-religion-and-anarchism-in-america/ch3-the-dilemma-of-the-black-radical>.

¹²¹ See Azaransky who adds to the argument by writing that Rustin believed, along with many Quakers, that he should not openly rebel against the state even while disobeying or undermining it when the state oversteps its bounds. The purpose of actions that might seem like outright rebellion actually serves a specific purpose. She writes, “The act of setting oneself apart from the community is taken only in order to improve the community; it is not an act of simple defiance or desertion. Instead, civil disobedience is undertaken with the hope that the community can improve, and with faith in the capacity for positive change. . . . Though the civil disobedience is not exclusively Quaker, Rustin’s description fit with Quaker beliefs about community and responsibility.” Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 156.

¹²² See Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy: Jesus’ Primacy Over the Powers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Multiple schools of Christian anarchist thought exist, but for one example of Christian anarchism described as essentially ambivalence to the state, read the following words by Christian anarchist scholar Vernard Eller. “For us, then, ‘archy’ identifies any principle of governance claiming to be of primal value for society. ‘Government’ (that which is determined to govern human action and events) is a good synonym—as long as we are clear that political arkys are far from being the only ‘governments’ around. Not at all; churches, schools, philosophies, ideologies, social standards, peer pressures, fads and fashions, advertising, planning techniques, psychological and sociological, theories—all are arkys out to govern us. ‘Anarchy’ (‘unarkyness’), it follows, is simply the state of being unimpressed with, disinterested in, skeptical of, nonchalant toward, and uninfluenced by the highfalutin claims of any and all arkys. And ‘Christian anarchy’ . . . is a Christianity motivated by ‘unarkyness.’” Eller, 1–2.

activist seeking to hold the whole government to account than he did as a partisan in later years. I mention this not to focus our attention on effectiveness for its own sake but as an argument that Rustin's key political contributions came about mostly when he was being explicitly faithful to his earliest theological commitments. This is a theme that I will revisit later in the dissertation.

1.13 Confessing Complicity and Connecting Violence Abroad to Violence at Home

Rustin also confessed his own complicity in supporting structures and institutions that promoted fascism and war, but says that guilt from one's past should not stop one from doing what is right in the present, and in this way he compares himself to the prodigal son. Here we not only see other ways in which Rustin's faith informs his moral decision making but also that he recognized even as an oppressed minority that he had some complicity in the systems driving his world. Though he does not mention them here, it seems safe to recognize that one of those systems was capitalism, with its debt-holding over Germany and promotion of inequality and violence, especially as the US government came to understand capitalism and democracy as essentially one and the same if not twins (with their parent of white supremacy, at least in the United States). Rustin noted this connection elsewhere around the same time in his 1942 essay, *The Negro and Nonviolence*, in which he wrote, "Since the United States has entered the war, white-Negro tension has increased steadily. Even in normal times, changes in social economic patterns cause fear and frustration, which in turn lead to aggression. In time of war, the general social condition is fertile soil for the development of hate and fear, and transference of these to minority groups is quite simple."¹²³ Rustin continues in this essay to write about a new rise in the

¹²³ Rustin, "Nonviolence," 6.

activity of the KKK and about assaults on and murders even of Black soldiers by both civilians and the police.

When looking at his early published essays alongside his letter to the draft board, one can see the connection Rustin was making between violence in the United States with violence that the United States was participating in elsewhere, while also connecting socio-economic conditions with racism and violence not only in the South but in the North as well. He saw a growing movement of discontented Black folks who were fighting for or supporting friends and family members who were fighting for freedom abroad but who found their freedom restricted in myriad ways at home, both through the legal system and in the broader socio-economic system in which Black people were losing jobs or unable to find them. He notes, for instance, “‘If we must die abroad for democracy we can’t have,’ I heard a friend of mine say, ‘then we might as well die right here fighting for our rights.’”¹²⁴ So, even as early as 1942 Rustin was recognizing the ties between violence elsewhere and violence at home, along with the ties of both locations of violence to socio-economic oppression, all the while noticing the growing movement in a potentially violent Black nationalism as the anticipated response. Rustin spoke out against all of the above in favor of nonviolent civil disobedience that did not come into its own among Black folks until over a decade later, and did not significantly succeed until nearly two decades after Rustin first wrote about it.

Rustin could see how social and economic change, together with war, had made for conditions in which the oppression of minorities would arise. So, in writing to the draft board, he was not only protesting war and conscription, but also the socio-economic conditions connected

¹²⁴ Rustin, 8.

with the war that raised people's anxiety levels. Thus, his protest was against all of the above. He wrote in his letter to the draft board, "Though joyfully following the will of God, I regret that I must now break the law of the state." This statement is central to understand his "ambivalent" and "Christian" anarchism, because he recognized the state's existence and right to make laws, but he was willing to break them because the state's power was limited whereas God's power is infinite. Like Gandhi before him and King after him, he made it known that he was ready to face whatever consequences may come of his decision.¹²⁵

Near the end of his life Rustin recounted the fact that he was upset that while the alternative draft of work camps had been created for people like him from historic peace churches, the folks from other denominations or faiths were left out from this option even if they were truly conscientious objectors. For Rustin,

It was possible for me to do alternative service. However, two of my friends, one Jewish, and one Methodist, who were also conscientious objectors could not get the conscientious objector status because it was not given to anything but the three religious groups I mentioned earlier. Inasmuch as I could not see myself taking the privilege that went with being a Quaker while my friends were going to be forced to go to jail, I took the position that I had to stand with my friends.¹²⁶

The courage and conviction that Rustin had against war and helping make war possible was the same courage and conviction that caused him to stand with his friends, even when both convictions were costly for him, and the latter, like the former, was based on his Quaker conviction in the equality of persons. Rustin was arrested and thrown into prison, which itself became a training ground for him that shaped his thinking and action. He began his stint at the

¹²⁵ Long notes that Rustin included a pamphlet that he had written as "one type of creative work to which God has called me." That pamphlet was titled *Interracial Primer: How You Can Help Relieve Tension between Negroes and Whites*, which he authored while working at FOR. Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 12–13.

¹²⁶ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 71.

maximum-security prison in Ashland, KY, though Rustin called it “permissive” and said that it was largely filled with other conscientious objectors.¹²⁷

1.14 Rustin in Prison and Communications with the Outside (1944–1946)

Rustin was as much an agitator inside prison as he had been on the outside, fighting for the desegregation of the dining hall, refusing to cooperate with prison authorities, and working to end censorship of the books in the library. He agitated to the point that one prison warden wrote, “Everything seemed to be going very well here until Bayard Rustin arrived about three weeks ago. . . . Our radical group of conscientious objectors have accepted Rustin as their leader . . . an extremely capable agitator whose ultimate objective is to discredit the Bureau of Prisons.”¹²⁸ Rustin led a few successful campaigns inside the prison. He wrote to the warden a letter that explains well his near-lifelong approach to injustice, in this case the specific injustice of segregation (though as noted elsewhere, Rustin saw segregation in many forms not just that of the racial variety, namely in that of socio-economic divides as well, a fact which he notes in his letter to the warden). He recognizes that racial hostility on the part of some white folks toward

¹²⁷ Rustin, 71. The only personal item Rustin was allowed to keep in Ashland was his Bible. See Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 100.

¹²⁸ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 81. Even in his letter of frustration the warden noted that Rustin “possesses in abundance the rare quality of leadership.” Perhaps unexpectedly the plan to desegregate the dining hall was not as radical in its demands as one might expect given both Rustin’s other work and his mentee’s words, later in the Letter from a Birmingham jail, but D’Emilio writes, “Gradualism and voluntarism were at the heart of his proposal” (90). I think this indicates something that was unique about Rustin, based on a certain view of Christian eschatology, in that he was both impatient, demanding justice now, but at the same time patient knowing that sometimes working with those that seem like unfit partners might bring about longer lasting and deeper change. This is especially important here given that the issue at hand had to do with people eating together, a classic Christian activity in which folks learn about equality as they share a meal together. Also, important to the story and Rustin’s development was the fact that he had friends both inside and outside the prison working to help with desegregation, including Muste and Randolph, along with NAACP leader Roy Wilkins. Here, had it not been for these friendships, I doubt Rustin could have achieved his goal.

black folks “spring[s] in part from economic and historical factors,” which Rustin believes, as he points out in the work of John Dewey, can be overcome through education that will make rehabilitation and “Christian living” possible. Here, then, we see that for Rustin racism and economics are tied together, and that they must be overcome by education, which is, for him, a part of Christian witness, all of which he says are indicative of his concern “for all involved.”¹²⁹

In any case, in this letter Rustin wrote,

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed to the fact that segregation is unchristian because it leads to a set of conditions which encourage unequal treatment. . . . Therefore, both morally and practically segregation is to me a basic injustice. Since I believe it to be so, I must attempt to remove it. There are four ways in which one can deal with an injustice. (a) One can accept it without protest. (b) One can seek to avoid it. (c) One can resist the injustice nonviolently. (d) One can resist by violence. To use violence is to increase injustice. To accept it is to perpetuate it. To avoid it is impossible. To resist by intelligent means, and with an attitude of mutual responsibility and respect (education by nonviolence) is, according to the prophets and to history, much the better choice.¹³⁰

From there, Rustin continues in the letter to explain why nonviolence is the better choice and what might constitute appropriate nonviolent approaches to injustice, noting that it often takes a long time for these approaches to have their intended effect.

Rustin’s dealing with another injustice in prison finally got him removed from the Ashland facility. Immediately after Rustin had led a hunger strike to protest the library’s book censorship, he and a few other inmates were sent off to another, tougher, facility in Lewisburg, PA. There, he and about a dozen others were cordoned off from the rest of the prisoners in a part of the prison library so that they would not be able to lead any demonstrations or “be trouble

¹²⁹ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 16–17.

¹³⁰ Rustin and M. Long, 15–16.

makers anymore.”¹³¹ They were allowed whatever books they wanted, presumably to occupy their time so they would not devise any more plots to shake things up in the prison. Before this, however, Rustin was given permission at Ashland to teach a history class, which was made up primarily of poor, rural, white men from Appalachia. D’Emilio notes that this was revolutionary for those men because white men having a Black teacher was unheard of. Anderson points out that Rustin intended for the class to emphasize “the contributions racial minorities had made to the nation’s cultural life.”¹³² The Warden may have allowed the class, but he did not want Rustin focusing on the contributions of racial minorities because he saw that as Rustin’s “radical politics” infiltrating a prison made up mostly of southern whites, but Rustin went ahead with the class because he realized their need for education and he took it upon himself to help them, recognizing that their poverty had given them little but the lack of opportunity in life.¹³³

This along with other actions served as a testimony to Rustin’s theological convictions. One incident his biographers point out was an episode when Rustin was spending time with some white friends, a practice that had been forbidden in the prison. He was attacked by a white man who beat him with a stick, but Rustin refused to fight back. When some other inmates intervened to protect Rustin, he told them to stop, so the inmate continued to beat Rustin while Rustin told the man that he could not hurt him. Other inmates, white inmates, intervened by letting the man beat them without retaliating as well. At the end of it all, says a letter written by one of Rustin’s friends, “[The violent inmate] was completely defeated and unnerved by the

¹³¹ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 72.

¹³² Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 101.

¹³³ Anderson, 101–2.

display of nonviolence and began shaking all over, and sat down.”¹³⁴ This incident points forward to decades later when the same sort of approach was used in civil rights demonstrations; in other words, it was a testimony that passed on the faith to others even in later generations. This is an apt example of what Rachel Muers means by her discussion of Quaker “testimony.” As D’Emilio wrote, “The story quickly entered the peace movement’s lore about Rustin’s courage.” Further, D’Emilio notes the significance of white people standing up to a white inmate on a Black man’s behalf, which changed the very atmosphere of the prison and helped Rustin and the other conscientious objectors gain some status there that helped them achieve other goals.¹³⁵ Rustin, himself, recognized the significance of the event, noting that many white inmates “were conditioned to believe” that Black inmates “stay in their place.” To the contrary, Rustin’s nonviolent response “‘served as an example to all’ of the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance: overwhelming the attacker without fighting on his terms.”¹³⁶ Perhaps the reason his biographers focus on a relatively small event in Rustin’s life (given that there are so many incidents like this to choose from) is because it had the effect of testimony. This event helped other people come to believe through their own experience what Rustin had been preaching and teaching and what some of them already believed in theory.

In his reflections on prison, Rustin returned to a theme that was always important to him: the basic equality of all human beings. From this fact comes the reality that the basis for most or

¹³⁴ Anderson, 107. D’Emilio also recounts this particular event. Both refer to the letter, noting that Rustin considered this to point to “what Richard Gregg described in his *The Power of Nonviolence*.” A. J. Muste was thrilled to hear the story, saying that this showed evidence nonviolence was “the method which can break the barriers of race and caste.” D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 84.

¹³⁵ D’Emilio, 84.

¹³⁶ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 107.

all violence is when one person or group makes another person or group feel less than fully human. Of course, Rustin thought that violence itself made people seem less than fully human. Thus, for Rustin the ongoing connection between nonviolence and friendships of equality as the ends of justice must always remain. As for his observation about prison, Rustin talked about how all of prison life was controlled to the point that “what is oppressive about prison is that one is unable to be a human being in that he is never able to make a single decision about anything he thinks is important.” Rustin goes on to talk about how a bell rings at various times throughout the day and each time it does it indicates to prisoners the next part of their routine is to begin, so a bell rings when it is time to shower, when it is time to eat, when it is time to go to bed, and so on. “That robs people of their inner capacity to be a human being and almost all of the violence springs from that.”¹³⁷ This is an insight that undergirds nearly all of Rustin’s life and work.

During his time in prison, Rustin heard that A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement had decided to officially adopt nonviolent direct action “as their major strategy in the struggle for racial justice,” something that is directly attributable to the work of Rustin along with his friend Jim Farmer, prior to Rustin’s imprisonment.¹³⁸ This seemed to further confirm Rustin’s commitment to nonviolence and deepen the connection he drew between racial and economic justice as Randolph was one of the first to champion both together. At the same time,

¹³⁷ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 74–75. Rustin also connected such injustice with the state, noting that “tyranny is no harsh term for the deeds practiced here . . . we are held slaves to a state which ‘grinds the faces of the unfortunate in the dust. . . .’ One is held by men who refer to their ‘sense of duty’ and ‘the law,’ but they themselves cannot see that, more accurately, they are obstructing justice. They stand between an inmate and his basic rights; they reduce rights to privileges; and to a sickly whine of (their) helplessness to be just.” Anderson, 103–4. Here again we see Rustin was ahead of his time, denouncing prison as something akin to the “New Jim Crow,” even as Jim Crow itself was still being enacted. Rustin also shows his distaste for the state, a theme that was important already but that will come to shape more of his work later.

¹³⁸ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 74.

Rustin's commitment to nonviolence grew in the sense that he continually came to understand that it was not merely about refusing to harm an enemy but must also be about standing one's ground over the long haul until justice in each situation was won. On this account, D'Emilio says that Rustin was encouraged by one of his fellow prisoners of conscience, Paton Price, who had written a widely circulated letter during this time of imprisonment during World War II which, in part, read, "What we need is a more revolutionary, dynamic type of non-violent pacifism that initiates attack and does not hurriedly retreat every time a battle is engaged."¹³⁹ This militaristic speech about nonviolence grew in Rustin's strategy. He was among the most militant of pacifists in the worldwide pacifist movement. D'Emilio writes, "For Rustin the prospect of incarceration offered the opportunity to be on the front lines of pacifist conviction and to forge an even tougher stance against the coercive power of the war-making state."¹⁴⁰ This is something that could rightly be called a form of anarchism.

Rustin's time in prison for his failure to appear for his physical as part of the draft requirements not only gave him an opportunity to hone his organizing skills. It also gives people looking back on his life a rich collection of historical materials because his troublemaking in prison got him listed as a "notorious offender," causing the Bureau of Prisons to keep copies of all of his correspondence. During this period Rustin sent many letters to friends and received many in return.¹⁴¹ One letter from his friend John Dixon reminded him that as long as he was a

¹³⁹ D'Emilio, 74

¹⁴⁰ D'Emilio, 74. This is another example of Rustin's ambivalent anarchism.

¹⁴¹ D'Emilio recognizes the absurdity of this designation by noting that this put Rustin on the same list as folks like Al Capone. D'Emilio also points out that the Director of the Bureau of Prisons, James Bennett, received many letters asking for ways to "tame" Rustin during his many protests and attempts to bring about more just conditions in the prisons. This was made even more difficult because Rustin had many influential and well-connected people like Randolph and Muste paying attention to his treatment while in prison. D'Emilio, 77.

part of this movement for justice he would not be alone. Dixon wrote, “Remember, wherever you go, you will have friends.”¹⁴² This sentiment will be important to revisit as we later explore the waxing and waning of some of Rustin’s key friendships.

Countless stories have been told about Rustin’s time in prison and his use of nonviolence and his organizing abilities to bring about significant changes in both individuals and the system itself around issues of race and class especially, but from here I will focus on Rustin’s correspondence from which we can get a glimpse inside his mind at the time and see how his theological and ethical perspectives were evolving and being solidified. It demonstrates the effect of Rustin’s friendships on his life during this time of challenge and growth. Rustin did, after all, describe this time as “the most profound and important experience I’ve ever had.”¹⁴³

Many of those letters were to or from Rustin’s friend and romantic partner, Davis Platt.¹⁴⁴ As Rustin wrote about the difficulties of prison life to Platt, he also wrote about matters of faith. On one occasion he heard President Roosevelt pray over the radio after talking about the D-Day landing, about which Rustin wrote to Platt, “I wept inwardly—somehow the more for God who must have been bewildered by it, by so many of his children asking for victory . . . yet all of them meaning something different.” Rustin also told Platt about his own prayer life, writing that

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic kept me from access to those archival materials or I would share more relevant quotes and summaries.

¹⁴² D’Emilio, 76.

¹⁴³ D’Emilio, 85.

¹⁴⁴ This was challenging as homosexuality was not only frowned upon at the time but was illegal. When they wanted to share love letters Platt wrote about himself as a woman so that they could still communicate about their romantic feelings without getting Rustin into trouble.

he “prayed, too, ‘more and more these days and constantly.’”¹⁴⁵ As one might expect of a Quaker, Rustin mixed contemplativeness with action, his prayer life, his theology, and his ethics all influencing one another.

In one letter, Rustin expounded upon this connection, writing to Platt,

I am certainly convinced that there is need of a spiritual revolution. . . . I am equally certain that some totally dedicated and spiritual radical group, giving itself constantly and wholly to a life of the spirit, will (by its witness) usher in the forces that will make genuine change possible. Whether I am to be of that group I doubt. . . . I know that at present I must work in the field of action. However, I believe that certain men are doing a great deal thru their lives of prayer. . . . Political, social and economic changes, no matter how radical, will not bring bread, beauty, or brotherhood to men. A radical spiritual ‘revolution of our total culture’ is needed.¹⁴⁶

Rustin was correct to realize that neither good public policy nor activism per se was sufficient to reach the goal of a completely changed society in which people are changed internally and externally.

1.15 Journey of Reconciliation and Journey to Meet Gandhi’s Heir

Soon after Rustin was released from prison he went back to working and traveling, but this time his travels were a bit different. Over a decade before the famous Freedom Riders of the 1960s he gathered an interracial group of friends to ride buses across the South as a challenge to racist bus laws. During this period he also traveled to several other countries sharing and learning more about the message of peace.

¹⁴⁵ D’Emilio, 88.

¹⁴⁶ Rustin in D’Emilio, 88. This is one of the places where one can see near verbatim language between Rustin in the 1940s and King in the 1960s regarding war, which indicates Rustin influenced the way King thought and spoke about the relationship of America, justice, and God.

While Rustin was in prison, the *Morgan v. Virginia* decisions declared segregated interstate bus travel to be unconstitutional. Upon his release from prison, Rustin saw this as the perfect opportunity to test his nonviolent methods on a national scale to see if they could force the hand of bus companies and states to enforce the new law of the land. Rustin was already traveling again speaking on behalf of the FOR, but with the war now over he turned his focus to issues of race and class in the United States, urging people to adopt nonviolent methods to combat these problems at home. At first, Rustin was doing so alone “as a one-man civil disobedience movement in his travels across the United States.”¹⁴⁷ However, he quickly realized that he had to gather others in experimenting with nonviolence in order to convince people of its moral superiority as well as its effectiveness. Thus, was born the Journey of Reconciliation. In this, Rustin was ahead of his time compared to other civil rights leaders. He was criticized by both the NAACP and Thurgood Marshall, among others, yet he trusted in the method because it had proven effective over and over again for him.¹⁴⁸ Rustin responded, calling Marshall to task for being “ill-informed on the principles and techniques of nonviolence or ignorant of the processes of social change.”¹⁴⁹ For Rustin, trusting the state simply was not sufficient, rather he knew that appealing to people’s hearts and conscience was necessary because he had in mind a community of friends in which hostilities were ended not because of the threat of punishment but because of the promise of a better society. One of his traveling companions and friends, Rev. Homer Jack, referred to their efforts as “aggressive goodwill,” which captures the heart of Rustin’s work and

¹⁴⁷ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 111.

¹⁴⁸ The NAACP did end up offering their lawyers to support participants in the journey.

¹⁴⁹ Rustin, quoted in Anderson, 115. Originally from *Louisiana Weekly*, 1/4/1947, in Bayard Rustin Papers, unknown folder.

reflects ancient ideas of friendship as “mutual goodwill.”¹⁵⁰ Rustin was determined to help shape a world full of mutual goodwill even if it got him beaten, imprisoned, harassed, spied on, and betrayed.

The Journey of Reconciliation took place as planned, and they were met with violence, harassment, and arrests as anticipated. One significant stop on the journey was in Durham, NC. Anderson calls Durham “a stronghold of the black bourgeoisie,” who did not want to upset the status quo because their wealth largely shielded them from the problems of segregation. This is important to note because it highlights how Rustin and his compatriots understood class and wealth inequity as part of the struggle for justice. In this case, James Peck, another of Rustin’s friends and journey participants, noted that rich Black families could just get in their car to go somewhere, so they did not have to concern themselves with segregated buses, and that it was not so much white folks as it was rich Black folks in Durham who opposed the Journey of Reconciliation. Situations like these are indicative of Rustin’s commitment to not only racial reconciliation but the fight against wealth inequity as well.

It was just a few miles down the road however, in Chapel Hill, where the situation got especially dangerous as a white mob gathered and threatened violence. They were able to escape most of the violence due to a network of friends who helped them escape. However, Rustin noted in a letter to another friend that he realized the journeyers’ choices would possibly bring violent blowback on local Black community members and white people who supported them. Rustin soberly wrote, “You cannot take a stand for truth and justice without automatically involving

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, 114. Aristotle, Cicero, and Aelred, among others, argued that mutual goodwill is one of the key aspects and friendship.

other people and causing some suffering.”¹⁵¹ This is an important word that later pacifists have come to realize as well, but in Rustin’s mind this reality should not stop the journey toward justice and reconciliation.

1.16 Rustin as Reconciler and Leader on a Chain Gang

During the journey Rustin was arrested and tried in North Carolina, and later he had to serve twenty-two days on a chain gang. He wrote a compelling essay about this experience that further illumines his ideas at the time regarding race, economic injustice, and the possibilities for nonviolent movements toward justice and friendship. Although I will cover it in more detail later, I want to note here that Rustin went from meeting with world leaders, particularly Jawaral Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, and thus spending his time in lavish settings among very powerful people, straight to the low position of being a prisoner on a chain gang, doing manual labor under the supervision of racist corrections officers. In other words, he went from nearly the highest highs to the lowest lows within a matter of days. In some way both places suited him as he was no respecter of persons because he respected all persons. This adaptability is key to my thesis that Rustin’s life is exemplary in that he was able to form friendships in places low and high, participating in each of those friendships, in every place and space, as altruistic *caritas* for the sake of justice.

In his 1949 essay “Twenty-Two Days on a Chain Gang” Rustin describes his experience in a North Carolina prison camp. It was a miserable experience that was degrading to all involved, stripping them of their humanity in ways beyond what Rustin had experienced. In one

¹⁵¹ Rustin, quoted in Anderson, 120. Personal correspondence with Beverly White, 5/3/1950, in Bayard Rustin Papers, unknown folder.

particular exchange, Rustin's charitable nature came to the fore when another inmate asked to borrow his razor because the prison provided "no comb, no brush, no toothbrush, no razor, no blades, no stamps, no writing paper, no pencils, nothing."¹⁵² Eventually, Rustin was loaning out his toothbrush. At least one of the guards recognized Rustin and called him uppity and told him that Rustin would either do as he was told and work or he would be met with extreme violence. Rustin being Rustin, told the other prisoners that he was going to talk to the captain about the conditions. They all warned, even begged, him to be quiet, but Rustin talked to the captain anyway: "I told him that I knew there were great differences in our attitudes on many questions but that I felt we could be friends."¹⁵³ If ever there were a time that Rustin sought friendship across clear socio-cultural dividing lines this was it.

He went on to tell the captain to punish him rather than other inmates if his work was not satisfactory, but in Rustin's standard righteous (though not self-righteous) way he told the guard, "I could not help trying to act on the basis of my own Christian ideals about people but that I did try to respect and understand those who differed with me."¹⁵⁴ Of course the captain was dumbfounded. Rustin said that in the evening the captain called the inmates together and told them all essentially that even though Rustin was a Yankee that he was not so bad and that they could work together to teach him how to work hard. This is the same captain who had just a day or two before said to him, "You're the one who thinks he's smart. Ain't got no respect. Tries to be uppity. Well, we'll learn you. You'll learn you got to respect us down here. You ain't in

¹⁵² Bayard Rustin, "Twenty-Two Days on a Chain Gang (1949)," in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 33.

¹⁵³ Rustin, 37.

¹⁵⁴ Rustin, 37.

Yankeeland now. We don't like no Yankees here.”¹⁵⁵ Once again, Rustin's approach to treat all people with respect, even to the point of inviting them into friendship, had worked and softened the captain with kind, respectful, and undoubtedly sincere words. The next day the captain even brought Rustin a cap, saying that he was concerned Rustin would “catch your death of cold” because of Rustin's bald head.¹⁵⁶

None of this is to say that the rest of Rustin's stay in the prison camp was pleasant. In fact, he recounts many details of its depravity and explains why such a system is bad for society as it does not help prisoners but only makes them vengeful. More restorative forms of justice would not only be better for individual prisoners seeking help in life but for the community as a whole. The present system seemed to make friendships across many kinds of lines impossible, but the system Rustin had in mind would make reconciliation and friendships possible.

Later in “Twenty-Two Days,” Rustin returns to his interactions with the captain, talking about he tried to balance having self-respect and showing the captain respect, even strategically asking for the captain's help on a cement pipe he was working on for a drainage project the prisoners were doing, which helped endear the captain to him a little bit more: the captain, for the first time, referred to Rustin by his nickname, Rusty. In all of this, Rustin worked with prisoners and guards to help change their perspectives on themselves on each other so as to bring about some harmony in his brief time at the prison camp. And once he was released he used his writing skills and relative fame to spread the word about how such prison camps could be made more just. He did not have time to form true and full friendships while at the camp, but his

¹⁵⁵ Rustin, 34.

¹⁵⁶ Rustin, 39.

charity to both prisoners and the captain helped change the atmosphere and make it slightly more just. If Rustin could do this in only twenty-two days on a chain gang, what might he accomplish with more time and resources but with the same humility, kindness, and willingness to make friends out of enemies? There were other important events in the coming years from his involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and his co-writing of *Speak Truth to Power* that make up important material for understanding Rustin's intellectual and theological development, but I will address those in later chapters rather than here because they also help us understand how some of his most important friendships unfolded and how those friendships led to historic events.¹⁵⁷ The greatest of all the events was, of course, the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

1.17 "Mr. March on Washington"¹⁵⁸

We all know that Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream because on that hot and muggy August day, Mahalia Jackson shouted out while King was speaking, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin!" King responded by then riffing off of material he had used earlier in an impromptu but only semi-extemporaneous oration. Notably, King's speech takes a turn at this point toward themes of friendship, strikingly after he had talked about justice as if friendships were the step beyond justice that King sought, what he called the "Beloved Community." What folks may not realize is that King's famous speech and the dream he articulated would have almost certainly

¹⁵⁷ *Speak Truth to Power* came after the journey of reconciliation, a trip to India for world pacifist gathering, and Rustin's arrest in Pasadena and subsequent dismissal from FOR. At least one biographer says Rustin had moved away from Christianity, yet this is a thoroughly theological document to be addressed later.

¹⁵⁸ When Strom Thurmond attacked Rustin's character and the media began asking if Rustin would continue to lead the March, A. Phillip Randolph stated unequivocally, on behalf of the whole march leadership, "Bayard Rustin is Mr. March on Washington." Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 208.

been drowned out if there had been any violence in Washington that day.¹⁵⁹ But due to the careful planning and preparation there was not a single notable incident even on a hot DC day with crowds gathered in the hundreds of thousands, all thanks to one man: Bayard Rustin.

It was a remarkable feat that a crowd of that size voicing their frustration about centuries of injustice and oppression that not a single incidence of violence by marchers was recorded on that day. This, I argue, is because Rustin was both meticulous in his planning and crystal clear in his messaging. Rustin's message had always been about reconciliation, peaceableness, and friendship, though not at the expense of justice. Indeed, his message was about both friendship and justice, as both serve one another. A live radio report from the day of the march records Rustin reading out the marchers' demands, all essentially for justice.¹⁶⁰ Yet, early in the reporting on the march, reporter George Geesey says, "In practical terms Bayard Rustin says Negroes must accomplish their goals through non-violence, because we are, he says, a minority group trying to integrate with a majority and we can't use guns, in his terms. The only weapon according to Rustin is friendliness. And, according to police, this is a very calm crowd today and

¹⁵⁹ "“Dr. King will go down in history as Lincoln did after the Gettysburg address,” Charles Bloomstein said. “But if there had been violence that day the media would have seized upon it, and King’s great speech would have been drowned out. Bayard’s Masterful planning of the march made King’s speech both possible and meaningful.” Anderson, 264.

¹⁶⁰ The marchers' demands were simple and straightforward. Rustin read each one aloud to the audience. “The first demand is that we have effective civil rights legislation, no compromise, no filibuster and that it include public accommodations, decent housing, integrated education, FEPC and the right to vote. What do you say? Number two, number two, they want that we demand the withholding of federal funds from all programs in which discrimination exists. What do you say? We demand that segregation be ended in every school district in the year 1963. We demand the enforcement of the 14th Amendment, the reducing of Congressional representation of states where citizens are disenfranchised. We demand an executive order banning discrimination in all housing, supported by federal funds. We demand that every person in this nation, black or white, be given training and work with dignity to defeat unemployment and automation. We demand that there be an increase in the national minimum wage so that men may live in dignity. We finally demand that all of the rights that are given to any citizen be given to black men and men of every minority group, including a strong FEPC. We demand.” Bayard Rustin, *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*, vol. 9, 17 vols. (Washington, DC, 1963), https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_A014C398246A48308919615DE8676DFC.

police experts say that everything is running peacefully. And, in their words, it looks like a holiday festive mood on everybody's part."¹⁶¹ Rustin's message, springing from his Quaker heritage, unites the virtues of charity and friendship with justice.

Perhaps the most difficult piece of planning the march was guiding the so-called "Big Six," and later, "Big Ten," the coalition of civil rights leaders, as well as leaders from labor and faith communities.¹⁶² Rustin drew together a group of people made up of some fiery and persnickety personalities, but they all held a few ties in common. First, of course, they were all committed to the causes of economic equity and racial freedom. Secondly, and perhaps no less importantly, they were all either friends of Rustin's or of A. Philip Randolph's. At times it was only these friendships that held the group together. These friendships were strained, but some of them deepened as they struggled together in the work of justice.

In some sense, though, planning for the march had started some twenty years prior as Rustin collaborated with Randolph on a number of marches and protests including the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom and then the 1958 and 1959 Youth Marches for Integrated Schools. Yet, all of those efforts were tiny compared to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the sort of massive action in Washington they had been hoping to pull off since the 1940s. Rustin's motivations for executing the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom were multifaceted, but there is no doubt that his friendship with Randolph was a key factor. Even

¹⁶¹ George Geesey, *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; Part 2 of 17*, vol. 2, 17 vols. (Washington, DC), accessed March 12, 2021, https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_3135488CBB9E467B9F0684BC930E6498.

¹⁶² The "Big Six" included the key civil rights leaders: Martin Luther King Jr., James Farmer, John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. The "Big Ten" added to this group white Christian leaders including Eugene Carson Blake, Michael Ahmann, and a Jewish Rabbi, Joachim Prinz, as well as a major union president, Walter Reuther.

when Rustin had been exiled by the rest of the civil rights leadership over his arrest in Pasadena, “Rustin remained close to Randolph. The trust and affection between them ran deep. It was fed by dreams and goals they held in common. It rested on the bonds that develop when two comrades in struggle face bitter disagreements and then repair the damage.”¹⁶³

D’Emilio’s avers that no one can remember if it was Rustin or Randolph who first suggested the 1963 march, but that “Rustin knew in a flash that he would devote himself to the project. From the start, he reminisced, ‘[I was] deeply involved emotionally. . . . I knew [Randolph] always had a hankering for a march and my emotional commitment was . . . to bring what had always been one of his dreams.’”¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, at the time, Rustin was employed by the WRL, so Randolph and A. J. Muste were essentially fighting over his time and skills. That changed quickly once Bull Connor unleashed dogs and firehoses on children in Birmingham. Muste relented and gave Rustin leave to work on the march.

The incident in Birmingham pointed to another of Rustin’s important friendships and its connection with the march. Ever since the Montgomery bus boycott, Rustin had become a friend and mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr., but leading up to the march it was not clear if King would participate. King’s issues with Rustin—resulting mainly from threats of the FBI and false rumors they were having an affair—caused King to distance himself from Rustin to the point that he did not want to participate in the march initially. As things heated up in Birmingham, however, King began to realize that a mass rally in DC would help the cause. He was going to propose his own

¹⁶³ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 326. This is an apt description of peripatetic friendship. I discuss this arrest more in Chapter Two.

¹⁶⁴ D’Emilio, 327.

march until some of his advisers persuaded him to talk to Randolph at which point Rustin was dispatched to talk with SCLC leadership about their participation.

This episode highlights how much of King's political strength lay in his friendship with Rustin and when that friendship was disturbed by King's reticence and disorganization it negatively affected both men. However, when they came together to work again, restoring their friendship to a degree, they pulled off one of the most memorable and important days in the nation's history. D'Emilio notes that their skills complemented one another by taking a bit of a shot at King. He writes, "For all King's virtues, of which there were many, Rustin understood that organizing was not one of them. 'All King needed around him were people who had hard asses and perseverance,' Rustin told one interviewer. 'They didn't have to have a pea in their head as long as they would sit down and be arrested and sit down on their hard behinds and persevere again. I know Martin very well. . . . He did not have the ability to organize vampires to a bloodbath. The organization was done by Southern brutality.'"¹⁶⁵ It so happened that Rustin both had at least a pea in his head and a hard ass and perseverance, making him the able companion that King needed.

Along with Randolph and King, Rustin worked with a number of other civil rights leaders, but Rustin's own leadership was unsure from the start. At one of the early meetings for the march, Randolph suggested that Rustin should be its director, but Roy Wilkins argued that Rustin had too many liabilities to be the march director. Wilkins spoke up in the meeting and said, "I don't want you leading that march on Washington, because you know I don't give a damn about what they say, but publicly I don't want to have to defend the draft dodging," he said. "I

¹⁶⁵ D'Emilio, 337.

know you're a Quaker, but that's not what I'll have to defend. I'll have to defend draft dodging. I'll have to defend promiscuity. The question is never going to be homosexuality, it's going to be promiscuity and I can't defend that. And the fact is that you were a member of the Young Communist League. And I don't care what you say, I can't defend that."¹⁶⁶ Wilkins' concerns were not personal. Jervis Anderson quotes one of Rustin's friends and mentees, Tom Kahn who said, "Bayard had a high respect for those people in his political life who counterbalanced his tendencies toward the dramatic and flamboyant. . . . Roy Wilkins was such a person—coolly analytical, hardly ever carried away by emotion. He and Bayard had their differences, but their mutual respect remained intact. Later, when Rustin began organizing the march, he received more support from the NAACP than from any other civil rights institution."¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, Wilkins' concerns proved correct, but Randolph was unshakeable in his defense of Rustin. Even though Randolph took the formal role as director he put Rustin in charge of making it happen. Clearly, Rustin's competence was part of the reasoning, but no doubt Randolph's own personal love for and friendship with Rustin caused him to stand up. Randolph was named the march director, but he picked Rustin as his deputy.

In his deputy role, it was not only Rustin's skill and experience that helped him wrangle the alpha personalities, his Quaker commitments were also important. About this, Rustin said,

When Randolph picked me as his deputy, it was then that I knew the only way to keep peace between these six was to have all major decisions made by eleven people, the ten representatives of these top guys and myself, with me as Randolph's man being able to break any ties. I never had to break a tie, because as a Quaker I started out by saying that I thought we had to make all decisions by consensus. From the moment I was able to sell

¹⁶⁶ Gary Younge, "Bayard Rustin: The Gay Black Pacifist at the Heart of the March on Washington," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/23/bayard-rustin-march-on-washington>.

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 248. In fact, "History, Roy Wilkins wrote some years later, 'has attached the name of Reverend King to the march, but I suspect it is more accurate to call it Randolph's march—and Rustin's.'" Anderson, 264.

the notion of consensus, there was never a need for a vote. Because consensus does not mean that everybody agrees. It means that the person who disagrees must disagree so vigorously in terms of principal that he is prepared to fight with everybody else. Where there is a spirit of cooperation, very few people want to hold out against the rest—unless there's voting. Where there's voting he doesn't mind. But where there's a consensus it brings about a totally different spirit. We never had a problem.¹⁶⁸

Dandelion states that “a vote-less way of doing church business based on the idea of corporate direct guidance” is one of the central theological commitments “still held in common by Friends everywhere.”¹⁶⁹ In short, Rustin helped bring the work of the church into the world by doing this work in much the same way that he had been taught to do the work of the church community.

Rustin attempted to create a unity of friendship among the leaders and did so with a fair deal of success. This is reflected in the final statement that the march organizers put out before the event. The statement reflected a friendly attitude in which they presented a united front for the sake of their shared cause and their shared respect for one another, for Rustin, and for Randolph. The statement read, “[The march] will be proud, but not arrogant. It will be nonviolent, but not timid. It will be unified in purposes and behavior, not splintered into groups and individual competitors.”¹⁷⁰ This was proved true largely because it reflects the leadership of Rustin who himself was proud, but not arrogant; nonviolent, but not timid; and uniting in the midst of discord. Rustin’s Quaker commitments to nonviolence, consensus, and racial equality, tied to his socialist convictions about economic equity, enabled Rustin to pull together a monumental and historic event that gathered massive crowds who, with Rustin, shared together in charity and peripatetic friendship in their concerted demand for economic and racial justice.

¹⁶⁸ Rustin Oral Interview 5, 204–5.

¹⁶⁹ Dandelion, *The Quakers*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 352.

The question, then, is how did Rustin get to this point in which this Pennsylvania Quaker became the leader of folks from many classes, races, and religions all unified in the cause of “the brotherhood of man”?

1.18 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have established the importance of Rustin’s Quaker faith formation for his activism, discussed his intellectual and theological development, and demonstrated the role friendships played in both. This selective biography begins to clarify Rustin’s theological and moral commitments and to suggest how his vision came to be. However, in order for those commitments to be further contextualized for the purpose of discovering how they are made tangible, I must now look to a few of Rustin’s friendships, especially those with a strong peripatetic element.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Rustin's Friendships with Muste and Randolph

In the introduction, I wrote about Aristotle's Peripatetic School and the way that marches of the civil rights movement were peripatetic schools as well as an Exodus route for African-Americans being oppressed by the white system. I also at least hinted at my idea of "peripatetic friendship." This chapter will begin to build a case for adopting peripatetic friendship as a frame for understanding friendship and justice as a lived theology, a way of life. Rather than continuing to parse out my definition of peripatetic friendship, in this chapter and the next I will narrate pieces of three of Rustin's friendships in order to help clarify and complexify the concept for the sake of concretizing it in the sense that it is not simply a theory but a practice and a school for living a good life.

It is my contention that peripatetic friendship allows us to make normative suggestions about friendship and morality that often get walled in by neat classifications. It provides a view of friendship that is more relatable to our lived experiences and that allows for all kinds of variations of classifications of friendship but renders those primarily of descriptive value. Peripatetic friendship, on the other hand, is both descriptive and makes a normative claim about friendship as the pursuit of virtue together in marching, that is working toward a shared goal related to charity and justice. I further argue that this pursuit of virtue happens in real-life marches that inform and are informed by the ongoing metaphorical march toward justice. I will look at three different friendships with the help of three different theorists in order to show that

peripatetic friendship is malleable enough to work in line with multiple theories about friendship, virtue, organizing, and protesting for justice. Yet it is durable enough to provide a firm foundation on which to build theories and theologies in response to vices like economic injustice.

I must first say more about friendship in order to explain peripatetic friendship and trace its role in Rustin's life and on the justice movements for which he was an important figure, especially as it relates in our age to the concern of responding to wealth inequity and economic injustice. Philosopher Todd May helps this discussion by naming friendship as both an alternative and resistance to the economic injustices exacerbated by neoliberalism. May also deliberates on Aristotle's three classifications of friendship, suggesting that while they may be useful for understanding friendship, Aristotle's categories of friendships of utility, of pleasure, and of true friendship, are too rigid when considering the way people's lives and friendships actually unfold. I will follow May's work by applying these categories to three of Rustin's friends in order to discover the promises and shortfalls of Aristotle's three types of friendship as well as the potential strengths of peripatetic friendship. I will also look at the work of Vincent Lloyd on Black religion and Black secularism to help raise questions about Rustin's friendship with A. Philip Randolph and the possibilities of discipleship in the context of a peripatetic friendship wherein an atheist is discipling a Christian. Finally, I will use Paul Wadell's work on the relationship between friendship and justice to illumine issues and promises in Rustin's friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr. to help describe peripatetic friendship, and to show that my idea of peripatetic friendship essentially transcends those categorizations in a way that provides a more helpful hermeneutic for understanding friendship as the means and ends for overcoming injustice even as imperfect friends march together. It is about the journey of the friends toward virtue, wherever they may be on Aristotle's, or anyone else's spectrum.

May's book, *Friendship in an Age of Economics* argues rightly that people are a product of their time, which for contemporary readers is a time of neoliberal global economics, but that even the ubiquitous logic of neoliberalism cannot account for the whole of our lives. He writes, for example, "Alongside whom we are often fabricated to be with ourselves and one another are ways of being that refuse that fabrication," namely friendship. May continues, "We will see that certain kinds of friendship cut against consumerism and entrepreneurship, making us deeper and richer than these figures would have us be. Moreover, they also cut against the structure . . . [of] neoliberalism."¹⁷¹ May argues that the figures of consumer and entrepreneur are the main forms to which humans have been reduced in our age, but we are all more than that, even though our understanding of ourselves and others often relies on debauched logic.

How is it that something as seemingly mundane as friendship might challenge the powerful forces perpetuating wealth inequity? First, friendships are "models of how one might live otherwise than how neoliberalism insists that we live. They are paths outside some of the practices that seek to dominate us." Second, some friendships "can form a basis for political solidarity. That solidarity in turn can be mobilized in resistance to or confrontation of the practices of neoliberalism itself."¹⁷² Neoliberalism, it should be recognized, is essentially just a more pervasive and pernicious iteration of the wealth inequity and economic injustice Rustin battled during his life. May writes that neoliberalism reinforces the vices and systemic problems from earlier times and is just a worsening of the problems faced in decades prior to

¹⁷¹ Todd May, *Friendship in an Age of Economics: Resisting the Forces of Neoliberalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 2. May also writes in this section, "These forms of refusal are as deeply woven into our character, and in many ways more deeply so, than the figures of the consumer and the entrepreneur. . . . We will see that certain kinds of friendship cut against consumerism and entrepreneurship, making us deeper and richer than these figures would have us be." May, 2.

¹⁷² May, 3.

neoliberalism, such as economic inequity, separation and isolation of folks, and racism. Thus, May's insights can be applied to Rustin's friendships without being significantly anachronistic. In fact, it is likely that Rustin saw neoliberalism on the horizon when he was working with friends to craft the "Freedom Budget for All Americans" (an important work that will be discussed in chapter four) to head off this beast in its nascent forms.¹⁷³

In this chapter, I will provide a narrative about three of Rustin's friendships that are both historically important as well as approximations of Aristotle's categories. As a gesture to the fact that peripatetic friendships transcend any ordering of types of friendship, I will look at these particular friendships in the order in which they came to be, although the first two overlap in time when they began and grew. I will begin with A. J. Muste, describing his friendship with Rustin as similar to Aristotle's friendship of pleasure. Secondly, I will move on to Rustin's friendship with Randolph as nearly synonymous with Aristotle's true friendship. And finally, I will look at his most famous friendship, the one he had with Martin Luther King, Jr., which most resembles Aristotle's friendship of utility.

Every friendship is a two-way street in which friends ought to reciprocate one another's affection and virtuous action, and each of the friendships above does that to varying extents. But the differences in these three friendships seem to have more to do with the choices of Rustin's friends than his own choice to be committed to each of these friends completely. Most importantly, Rustin's friendships with Muste, Randolph, and King were all peripatetic friendships that literally and metaphorically marched for and toward virtues like charity and justice, even as their friendships were teaching them about other virtues required for friendship

¹⁷³ In fact, May's work offers evidence that a new Freedom Budget ought to be created for these times to deal with the escalation of the very concerns Rustin et al. had about economic inequity during their own time.

like truth-telling, fidelity, mutual affection, and justice. Thus, justice is the place where that which is internal to friendship meets that which is external to friendship, which means that friendship is both the means and ends of attaining justice.

The virtues of justice, charity, and courage all must exist to a degree in friendship. These virtues are especially learned and displayed in peripatetic friendships that are trying to help society adopt more substantive or deeper versions of these virtues. Thus, a society can be created that encourages friendships, which in turn deepens the virtues, which in turn encourages friendships, and so on.¹⁷⁴ For example, preparation for many of the marches and protests included training that was intended to help participants begin to cultivate virtues like courage, and to clarify and embolden their sense of justice. But perhaps most difficult of all was that they were taught charity toward their enemies with the belief that it was possible to turn enemies into friends. It was in the heat of many marching moments that participants learned to practice these virtues together.

Further, the friendships narrated here are each important in Rustin's life and development. They each illumine what growth in virtue can look like especially in peripatetic friendship. Each of these friendships grows precisely because they were committed to a common cause, which helped them, generally, become more committed to one another for the other's sake and for outsiders as well. May points out that two key aspects of Aristotle's vision of friendship, virtuousness and self-sufficiency, miss the mark. He argues that people who are not especially virtuous can still care deeply for another and those who cannot take care of their own needs can

¹⁷⁴ Friendships are inherently just. Charity is necessary in all relationships aimed toward the good. Courage is necessary because friendship always involves some level of vulnerability and solicitude.

still offer much to a friendship.¹⁷⁵ For instance, Aelred argues that we should not exclude friends simply because they are poor or otherwise lack status. He notes that persons lacking self-sufficiency, even virtue, need not necessarily be excluded from friendship. He writes that if we only choose friends who seem to offer us some advantage in terms of our own finances or place in society, “how many most worthy of all love shall we exclude, those, namely, who, since they have nothing and possesses nothing, offer, assuredly, no material gain or hope therefore to anyone! But if you include among ‘advantages,’ counsel in doubt, consolation in adversity, and other benefits of like nature—these in any case, are to be expected from a friend, but they ought to follow friendship, not precede it.”¹⁷⁶ Peripatetic friendship takes this observation seriously, in that it can start with any two people willing to pursue virtue together, regardless of what they may lack in both virtue and socio-economic status. If it is understood correctly, peripatetic friendship is intended to help friends gain in both of those areas as necessary while also helping the wider society to be more virtuous and equitable.

One final note that bears mentioning is May’s argument “that our relationships with others are not immune to the forces [of the influence of society’s attempts to shape us as mere consumers or entrepreneurs],” yet “our relationships need not be entirely circumscribed by those forces.”¹⁷⁷ People have to navigate the realities of the world in which they live as it is but also as it ought to be, and the best way to do so, I argue, is in peripatetic friendship with others journeying together in deeper friendship and for a more just society.

¹⁷⁵ See May, 61.

¹⁷⁶ Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, 72.

¹⁷⁷ May, *Friendship*, 58.

Peripatetic friendship could be the very kind of relationship through which people walk together from one type of friendship on to the next. Their shared commitment to justice might make them pleasurable to be around because the conversation on those issues can be exciting. Two people might meet up at a march and realize quickly that they need each other, perhaps to shelter against water hoses and dogs turned loose on them. As they continue to walk together and mature, they reach the true deep friendship that can only be among virtuous people precisely because they have walked together toward virtue. That shared journey, through struggle, has led them to acquire not only virtue but a friend who is closer than a brother.

One significant issue that has already been named but needs reiteration and expansion here is that of the other virtues concomitant with friendship, which will be primarily explored via the narratives. Of what virtues, along with those already mentioned, must the relationship called “friendship” be made? And, how does peripatetic friendship illuminate new ways of understanding and working toward virtue? Scholars from ancient times to today tend to agree that certain virtues are necessary, in varying degrees, for friendship, such as mutual charity, justice, trust, and fidelity, among others. In this chapter I will especially interrogate the virtue of fidelity as it appeared in three of Rustin’s friendships. I will examine this one specific virtue through three of Rustin’s friendships in order to suggest that peripatetic friendship can both intensify virtues and account for dealing with failures in virtue. I will explore friendship, especially peripatetic friendship, as a means of grace for the friends as well as the world. This exploration will show that peripatetic friendships can be meaningful even after they end. And, finally I will address how peripatetic friendship influences friends deeply in a way that contributes to the common good even when friendships falter.

As a way of developing the idea of peripatetic friendship, this chapter will narrate a few key friendships with movement leaders, friendships shaped during struggle, the metaphorical march and literal marches, for justice.¹⁷⁸ These friendships will show how Rustin’s concerns for various justice issues were shaped and how he, in turn, shaped the justice commitments of his friends. Rustin walked most closely with A. J. Muste at the start of his activist career. Yet as their story is shared, it will become clear how the messiness of a friendship can both add to the friends’ maturation in virtue and potentially end a friendship when one or both friends hit a breaking point in their lives and in the friendship.

2.2 Rustin and A. J. Muste: A Friendship of Pleasure

If ever there were a complicated long-term friendship, it was that of Bayard Rustin and A. J. Muste. Rustin and Muste met early in Rustin’s activist career. When Rustin went before the draft board to explain his opposition to war, his eloquence caused a member of the board to connect him with A. J. Muste. “That’s how he came to work at the Fellowship of Reconciliation [FOR], the first job that gained him recognition in this country.”¹⁷⁹ Rustin told another one of his friends, Nat Hentoff, “I was deeply impressed [with Muste]. He wasn’t at all the fuzzy liberal pacifist type I’d expected. He didn’t try to proselytize me, although he did explain several principles of nonviolent direct action. At the end of our talk, he said simply that if I examined all

¹⁷⁸ Although I have focused here on Rustin’s friendships with a few key movement leaders, one might also focus in other areas—such as Rustin’s friendships within the gay community, especially with his long-term partners, including Walter Naegle, his partner and friend for the last ten years of his life. Many other friends played an important role in Rustin’s life, and he in theirs, as is evident in the biographies written by D’Emilio, Anderson, and Levine, along with biographical films like *Brother Outsider* and the short film *Bayard and Me* that recounts his love story with Naegle. Further, Rustin’s own published writings and his now archived letters recount the breadth and depth of his friendships. There is still much work to be done.

¹⁷⁹ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 66.

the possible positions I could take, and measured them against my background and experience, I'd come to the right decision."¹⁸⁰ It was evident early on that the two men would become friends because they both shared similar views on faith and politics. For instance, after Rustin began working for Muste he learned "that Muste was 'realistic'; that what friends and critics called his 'saintliness' was 'combined with unusual political shrewdness'; that he knew and admitted 'enough about the existence of evil not to share the easy optimism of the average pacifist.'"¹⁸¹ Muste's influence helped Rustin continue on a path away from any type of naïve nonviolence that takes for granted the effectiveness of nonviolent action or inaction.

Rustin refused to accept a utopian vision but embraced nonviolence in principle and in practice as the best strategy for bringing about the changes he sought in the world. It was here that Rustin and Muste started marching together toward justice, marching to become friends. Early on in their friendship Muste invited Rustin to FOR's annual conference, at which Muste "presented Rustin to us as one who, in his lifetime, would probably have a national influence in helping to solve the racial discrimination problem in the United States."¹⁸² Little did anyone know at the time just how right Muste was in this prediction. Even in 1940, only soon after they met, Muste was already touting Rustin's abilities, which was significant as Rustin was one of the only Black people involved in the American pacifist cause at the time. Yet he would gain a great deal of influence and play a pivotal role in bringing together the peace movement with the civil

¹⁸⁰ Anderson, 66.

¹⁸¹ Anderson, 66.

¹⁸² Anderson, 67.

rights movement to create the golden age of the civil rights movement from primarily local actions to a nation-wide force.

This started, in proper Quaker fashion, as an inner realization on Rustin's part: "He was what his friends and political colleagues called racially self-liberated: never uncomfortable with, and always challenged by, his minority status in white groupings."¹⁸³ Apparently, Rustin's unique position also gave him a great deal of recognition, which he enjoyed, reveling in the attention. William Sutherland, one of Rustin's few Black pacifist friends, said that Black friends were more likely to try and knock him down a notch, but Rustin felt special among white people because they tended to put him on a pedestal. Rustin was adored by Muste and he returned that affection. This is but one indication that Muste and Rustin's friendship approximated Aristotle's category of a friendship of pleasure. However, the narrative will reveal that it was also more than that. Namely, it was a peripatetic friendship that almost always marched toward justice and deeper friendship.

In his critique of Aristotle's friendship categories, May offers an alternative, which he calls "deep friendships". These are possible among people in or between Aristotle's categories. Essentially, the idea is that even a friendship that appears to be about mere pleasure can actually become quite meaningful. May points to Aristotle's argument that friends should "live together," and explains that the idea is really about friends spending a lot of time together. He says that what Aristotle lacked in his exposition was the emotional aspect of friendship. May writes, "Aristotle does not focus on the emotional character of the bond between two friends, although

¹⁸³ Anderson, 67.

emotional entwinement is central to the depth of a friendship.”¹⁸⁴ He also argues that this aspect of friendship resists entrepreneurial calculations, meaning that we do not tend to do risk/benefit analyses of a friend with whom we have a strong emotional connection.

Even if there was a sort of fetishization of Rustin going on among many of his white colleagues, Muste seemed to see Rustin at a deeper level, which included the sheer enjoyment of being together as well as an appreciation of Rustin’s unique skillset. When Rustin went on a trip for the AFSC to Puerto Rico, Muste tasked him with investigating the conditions of conscientious objectors there. Muste was impressed with Rustin’s work and decided to hire him as part of the FOR’s national staff. Muste hired Rustin along with James Farmer, George Houser, and Glenn Smiley, who “were probably the finest staff appointments Muste ever made. Farmer and Rustin were black; Houser and Smiley were white. And, in a sense, they were Muste’s gifts to the future movement for racial and social reform in America.”¹⁸⁵ All the other three men were trained as protestant clergy whereas Rustin was Quaker laity with no training in ministry. But all four men shared the general conviction that being a Christian meant putting their faith into practice socially, whether it be in labor struggles, pacifism, or racial justice. It seems that for all of them their faith was the driving force behind their march together toward a more just world.¹⁸⁶ It was at this point, thanks to Muste’s leadership and encouragement, when Rustin’s commitments started colliding via all his various friends. Houser, a Methodist minister, for instance, founded the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and joined with A. Philip Randolph’s

¹⁸⁴ May, *Friendship*, 67.

¹⁸⁵ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 68.

¹⁸⁶ At this point, the theological and moral significance of Rustin’s faith, which he shared in common with many of his friends, may still be unclear, but its relevance and importance will be clarified in chapter four.

work in the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Both of those were connected to labor and pacifism, so naturally out of this confluence of friendships was born “the nonviolent mass struggle against segregated public institutions in the United States.” Rustin was there serving and leading in various capacities all along the way.¹⁸⁷

Yet, even as Rustin’s influence grew and his friendship with Muste developed, he was still living right around the poverty line.¹⁸⁸ In many ways, on paper at least, Rustin was basically the same as any low wage worker. He did not have a college degree, and he was making less than twenty dollars a week while living in one of the most expensive cities on earth. This epitomizes Rustin’s commitment to the cause, while putting him in a strange position of someone who had relative access to power while living in poverty. Rustin and his friends at AFSC were poor financially but rich in friendship, which contributed greatly to their well-being and even flourishing. Perhaps it could be said that these friends were making financial sacrifices in order to make a just world in which friendships could flourish and provide others the chance at the wealth they had because they were walking together, seeking virtue together, and being charitable with one another. There is a comparison to be drawn here with the church as it is described in Acts chapters 2 and 4, in which friendships were the wealth that made well-being and flourishing possible as those friendships caused people to make financial sacrifices so that

¹⁸⁷ Anderson, 68–69.

¹⁸⁸ “The chief reward to workers at the Fellowship’s headquarters was the spiritual satisfaction they gained from serving the pacifist cause in which they deeply believed. When Bayard Rustin joined the staff in September 1941, his base salary (and that of other field representatives) was fifteen dollars a week—raised a year later to \$18.75. In November 1941, the FOR had reason to remind its employees that they worked under a virtual vow of poverty—though all of them, well enough educated, could easily have found more lucrative employment elsewhere. Rustin certainly could, probably somewhere in the progressive sector of organized labor. At its national committee meeting, late in 1941, the FOR acknowledged that its staff payments were ‘obviously minimum . . . by many standards of subsistent wages.’” Therefore, the committee said, employees should be genuinely committed to ‘the Fellowship way of life,’ should be willing to undergo ‘whatever sacrifices it may require.’” Anderson, 72.

their friends could be well. Likewise, in the biblical example above and in Rustin's friendships at that time there was always more room for new friends to join the community. An active invitation was given, calling people turn from injustices that destroy friendships and community toward lives that enable them for the sake of the world. This brief discussion will be fleshed out more in chapter four where I will talk about the differences between money and wealth, as well as describe my concept of abundance-wealth, which is the sort that Christ offers to others in his own invitation to friendship and discipleship.

In the meantime, at the FOR, this would also be one of the first times that Rustin's sexuality proved to be an obstacle for him. Constance Muste, A. J. Muste's daughter, worked to improve the salaries of the staff and they decided that married employees would make more money, but Rustin, as a gay man (though not necessarily out to anyone yet) complained that it was unjust that married persons got paid more than he did for the same work. Nonetheless, this did not hurt Rustin's friendship with A. J. Muste. In fact, one of their other colleagues and friends, Marion Bromley, said about Muste,

'Bayard was certainly the star of the FOR field staff.' He was a special favorite of A. J. Muste. Like A. J., he had some earlier experience with the political left. He was devoted to A. J., looked up to A. J. as his guru. He could be a slippery customer when it came to keeping a dinner engagement, unless it was with Muste and his wife, Anne. A. J. was such a wise and self-confident leader that Bayard knew he couldn't pull any of his shenanigans with Muste. Bayard respected A. J. for that, and A. J. loved and respected him in return"¹⁸⁹

Their relationship became so close that their colleagues referred to them as "Rusty-and-Muste."¹⁹⁰ Rustin and Muste liked and respected each other enough to continue to grow closer

¹⁸⁹ Anderson, 73.

¹⁹⁰ See Anderson, 74.

even in disagreement, an idea that also runs counter to Aristotle and other ancient philosophers who argued that friends were those who agreed on everything.

Given their age difference, many people described it as a father and son type of relationship; for that to be said about a white man and a Black man in the 1940s, even in New York, had to mean they were incredibly close. Their mutual friend George Houser said of them, “A. J. provided a father. . . . A. J. had a special feeling for Bayard. . . . Toward Muste, Rustin often behaved like a dutiful son, accepting advice and following directions.”¹⁹¹ They shared political visions and tactics to the point that when the FOR leadership gathered for meetings everyone expected that Rustin and Muste would say essentially the same things. Under Muste’s leadership and friendship Bayard first began to connect his pacifism with the struggle for racial justice. Muste was a firm believer in working toward equality for African Americans. Thus, even though Rustin’s job at the FOR was not race relations, Rustin was encouraged by Muste to speak out about race and tie them together with pacifism. “Energized by this belief and commitment, Rustin, on his national speaking tours, came to be recognized as probably the most militant civil rights advocate in the United States.”¹⁹² He gave many provocative speeches, which at the time often meant Rustin did not meet a main criterion of his job: speaking with a winsomeness that would persuade people to his view. At this time, Muste was fiercely loyal to Rustin and ready to defend him from critics, another sign of the depth of their friendship even though it would eventually hit troubled waters. For decades, these friends walked together closely, directing one another toward virtue and displaying virtues like courage all the while.

¹⁹¹ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 64

¹⁹² Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 82.

In responding to one critic who said Rustin cared more about race relations than Christianity, Muste responded,

On the whole, my impression is that he is nearer to what you call a universal Christian base than you think. True, he is young and a little too inclined to want to cover ground. . . . On the other hand, he has demonstrated a very sweet, generous, courageous, and devoted spirit in many situations. I think all of us here at the national office feel that he probably has unusually significant future before him and that he is ready for greater responsibilities.¹⁹³

Again, Muste predicted what was ahead for Rustin, though it would not be easy. The next stop in Rustin's march was prison, but even prison could not keep Rustin from marching toward justice, nor could it keep these friends from aiding one another along the path.

When Rustin went to prison for refusing to take part in the draft, Muste wrote to him often and visited as well. They exchanged letters that included both encouragement and exhortation as well as one of chastisement from Muste to Rustin. Muste made a point of reminding Rustin of his value to the peace and civil rights movements, writing in one letter, "There are tremendous and pressing demands for the kind of service you are in a position to render."¹⁹⁴ In another letter, dated March 1, 1944, Muste wrote in a more personal fashion about his own care for Rustin and the strength Rustin could find in his faith, writing, "I need not tell you that you have my love, my faith, my daily prayer. Let all you do come from deep within—let it be what in your inmost being you want to do—and not determined by outer conditions or other men. Those who truly bow the knee and the soul to God will never bow to men, whether they be friend or foe."¹⁹⁵ There is wisdom, especially of a Quaker sort, in Muste's words, as he knew that

¹⁹³ Anderson, 92.

¹⁹⁴ Anderson, 110.

¹⁹⁵ A. J. Muste, quoted in Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 13.

humans should not bow their knee to one another. But Rustin learned what his inmost being should do through his friendships, not because he bowed to them but because he befriended them, listened to them, respected and loved them, and ultimately was transformed by them.

Muste wrote a pointed letter attempting to speak the truth, as Muste understood it, to Rustin. He argued, in part, that Rustin had admitted to some misconduct in terms of sexual relations and that by doing so he had undermined his cause of leading a revolution in the prison. Muste wrote, “You were capable of making a ‘mistake’ of thinking that you could be the leader in a revolution of the most basic and intricate kind at the same time that you were a weakling in an extreme degree and engaged in practices for which there is no justification, which a person with the tenth of your brains must have known would defeat your objective.”¹⁹⁶ It is unclear, at this point, if Muste was upset about Rustin being gay or with Rustin having done something that Muste interpreted as undermining Rustin’s credibility. Yet, this foreshadows events later in Rustin’s life that caused a major rift between them. This is another area in which Rustin’s friendships (along with May’s commentary on deep friendships and my own on peripatetic friendship) split from most classic, even Christian, commentary on friendship. Aristotle, Aelred, and others argued that friendships must last forever if it is a true or complete or spiritual friendship, depending on whose categories one uses. However, that does not do justice to the realness, or completeness, or spiritual-bondedness of friendships that are temporary in our lives. In fact, many peripatetic friendships are temporary because people march together for a while,

¹⁹⁶ Rustin and M. Long, 48. On top of that he thought Rustin was coming off haughty toward prison officials and that he needed to show more humility. Muste left him with the words of Psalm 51. He closed the letter with, “Love all men, children of the one Father. Write to me soon. Write to your friends. Let the thoughts and prayers pour forth.” Rustin and M. Long, 49. This latter message affected Rustin’s behavior, as soon after he wrote a letter to the prison leadership apologizing for breaking certain prison rules, namely about shaving his head and growing a mustache, which was against prison policy. Rustin also apologized, writing, “I am quite ashamed that I lost my temper and behaved rudely.” Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 50.

literally and metaphorically, then some choose to head another direction. This does nothing to undermine the depth, meaning, or formative importance of friendships that end.

Rustin wrote in response to Muste,

Dear Friend A. J., it is always difficult to thank you for coming down, difficult to express all I feel for the sacrifice time, energy, and money which you make. Unworthy as I am, I want you to know that I love you, for “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in a land of the living.” For although I feared, inwardly, I wanted you to come to me. I wanted to unburden myself. You will never know the relief and joy which have followed. Thank you.¹⁹⁷

Rustin continues by apologizing for precisely the things Muste had called him out for, namely for trying to blame the prison’s administration for his own choices. Rustin holds back nothing as he writes, “I did not simply face the fact that no matter how insincere they might have been, it was my own weakness and stupidity that defeated the immediate campaign and jeopardized immeasurably the causes for which I believe I would be willing to die. . . . I have hurt and let down my friends.”¹⁹⁸ Here Rustin is, at least in part, recognizing that he might have to sublimate his sexuality into the work of the movements for which he was a part, even though he had no sense that his sexuality itself was a problem. All of this foreshadows Rustin’s arrest in Pasadena and his eventual break with Muste as a result. In the meantime, Rustin and Muste worked to start a fund for incarcerated pacifists to help their families with legal fees and other needs. This is another example of how their deep and peripatetic friendship looked not only inward but also outward to those unjustly incarcerated, as well as their prisoners, bringing the virtues of peace, justice, and benevolence that upheld their friendship to others. When Rustin was released from prison, Muste quickly put him back to work at the FOR.

¹⁹⁷ Rustin and M. Long, 51.

¹⁹⁸ Rustin and M. Long, 51.

It is appropriate here to offer an intermission of sorts to note that Muste's own story is interesting enough that it ought to be studied more. One point worth mentioning is that he had a similar search for truth as Rustin, looking to the communists for revolutionary inspiration, but eventually finding it in the same place Rustin did. Muste began his career as a Dutch Reformed minister, tried out several varieties of leftist political movements, and eventually returned to his Christian pacifism.¹⁹⁹ This, in part, explains why he and Rustin were so drawn to each other, and why Muste seemed, for a while, to let Rustin get away with more than he might let other people.

At the FOR with Muste, Rustin found a home among others who were as committed to nonviolence as himself. These included other FOR employees and associates like Muriel Lester, who had written, "One must choose between the cross and the sword," and Richard Roberts who explained the FOR's mission, "For us, peace was something to be waged, as war was waged."²⁰⁰ Rustin had really found his people, those who wanted to take the fight of peace out to the world waging militant peace campaigns across the globe, peace campaigns that ended up being at the heart of the civil rights movement, thanks to Rustin's determination to make it so.²⁰¹

After Rustin's arrest for a "morals charge" in Pasadena his relationship with Muste changed.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 63.

²⁰⁰ Anderson, 62.

²⁰¹ Other early leaders of the FOR included Reinhold Niebuhr, who soured on the idea of Christian pacifism later in life, Howard Thurman, and Harry Emerson Fosdick. Thurman was the FOR's first African-American board member and was among Rustin's advisers when Rustin joined the group. Thurman wrote his famous book *Jesus and the Disinherited* while part of the FOR. Although his influence on Rustin was not as significant as that of Muste and Randolph, Thurman did provide theological and moral guidance for Rustin as well.

²⁰² At the time, "morals charge" was code for, among other things, sexual activity between men, the crime for which Rustin was charged. In 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom formally pardoned Rustin, writing in a press release, "In California and across the country, many laws have been used as legal tools of oppression, and to stigmatize and punish LGBTQ people and communities." <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/02/05/taking-on-historic->

Muste was devastated by the news from California. He deeply loved Rustin's political imagination; he had long known of Rustin's sexual preference; and he had always advised Bayard to indulge that preference only in his purely informal hours—not while he was undertaking an official mission for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Muste felt that Rustin's conduct in Pasadena had not only strained, severely, their father-son relationship but also damaged, fatally, his political usefulness to the FOR. Phoning Rustin on the West Coast, Muste informed him that he was no longer acceptable as a representative of the Fellowship; if he didn't resign his position as a field secretary, he would be fired.²⁰³

One might question the authenticity of their friendship based on Muste's harsh response. Rustin sat in prison devastated that he had let down his beloved friend and mentor. This may have been the incident that put an end to their deep friendship, but they still remained peripatetic friends pursuing virtue together. Nonetheless, it was an incredibly painful time in Rustin's life.

Anderson emphasizes the hurt Rustin was feeling at the time by writing about a visit from one of Rustin's other close friends. Anderson writes,

Soon after, Glenn Smiley, the FOR's representative in California, visited Rustin at the Rancho Honor prison farm. "Bayard was in tears," Smiley recalled. "He was most repentant over the homosexual incident, because the grief it had brought A. J. Muste. He told me, "I have talked with A. J., and have, of course, resigned my position with the FOR." I questioned this decision, but he hastened to add that the decision was irrevocable.²⁰⁴

Rustin was unusually open about his sexuality for a man during that era, and, in fact, not only Muste, but all his colleagues at the FOR knew he was gay. They seemed to accept it so long as Rustin kept it quiet, but Rustin's arrest was problematic because many among the FOR's leadership, chief among them Muste, thought that this arrest was bad for the image and thus the mission of the FOR. As for Rustin himself, he was generally comfortable with his sexuality even

homophobia-in-justice-system-california-governor-newsom-launches-process-for-pardoning-people-prosecuted-for-being-gay/.

²⁰³ Anderson, 154.

²⁰⁴ Anderson, 154.

from his teenage years, but he was ashamed that this particular incident had hurt the people and the organization he loved. Tragically, such was the life of a gay man, even in a liberal organization, in the mid-twentieth century.²⁰⁵

The Pasadena incident was problematic to Muste because Rustin was arrested while on FOR business after Rustin had agreed to refrain from sexual encounters during these trips. Muste felt like Rustin was being duplicitous and that strained their friendship, whether Muste was right to feel this way or not. Even in this, however, Muste said later that he was concerned that his own words did not come across with his “true and full meaning” because he insisted in regards to Rustin “that my love for you and hope in you shines through.”²⁰⁶ At the time, however, it seemed that Muste had deserted his friend, wanting nothing to do with him, leaving both Rustin and Muste with a deep sense of betrayal. Rustin wrote about this time, “I just cannot overemphasize what it was like at the point where one feels deserted by one’s closest friends.”²⁰⁷ While in the future, Rustin again worked very closely with Muste and put aside his sense of abandonment, he never again saw Muste as a mentor or guide.²⁰⁸ This indicates that peripatetic friendship is durable and may continue even when deep friendship ceases.

As is often the case when friendships go through hard times, perhaps especially among those who are also work colleagues, Rustin and Muste argued over money. In this way, they

²⁰⁵ No doubt being a gay man at that time created numerous challenges. His sexuality is one reason that folks might not recognize his significance, although the story is more complicated than that inasmuch as there is also a failure in American education to convey African-American history well. The rise of more libertarian forms of economics near and after the end of Rustin’s life have also played a part in his story being lesser known than it ought to be.

²⁰⁶ Anderson, 161.

²⁰⁷ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 202.

²⁰⁸ D’Emilio, 204.

were drawn into the May's consumer and entrepreneur forms as a product of the end of their deep friendship. This suggests, although from the opposite direction, that May is correct about friendships, especially deep friendships, counteracting the nefarious power of money and the market. In their deep friendship Rustin and Muste saw abundance and promise. Without that depth, though, they lacked a compelling way to avoid being sucked into a mentality of scarcity. Rustin thought he was owed severance for his twelve year of service to the FOR, but Muste disagreed.²⁰⁹

One might expect that such a severe break would end Rustin and Muste's friendship and working relationship, but that was not the case. Their relationship actually got more complicated even as it kept its peripatetic quality as they both continued to march toward justice together, even when it seemed like an impossibility. For instance, when Bayard was forced out of the FOR, he started working for the FOR's secular counterpart, the War Resister's League (WRL). Muste was on the executive committee for the WRL, and he resigned in protest, another devastating and mean-spirited act on Muste's part, but once he retired from the FOR on 1954, he rejoined the WRL. During that time, Rustin and Muste ended up working together again, particularly when creating the leftist political magazine *Liberation*. The two once again spent years laboring together for their shared causes and commitments. Although a certain level of mutual affection was lost and their connection was therefore considerably weaker than in

²⁰⁹ Muste wrote a psychoanalyst to say the FOR would pay for Rustin's therapy sessions, given that they believed at the time that therapy could "cure" his homosexuality through what is now known as a discredited approach often called "conversion therapy." He also offered to help Rustin financially if he could not pay his bills, but this would not have been a problem if Muste had paid Rustin what Rustin believed he was owed for his years of service at the FOR. Eventually the doctor responded to Muste and questioned Muste's fidelity to Rustin, writing, "Bayard cannot have a high esteem of your reliability and honesty in the future." Anderson, 167. This story also shows how Muste took on a stewardship mentality in which he could treat Rustin as a charity case and thus assert power over Rustin, something that definitely does not accord with friendship and seemed to show the worst of Muste's character. This mentality is critiqued in chapter four.

previous times, the two still managed to be in peripatetic friendship, working and walking toward justice.

In this instance the march itself kept the two men together and it was the primary thing that held their friendship together when it probably should have crumbled. This is a prime example of the connection of the means and ends of friendship and justice and how they are naturally bonded together. Justice in this case became the basis for a friendship, which in turn made the friends go deeper into the work of justice together. When Muste's betrayal led to broken trust, it was justice that continued the friendship, even if that friendship looked different than before. And the different shape of that friendship had a profound effect on Rustin.²¹⁰

None of this mitigates the pain Rustin and Muste must have been feeling, but peripatetic friendship sometimes means walking with someone even when you do not want to because virtues like justice and charity demand it. Nonetheless, this is one of the first of Rustin's key activist friendships to take on a significantly different form, which began to reshape Rustin's commitments and actions.

Bayard would come to lose his sense of Muste's paternal solicitude for him. In his predicament, during the early months of 1953, Rustin was to gain from socialists and secular peace leaders the faithful support that Muste and the religious Fellowship of Reconciliation had withheld from him. It caused him to wonder about the Christian values of the organization he had served—the values of forgiveness and reconciliation. He was never to forget that Muste abandoned him in the worst crisis of his personal life. They were to work together again, within other peace organizations, but always under the brooding cloud of Rustin's memory.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Their friendship also shows the episodic nature of friendship in which friendships go through their good times and their bad, so there must be something to hold them together, and the shared work for justice, at least in Rustin and Muste's case, proved to be one of the best adhesives available.

²¹¹ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 169.

When church folks reject folks, then it is no surprise that they might go find community elsewhere, not because they have been let down by God but by God's people.

The dissolution of this friendship, even if it was partially mended, was the starting point for the unraveling of Rustin's Christian faith, though he still held on to some part of it for the rest of his life. For instance, years later when remembering Muste's abandonment, Rustin cried and showed his pain, but he also still spoke in Christian language saying, "I'm also a child of God. I also have a soul and a personality made in the image of God."²¹² In fact, Anderson says that Rustin forgave Muste, but he never forgot the pain of his betrayal.

As noted, Rustin did leave the religious pacifism movement, at least leaving the FOR, and joined with the WRL, where he was considered "the most valuable man in the whole pacifist movement," and "the most creative nonviolent activist, . . . truly inventive, courageous, and brilliant."²¹³ After Rustin joined the WRL and was elevated there, Muste had a difficult time working with them. "It was one of the unlovelier episodes in Muste's estrangement of Rustin. Rustin's friend Ralph DiGia called it 'one of the saddest things in Bayard's life.'"²¹⁴ One can see how the sense of betrayal felt by Rustin was nearly impossible to overcome. Yet, Rustin and Muste were able to suck it up and work together for the sake of the cause.

²¹² Anderson, 169.

²¹³ Anderson, 172. These are the words of David Dellinger, a friend of Rustin's with whom he worked closely for years, especially on the production of the magazine *Liberation*. However, Dellinger would become one of Rustin's fiercest critics after Rustin published his essay, "From Protest to Politics," indicating, to a large degree, his break from more radical politics to partisan electoral politics, a move that became the point at which Rustin's work shifted from his earliest and deepest commitments. Many of his friendships changed as the ones with old radical comrades dissolved and new ones with powerful world leaders formed. Rustin went from radical hero to a voice that supported a number of neo-conservative causes, though he never completely lost his radical edge and concern for justice.

²¹⁴ Anderson, 172.

Friendship is difficult enough but peripatetic friendship that works its way out in struggle has that extra element of external pressure that can force it to turn coal into diamond or crush it as tectonic plates of social change press in on it. In Rustin and Muste's case, the latter seemed to be the ultimate result. Even if they were still able, to a degree, to continue marching together, they did so reluctantly and without concern for the other's wellbeing, instead just focused on the goals of justice toward which they were both oriented. If it had not been for the metaphorical march in which they were both participating to their fullest, they likely would have gone their separate ways, so even in the hurt and fracturing of their friendship, they still shared enough to at least work together to bear witness to a more just world. Even after the split, folks from the WRL acknowledged the influence of Muste and Rustin, noting for instance that Rustin's work in Africa with the WRL was born out in relationships Muste helped him forge.

Their friendship is difficult to understand because it had so many iterations, but that makes it valuable for evaluation through the lens of biography as theology. For instance, it gives us insight into both Rustin and Muste's lives but also into what friendship can mean as it relates to justice. Neither man offered an apology or tried to make serious amends, but they nonetheless kept journeying together. Their WRL colleague, David McReynolds, described well what their sojourn looked like. He said they needed each other as their skills complemented the other's, more so because they shared the brokenness that comes from taking up one's cross to follow Jesus. They had both been on the journey to Golgotha with its requisite beatings, insults, and shame. D'Emilio writes,

McReynolds implied that this was the source of a bond, an understanding, that allowed them to transcend, even while not forgetting, what each saw as betrayal by the other. 'I

think the broken part was a very important thing,' McReynolds insisted. 'Both Bayard and AJ were broken and healed. They'd been recovered.'²¹⁵

They may not have shared the warmth and pleasure of one another's company as they had before, but they shared having been broken by pilgrimage along the path to justice.

Is not this a potentially great description of peripatetic friendship? That is, friendship that is actively on the march toward justice will get beaten back and people will get broken. But it might sometimes be both their brokenness and continued commitment to walking the path toward justice that could hold them together when their relationship might have otherwise completely fractured. It does not indicate the kind of affectionate bond one usually ascribes to friendship, but they held together in the work for justice. And even though they had hurt one another deeply, they may have actually played a healing role in each other's lives as well while they walked together. Each brought his own gift to bring to the march, and the other respected that enough to listen, learn, and collaborate. This is friendship that is deeper than that of those who simply enjoy one another's company; it is the friendship that can only be forged under great heat and pressure, of going into battle over and over again against forces of injustice together as they both made their way to a more just horizon with others. With those others they produced the magazine *Liberation*, lead many more demonstrations, and hold many more conferences and trainings together. At first glance, one might call it a friendship of pleasure, but that is woefully inadequate to rightly describe Rusty and Muste.

Theirs remained a complicated relationship. In 1954 Rustin was among a group of intellectuals who, on behalf of the AFSC, were to put out a statement against nuclear war. Stephen Cary led the group and chose Rustin as one of the contributors, even though folks at the

²¹⁵ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 217–18.

AFSC were reluctant because of his arrest in Pasadena. Cary defended Rustin saying, “We had attended Quaker conferences in England, where Bayard was the most brilliant of the American delegate. . . . To me, Bayard was a marvelous human being. He stood out for his great clarity of his thought and speech, his astonishing grasp of issues, the depth of his intellectual analyses of political problems.”²¹⁶ Cary, was, of course, correct in recognizing the group’s need for Rustin’s contribution.

Rustin went on to write most of the document *Speak Truth to Power*. Muste was also part of this group, and according to Cary, he and Rustin were among the few who stood out as the most brilliant in the cohort. But Cary named Rustin as contributing than Muste, and Rustin leading of the group inasmuch as he brought together the different factions to reconcile differences in order to write a cohesive statement. However, even after Rustin had played such a significant role, Rustin told the group that the document was too important for his name to prevent its circulation. Here we see Muste and Rustin working together, but their roles were reversed as Rustin took the lead, but to a degree Rustin had adopted Muste’s concern for how Rustin’s sexuality could interfere with the reception of his unparalleled insight.

A few years later there was a discussion among New York activists about whether to send Bayard to Montgomery to help out with the bus boycott. Muste was among the folks who fully endorsed Rustin. So, whatever bad blood and hurt there might have been between them, Muste saw the march toward justice as important enough that he would stand up for the person who he thought was best for this particular job, in this case Rustin, further indicating the power of peripatetic friendship to hold people in bonds marching toward justice even when their

²¹⁶ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 174.

personal feelings had been hurt. And Muste's integrity showed here as "Muste shared Rustin's view that the Montgomery boycott could be the springboard for a black mass movement all over the South."²¹⁷ The friendship was precarious but the march was certain, and thus the friendship did not completely dissolve, and in fact it set the stage for Rustin's friendship with King, as King greatly respected Muste.

Muste's influence had not left Rustin either as Rustin participated in the American Forum, following Muste's lead to keep lines of communication with all kinds of people even those whose ideas one despised. "A. J. Muste emerged as the chief spokesman and architect of the idea that if a new socialist movement was created it could include dissident communists. And out of that idea the American Forum was born."²¹⁸ When Muste and Max Shachtman argued over these points, Rustin supported Muste, his fellow pacifist, though he later became close with Shachtman and started to move more toward Shachtman's point of view. When the three men met to talk, Rustin was ultimately convinced more by Shachtman because he thought his view was better for civil rights, and "it ended all serious collaboration between Bayard and Muste."²¹⁹ Ultimately, "Rustin resigned from the American Forum. He did not, he wrote to Muste, 'question the sincere desire of those who remain in it [so as] to keep the marketplace of ideas free.' He was resigning, he said, 'to refrain from compromising, in the eyes of a confused public, those with whom I am currently associated in other very important endeavors: . . . the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington."²²⁰ This is indicative of

²¹⁷ Anderson, 186.

²¹⁸ Anderson, 204.

²¹⁹ Anderson, 205.

²²⁰ Anderson, 205.

Rustin's struggles later to decide between the open exchange of ideas and the feeling that he was compromising.

The fact that Rustin and Muste's friendship ended might indicate to many theorists on friendship, including Aristotle and Aelred, that it was not a true or spiritual friendship. Yet, May is right that the depth of their friendship made it real and full in a significant way, for which the views of Aristotle and Aelred cannot account. Rustin and Muste were significant figures in one another's lives, and their shared trajectory over decades was no doubt deep friendship. But more importantly it was peripatetic friendship that walked through many trials on the way to a more just society, and every step of their journey together ended up providing the foundation for the modern civil rights movement. By my account, such a friendship is worth noticing and worth celebrating, and, most of all, it is worth imitating.

At this point Rustin was less willing to compromise, perhaps to the point of squelching some potentially helpful public conversation, while later in life he swung the other direction and was willing to compromise to the point that it was unclear precisely where he stood. But Muste's influence on Rustin stuck with him for decades to come. Also, Muste later came to Rustin's defense when, perhaps ironically, Rustin's sexuality was being used against him again, this time in threats by Adam Clayton Powell, a black pastor and politician from Harlem, to say King and Rustin were having a romantic affair. "Muste saw it as a failure of nerve" on King's part, even if Muste had done something not dissimilar years prior. Something kept Muste wanting to defend Rustin, perhaps an affinity for Rustin that he could never shake because of the way their friendship had been formed and tried on the march toward a more just world.²²¹

²²¹ Anderson, 231.

When Rustin was asked to organize the 1963 March on Washington, Muste was at first reluctant to let him take leave from the WRL because he still recognized Rustin's giftedness and commitment to the cause of peace. He wrote to Randolph, "The War Resisters League cannot be expected to release Rustin at this time. [The League] needs the full time of its staff, in which Bayard is such a key figure, for work on the international front. . . . [W]e all recognize that the causes involved in this discussion—civil rights, economic issues, including abolition of unemployment, and peace—are one cause."²²² Randolph responded, "I can understand that Bayard is practically indispensable to the League through this period of storm and stress throughout the world."²²³ Of course, due to events in Birmingham, Muste came around and released Rustin to plan the March on Washington. Even at this relatively late stage in their relationship Muste was still fighting to keep Rustin by his side, if not for the sake of their friendship then definitely for the march to victory over all the injustices he mentioned in his letter to Randolph. This underscores another vital aspect of peripatetic friendship, that its formation in crucibles of the march toward peace and justice makes it have a certain kind of durability in its continued insistence on each person's ongoing commitment to take steps, even when one feels like the other with whom they have been walking has let them down. It has this feature because the commitment to cause binds it together in a way that will be discussed more later.

In the mid-1960s, when Rustin's political views began to shift and his other friends from the movement were openly criticizing him, Muste once again came to his defense, writing to one

²²² D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 331.

²²³ D'Emilio, 331.

critic, Staughton Lynd, who had written an open letter condemning Rustin, “You should be aware of the fact that Bayard is undergoing a very grave inward struggle. . . . It is one which the civil rights movement is going through; and what happens to that movement may, for the time being, be more momentous than what happens to the so-called peace movement.”²²⁴ Muste once again recognized the importance of Rustin’s unique abilities in his changing role as possibly the only person who could have pulled off The March on Washington.

Yet, near the end of Muste’s life, he and Rustin were having a completely different disagreement. This time it was because of Rustin’s shift in political strategy if not commitments. “To the dismay of many in the peace movement, Rustin seemed far more willing to criticize antiwar activists than he was to throw himself into the struggle. As Muste, Dellinger, and McReynolds helped craft an inclusive antiwar coalition open to liberals, independent progressives, and members of sectarian communist organizations, Rustin decried the WRL’s ‘dangerous flirtation with the old line communists.’”²²⁵ While this was not an unreasonable critique (especially given both Rustin and Muste’s split with the communists years earlier and their constant critique of that group), Rustin’s open criticism of and refusal to reason with Muste shows how Rustin had drastically changed from the man who spent three years in prison earlier in his life for refusing the draft. This proved to be one of Rustin’s and Muste’s last interactions as Muste died in 1967. While it had been a tumultuous friendship for a couple decades, and though they seemed on opposing sides of this particular bout, Muste’s influence on Rustin never

²²⁴ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 296.

²²⁵ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 443.

left him as Rustin still spoke about peace for the rest of his life, even if in different ways and venues than he had before.

Nonetheless, it is telling that Rustin, in interviews toward the end of his life, only mentions Muste a few times, whereas he mentions Randolph, King, and others frequently. For instance, even Malcolm X's name comes up about three times more than, and King and Randolph come up dozens of times. No doubt, the interviewer is responsible for some of that, but Rustin was given a lot of leeway in these interviews to talk about what and whom he wanted. How can this man be called an exemplar of friendship leading to justice if his friendships seem so fragile? One possible answer is that peripatetic friendships are not fragile per se because they are training grounds for virtue. And whether they last for a single march or a lifetime they provide ample reason to consider them significant moral relationships that resist, and offer an alternative to, systems of economic injustice and wealth inequity. The question about friendship's supposed fragility will be explored more in his friendships with Randolph, King, and others below, and will be answered in the next chapter.

2.3 Rustin and A. Philip Randolph: A True Friendship²²⁶

Aristotle and others who have attempted to categorize friendship are not completely wrong. Such distinctions can sometimes be helpful descriptors, even if aspirational. Most folks should be ready to recognize that they have different kinds of friends, and they could hopefully recognize a friendship or two in their life that looks like Aristotle's true friendship, But even so,

²²⁶ Rustin's and Randolph's friendship was especially powerful because it was a true, deep, and peripatetic friendship. It epitomizes a friendship that was indeed both an alternative and resistance to unjust socio-economic arrangements. It was constituted by fidelity, truth-telling, strong mutual affection, trust, and the many other virtues necessary for a friendship of this unique sort to exist. When Randolph and Rustin worked together it seemed like they could accomplish anything.

we balk at some of Aristotle's characterizations of such a friendship. For instance, we might appreciate the extreme unlikelihood that friends agree on all things. Likewise, true friendship for Aristotle is only for those who have reached the pinnacle of virtue. What if peripatetic friends could continually walk toward virtue together without the expectation that their virtue will not be complete until the Parousia? Or, for peripatetic friends who are not Christians, what if they can recognize that even their truest friendships never stop being a work in progress? Peripatetic friendship thus becomes a compelling way to understand how Aristotle's categories can be useful, but it helps overcome the limits of his stark categorization by recognizing that in peripatetic friendship folks walk toward virtue at whatever place on the spectrum they may begin.

In order to argue this, I will draw upon Vincent Lloyd's work on Black theologians and Black secularists. Lloyd might argue that Randolph was living Black theology, and though he says that secularism has tamed Black theology and its revolutionary impulse, Randolph and Rustin were able to work together for revolutionary change. I argue that it was not because their friendship was a true friendship, although it certainly was, but more so because it was a peripatetic one. They were able to disagree about something as fundamental as religion yet march together as friends. And because they were able to march together as friends they could disagree on religion without it impeding their shared work. They walked together toward virtue even if they saw the basis for that virtue in different places. In peripatetic friendship, secularism need not tame a just impulse based on religion, nor must religion tame a just impulse that originated apart from religious reasons or justification.

For example, in most senses, Rustin's and Randolph's friendship could be cast as a true friendship in that it was lasting and displayed mutual care. However, one potentially significant

difference was the basis for their pursuit of justice. Rustin's basis was his Quaker faith, but Randolph, an atheist, had a more secular approach.²²⁷ I suggest that their friendship is a true friendship, even one held together by the Spirit. Friendship is a means of grace, and that is true for those who are Christians as well as those who are not. In a friendship between a Christian and an atheist, friendship serves as a means of grace for both but in different ways. For the follower of Christ, friendship serves as a means of sanctifying grace, by which I mean a deepening friendship with Christ and the invitation to others to participate in that friendship. For the friend who does not claim Christian faith, friendship, especially in its peripatetic manifestation, is an ongoing invitation into friendship with Christ. In this section, I will explore how the nature of peripatetic friendship in particular allows for one to be discipled as a follower of Christ by one who does not believe in God.

Vincent Lloyd argues that "all theology, properly understood, is black theology. All social criticism, properly understood, is theological. Black theology is social criticism; social criticism is black theology."²²⁸ If Lloyd is correct, then peripatetic friendship is Black theology. And furthermore one can see why Randolph had an affinity for certain church folks because he

²²⁷ See Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader* (New York: NYU Press, 2005). Taylor argues, similarly as I have about Rustin, that Randolph's connection to religion is more complicated than just slapping labels on him like atheist and anti-religious as many historians have done. It is beyond the scope of the current project to delve into Randolph's religious commitments or lack thereof, but it bears mentioning that he was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, later adopted a form of atheistic socialism that critiqued Christianity as a primary promulgator of Black oppression and the status quo of wealth inequity. Nonetheless, Randolph used religious language. He was impressed with the social gospel and therefore worked with a number of progressive ministers and churches, likely filtering his understanding of those relationships through his AME upbringing. I will primarily refer to him as agnostic or atheist although I recognize that his relationship to religion, Christianity in particular, is complicated.

²²⁸ Vincent W. Lloyd, *Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017), 5. A sizeable portion of this book is essentially biography as theology, in that Lloyd explores what particular people's lives, including Cone, Baldwin, Obama, and others, tell us about God, idolatry, and the liberation of oppressed people.

was unintentionally doing Black theology. Lloyd's definition also means that Rustin had been writing and living Black theology, even Black liberation theology, for years. He may not have been doing so in what might be called "theology proper," but James Cone has made a compelling case that the theology of a people can come from other places, such as their music. For Rustin, he was doing Black theology when he wrote for *Liberation*, and he was doing Black theology when in co-wrote *Speak Truth to Power*. Both were critiques of society that pointed toward a new way of living that was liberatory for everyone involved but especially those being crushed by injustice.

Lloyd also claims that in more recent times, secularism has tamed the revolutionary impulse of Black theology. Randolph, even when he did criticize Christianity, was calling the church to do what it should have already been doing: the work of charity and justice.²²⁹ Randolph was aware of the church's potential to bring about positive social change while he also recognized the church's (especially white and wealthy ones) propensity for creating unjust arrangements and maintaining that status quo. But I contend that this need not be the case because peripatetic friendship allows for differing motivations for pursuing virtues like justice, and, in fact, peripatetic friendships between folks with different faith commitments offer a contribution to the common good by their very existence.

Randolph could have taken the anti-church approach that many leftist political actors deemed necessary because, as Malcolm X argued, the church was primarily the domain of the "house Negro" that kept the masses, "the field Negroes" at bay in their oppressed state.²³⁰

²²⁹ When I talk about "the church" throughout this section, I am primarily referring to the white church, but there were some middle- and upper-class Black churches who often balked at talk about revolutionary change.

²³⁰ Malcolm X used this rhetoric in numerous places, but Lloyd opens *Religion of the Field Negro* with a story about Malcolm delivering a speech based on this idea at the same time as Adam Clayton Powell and others

Instead, Randolph saw in people like Rustin the promise of the Black church, and he thus chose to march with Rustin and their mutual friends, doing Black theology in spite of Randolph's admittedly complicated secularism.²³¹

The narrative below walks with Rustin and A. Philip Randolph through their friendship together as they pursue virtue together, find it in one another, and demand it for society. In the years leading up to World War II, Randolph demanded that African Americans have equal access to jobs in the defense industry, especially the military. He argued, "Responsible committees of Negroes who seek to intercede on behalf of the Negro being accorded the simple right to work in industries and on jobs serving national defense and to serve in the Army, Navy, and Air Corps, are being given polite assurances that Negroes will be given a fair deal. But it all ends there."²³² It might seem odd that pacifist Rustin built such a close and near lifelong friendship with a man who was prioritizing getting African Americans jobs in the military and broader defense industry. It is also perplexing, considering that soon after Randolph penned these words for his original March on Washington Movement (MOWM), Rustin was put in prison for refusing to participate in nonviolent civilian service for World War II.

Yet their friendship grew, in part, because Rustin saw in Randolph someone who was ready to summon and guide the masses in protest marches because Rustin had his walking shoes on and was ready to go. It was in the same speech mentioned above that Randolph penned these

among the Black gentry were holding a rally across town that intentionally excluded Black nationalists, and thus Malcolm was speaking at a protest gathering, naming the folks at the political rally as the epitome of "house Negro," and aiming his harshest critique at King and friends, presumably including Rustin.

²³¹ Lloyd defines secularism as "the exclusion or management of religion by the powers that be." Lloyd, *Religion*, 4.

²³² Andrew Kersten and David Lucander, eds., *For Jobs and Freedom: Selected Speeches and Writings of A. Philip Randolph* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 202.

words: “Power is active in principle of only the organized masses, the masses united for a definite purpose. . . . Now as to a practical program: I suggest that 10,000 Negroes march on Washington, DC.”²³³ Rustin wanted a movement, one that was fighting racially based economic injustice, and he found that movement in Randolph. Even if Rustin rejected the military, he rejected segregation and economic injustice even more.

Many years before Randolph and Rustin met, Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to organize for better labor conditions and pay for Black sleeping car porters. Over the next two decades he fought for integration and economic rights until in 1941 he showed his concern with the segregation of the military and defense industry. Around that time, “in early 1941, Rustin and his college friend Milton Kramer, white and Jewish, wanted to get involved with youth work in Harlem. Kramer suggested, ‘Why don’t we go over and talk to A. Philip Randolph?’”²³⁴ Rustin remembered the meeting in great detail even four decades later, recounting that right around the same time he was involved in communist discussions with Kramer, yet Kramer introduced him to Randolph, who was a staunch critic of communists. Also, Rustin thought it was crazy to just walk into the offices of one of the most famous Black men in America to ask for a meeting. Rustin said, “Are you crazy? We can’t just go talk to A. Philip

²³³ Kersten and Lucander, 203. The ideas Randolph critiqued as insufficient but necessary make up the early part of this quote. He wrote, “Evidently, the regular, normal and respectable method of conferences and petitions, while proper and ought to be continued as conditions may warrant, certainly don’t work. They don’t do the job. However, they are necessary preliminary, advance-guard work, for only a small committee can intelligently formulate a program. But the few people of ability who may develop a program may not possess the power to enforce or secure its adoption. Just a casual analysis and survey of the dynamics and mechanics of modern movements, legislation, administration and execution show that only power can affect the enforcement and adoption of a given policy, however meritorious it may be. . . . Power and pressure do not reside in the few, the intelligentsia, they lie in and flow from the masses.” This part of Randolph’s speech was a swipe at W.E.B. Du Bois’ idea of the Talented Tenth, something Rustin was likely aware of given that Du Bois had spent time in Rustin’s home when Rustin was a child.

²³⁴ Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 21.

Randolph.” Milton, nonetheless, insisted. They called Randolph’s assistant who told them he would meet with them the next morning. Randolph stood up to walk toward these bold college students, reaching out to shake their hands then offered them a seat. Rustin recalled, “And I noticed that Mr. Randolph did that all during the years I knew him whenever he had a guest. He’d meet them at the door, he’d walk them to a chair, and make a motion almost as if he were dusting the chair.”²³⁵ This points to Rustin’s admiration for Randolph’s humility, perhaps an underrated virtue when considering which virtues friendship requires. It may also be that Rustin’s and Randolph’s friendship was deep, true, and peripatetic thanks to Randolph’s humility. It certainly made an impression on Rustin at their initial meeting. This is just one example of the way an atheist might rightly disciple a follower of Christ via their peripatetic friendship.

After Rustin left the Young Communist League (YCL) and dropped out of college, he went back to meet with Randolph a second time in June 1941 at the headquarters of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters. “Then twenty-nine, to Randolph’s fifty-two, Rustin was somewhat like a prodigal son, going home to his roots after squandering a portion of his early idealism in an alien ideological lifestyle.”²³⁶ Randolph embraced social democratic governance, which Rustin came to embrace and support for most of his life. Likewise, after he left the YCL, Rustin spoke out against communism, but he was first warned about the communists’ lack of real care for racial equality by Randolph. This is when they first talked

²³⁵ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 61–63.

²³⁶ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 57.

about a march on Washington, one that Randolph was planning in order to pressure President Roosevelt to issue an executive order to hire Black workers in the defense industry.

Returning to Lloyd's discussion on Black and white theology, he clarifies how Randolph and Rustin were doing the former, while Roosevelt was initially doing the latter. Lloyd states, "The fundamental claim of black theology is that God is black." He continues by arguing that "blackness" has two interpenetrating meanings. The first "names the position of the weakest, the most marginal, and the most afflicted." The second "names a specific group of people who" fit those categories "here and now." He then argues, "Neither sense of blackness has to do with skin color; in the most empirical sense, blacks are those subject to the racializing regime of contemporary America, the regime that marks one as black." On the opposite side is whiteness, which "refers to the position of the comfortable, the privileged, and the wealthy—whether it is the wealth of financial capital, social capital, or cultural capital." He returns to the primary claim that God is Black, arguing it "means that God is to be found among blacks, among those who are systematically denigrated." And, finally, he argues, "Rich people do not go to heaven, as the Bible clearly says, and white people do not go to heaven—when whiteness is understood as comfort, privilege, and wealth. Whiteness can be renounced, and it must be renounced to do theology or to worship God. Renouncing whiteness means giving away the wealth that comes with whiteness."²³⁷ This was Randolph's and Rustin's shared declaration to society as well, as they tied the system of racial oppression to the system of economic inequity. Randolph, the secularist, was often doing better theology than professional Christian theologians because he was speaking truth to power, demanding a more just society in America.

²³⁷ Lloyd, *Religion*, 6–7.

Roosevelt relented before the march took place, and Randolph thus called it off because their goals for that particular march were achieved. Rustin was incensed because he wanted Randolph to demand the full desegregation of the military and was likewise angry that Randolph called off the march without pressing for more measures for racial justice. Rustin was ready to march, but Randolph prudentially decided not to and taught Bayard that patience can indeed walk with urgency. Even though Rustin left the YCL because of their lack of commitment to racial justice leading up to World War II, Randolph taught him that communists only cared about racial justice when it served their larger agenda. Nonetheless, Rustin held onto some measure of communist economic philosophy and incorporate it into his Quakerism.

Rustin also learned about fidelity in his friendship with Randolph. When Randolph halted the first planned march, Rustin put out a press release on Randolph's behalf condemning the presidential order to integrate the military as insufficient. Although Randolph was angered and put out his own statement saying the opposite, he gave Rustin a chance at reconciliation. But Rustin, rather than apologize and try to make things right, held a press conference, which was "hostile to Randolph" in which he described the presidential order as a "weasel worded, mealy mouthed sham which has accomplished nothing but confusion," and he "castigated leaders who 'fail to follow through,'" which was an obvious shot at Randolph.²³⁸

After their spat over the canceled March and Rustin's poor response to that decision, Rustin felt at odds with Randolph, and he quit spending time with him for a few years. Yet, when he returned, Rustin was surprised that Randolph welcomed him with kindness. "Randolph would

²³⁸ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 158

soon become the mentor, father figure, and close associate of Bayard.”²³⁹ The friendship they built together over their years of marching with one another provided a solid foundation for the next phase of the civil rights movement, the King era, as Randolph helped Rustin refine his understanding of racial and economic injustice, as well as taught him more about strategy and tactics.²⁴⁰ Rustin learned an important lesson that allowed him to continue friendships and working relationships with people who slighted him both publicly and privately over the course of his life, especially at the height of the civil rights movement. Randolph’s willingness to forgive and restore the friendship gave Rustin an example to follow during those darker days of his life when friends betrayed, denied, and distanced themselves from him.

Lloyd argues that secularism undermines Black theology because it limits concerns to what can be in this world, whereas early Black theology, in Cone for instance, held tightly to paradoxes that allowed for a necessary critique of idolatry. Lloyd contends, “Theology means speaking rightly and rigorously about God,” but he points out that we finite humans cannot do this task or God would not be God. We can only try to “speak more rightly and more rigorously about God, acknowledging the distance between the human and the divine.”

Lloyd proposes a twofold alternative regarding the role of theology. First, he says that theology can “rightly and rigorously [say] . . . what God is not. Theology can expose idols as

²³⁹ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 19

²⁴⁰ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 146. “For years, Randolph exerted an influence on Rustin as powerful as Muste’s, though for different reasons. Muste tapped the spiritual sources of Rustin’s motivation, something that the secular, almost anti-clerical, Randolph could not touch. But Randolph’s ability to inspire black working people—the people from whom Rustin had come—drew him irresistibly. True, Randolph’s March on Washington Movement had not become a permanent mass organization. But Randolph had come closer to succeeding than anyone else of his generation. And Randolph’s socialist views and union constituency kept him rooted in the collective approaches to political struggle that relied on working-class support. All this made Rustin willing to throw his energies into the campaign against a Jim Crow army. Never mind the troubling contradiction of a pacifist advocating that the armed forces should make it easier for some young men and women to serve. The prospect of a national mobilization was so exhilarating that it quelled any doubts.”

idols” and show when folks are using the divine to further their own interests. “Second, theology can hold up examples from those sites where God is most likely to be found, . . . where the hold of idols is the weakest, . . . sites of violence and tragedy” that reveal these idols for what they are. Lloyd clarifies what he means, writing, “Theology can hold up the wisdom of the weakest, the most marginal, and the most afflicted. The wisdom of the oppressed shows what is right, but it is not rigorous; the critique of idolatry is rigorous, but it does not show us what is right. Together, theology comes closest to fulfilling its task.”²⁴¹ These two purposes of theology intersect in the marches of the civil rights movement. Specifically, they intersect in both the individual stories of Rustin and Randolph as well as in their friendship. They did Black theology when their rigorous intellectual search for Truth resided among people who were the Way in new flesh, as they were both wise and streetwise. Rustin and Randolph spoke clearly against idolatry because they, Rustin especially, experienced marginalization from multiple directions.

Randolph rejects that kind of secularism as he walks with Rustin, and together their lives and words critique the idolatry of racialized capital. And, likewise, Randolph and Rustin emphasized the wisdom of the oppressed as they worked with train car porters and other underpaid or unemployed folks. They honed in on central issues and addressed them in action, like the March on Washington, and with their words in documents like the “Freedom Budget for All Americans.” In that sense, it could be said that civil and economic rights marches were a form of church and the Freedom Budget is a theological document.

²⁴¹ Lloyd, *Religion*, 6. Lloyd adds one more important clarification. He writes, “This is not to say that theology should abandon tradition, or sacred texts, or systematic inquiry. I am describing the stance that should be taken toward the practice of theology” because this stance helps us avoid idolatry, particularly idols of certainty and self-confidence.

Rustin's ability to build friendships and coalitions was strengthened by Randolph's example. For instance, Randolph befriended and recruited Grant Reynolds, army chaplain and New York State commissioner of corrections, who publicly supported much that Randolph was against, and vice versa. Yet Randolph knew that having this relationship would help him achieve his goals. Rustin followed suit in later years, for instance, by working with racist unions, knowing that it would ultimately further his goal of helping Black folks get jobs. They grasped that dealing with complicated paradoxes was central to their work against the joint idolatries of money and whiteness.²⁴² This is but one example of Randolph discipling Rustin that built on Rustin's own theological commitments to "the brotherhood of man" and reconciliation.

Randolph was, at this early juncture in their friendship, meeting with President Roosevelt about the march that was eventually cancelled. Rustin was a nobody at the time and yet he met and befriended the most powerful Black man in the country, a man who not only met with presidents but sometimes seemed to boss them around.²⁴³ But it was not Randolph's power that was the true appeal to Rustin but his integrity and his commitment to making the lives of others better without seeking to better himself.²⁴⁴ Because of Randolph, Rustin lived his own life in a

²⁴² On the necessity of paradoxes for Christian theology see Lloyd, 12–13, and his chapter on James Cone, particularly 26–38. One need only to look at traditional Christian claims regarding the Trinity, God as Three and God as One, or the issue that Lloyd names, the hypostatic union of full divinity and full humanity in Jesus Christ.

²⁴³ See Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 41.

²⁴⁴ Near the end of his life, Rustin said, "One interesting thing here is a side on Mr. Randolph. Mr. Randolph was a man of great dignity and extraordinary pride who felt that if people deserved justice and freedom, they should pay for it themselves. Therefore, he was almost never prepared to make an appeal. His theory was, if people understand the necessity, they should understand that they have to pay for freedom and justice. Therefore we admired this in Mr. Randolph, because we saw him as a man who was not out to get money, who never wanted anything for himself, who had confidence in the people, but he will never know the number of appeals we had to make when he wasn't around, in order to keep things moving. And he would say to me, 'Well, I think if you explain to the ministers and other people with whom you meet what it is you're trying to do, they will see that you get the money.' Well, it wasn't that simple. You had to maneuver them, you had to talk with them, you had to convince them. But Mr. Randolph himself would not ask for money, and he certainly would never ask for it from white

similar manner. Nonetheless, this is an apt example of the complexity of paradox in living Christian theology that Lloyd addresses, because Rustin planted one foot among marginalized people and the other among societal elites. This highlights a feature of peripatetic friendship, that people's feet need not be stuck. They keep moving, never fully resolving the paradox but never avoiding the complex realities of human relationships and societal injustices.

Randolph immediately began teaching Rustin lessons about the importance of economic uplift and the necessity of building alliances. Some Black folks wanted to picket George Meany, the key labor boss in the nation, because unions usually excluded Black workers. Randolph advised against it saying that he did not want a confrontation with the man who led the organization that offered the most uplift for Black people. Randolph instead said that he would continue to have conversations with Meany to push him toward racially inclusive unions.²⁴⁵ Randolph had a longer-term vision that Rustin learned to adopt as he worked on coalition building via his friendships for decades, and he would not let disagreements, even egregious ones like racism, stand in the way of achieving economic uplift for African Americans. Rustin learned from Randolph to see beyond the short term in order to put together plans and programs that could actually achieve their social and political goals.

people. Though he felt white people should be a part of the movement, he felt that blacks should pay their own way toward the justice and freedom." Rustin, 41.

²⁴⁵ Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 49. Rustin recalls that Randolph expressed this view in these words: "I will continue to push the matter and George can get as angry as he wants, but I'm not going to have an altercation with George Meany, because he is the head of the major organization which is the chief organization for the uplift of black people in America. The capitalists are not going to do it and the civil rights movements are too weak. They do not have an economic program. And the basic economic uplift of blacks in America is with the trade union movement because the great majority of our people are workers, and George Meany leads a workers movement, and we must stand with him."

This is where Rustin learned the lesson to bear with those who could help his causes even when it took a great deal of patience, maneuvering, and compromise. This lesson was necessary for him to form the alliance of leaders key to the March on Washington. The “Big Ten” often wanted to go their separate ways, but Rustin kept them together, thanks, in part, to what he had learned in friendship with Randolph.²⁴⁶ Rustin witnessed how, in spite of Randolph’s animosity with Black nationalism (which he despised because it caused people’s anger to make them run away instead of sticking it out), he built strong enough alliances to walk and march together toward justice. Rustin, and later King, also adopted similar stances. Rustin also learned that one could disagree about tactics but still have respect for people. Randolph completely disagreed with Marcus Garvey, but Randolph spoke highly of Garvey himself as a person. His only criticism of Garvey himself was that he surrounded himself with untrustworthy people.²⁴⁷ Perhaps this is where Rustin learned that he could be friends with others struggling for justice, even when their ideas clashed with his own. For instance, Rustin befriended Malcolm X and called him a friend, yet he disagreed with nearly every aspect of Malcolm’s beliefs and plans.²⁴⁸

For now, it is instructive to return to Rustin’s anger at Randolph for canceling the first planned march, but it is even more didactic to see Randolph’s response. “The historian Herbert Garfinkel later called Randolph’s statement an instructive ‘lecture on the nature and strategy of mass movements.’”²⁴⁹ Randolph’s statement about why he called off the march was

²⁴⁶ The “Big Ten” is described in chapter one.

²⁴⁷ See Rustin, Oral Interview Two, 56–57.

²⁴⁸ Lloyd claims, along with Cone and others, that Black theology was the theology of Black power, an idea with which Rustin and Randolph would take umbrage to the extent that Black power meant Black separatism, which they saw as a practical and theoretical affront to inherent connectedness of humanity.

²⁴⁹ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 61.

straightforward: “(1) The Main Objectives of the March had been Won. (2) To Rally the Masses, Objectives Should be Kept Simple. (3) The Youth Were too Enamored of the Romantic Flavor of Demonstration. (4) Organizers in the Youth Division were Dilettantes. (5) Some Members of the Youth Division were Communist Dupes.”²⁵⁰ Some of these lessons Rustin passed on to King and the other leaders of the Montgomery bus boycott. In this case it was *not* marching with Randolph that best taught Rustin the lesson about peripatetic friendship for their later marches together, and their continuing march together for justice. In fact, Anderson says, “Rustin would always regard the canceled march of 1941—with its threat of a massive nonviolent Protest in Washington—as ‘the symbolic inauguration of the modern civil rights movement.’”²⁵¹ Even so, they did not see significant fruit as a result of their labor until many years later with both the passage of critical civil rights legislation and the 1963 March on Washington that set the stage for civil and economic rights discussions up to the present.²⁵²

Even fairly early in their friendship, when Rustin was in prison, Randolph kept in touch. He wrote a letter to Rustin that said, in part, “I want to applaud you for your profound conviction as well as consecration to the principles of nonviolence and the brotherhood of man. . . . I hope I may have the pleasure of keeping in touch with you and getting a word from you now and

²⁵⁰ Anderson, 61.

²⁵¹ Anderson, 61.

²⁵² One of the reasons it is important to tell Rustin’s narrative, especially focusing on his friendships, is to help people remember well. God’s people are often reminded in Scripture to remember, but we tend to forget the reasons and substance of events like the 1963 march, exchanging them instead for inspirational soundbites from King’s dream. The fuller picture challenges our collective memory to understand the longer-term realities of the struggle as well as how that remembering can better shape justice marches and struggles today. My focus is also to remind us that friendships do have political and moral significance.

then.”²⁵³ The two did keep in touch, and after their initial fight continued to march together toward personal and social virtue.

In those early days while Randolph was politicking (something Rustin was not yet adept at), Rustin “searched for ways to inject militant tactics and nonviolent resistance into Randolph’s calculations.”²⁵⁴ Levine claims that Randolph was able to use the system to make a difference while not compromising his principles.²⁵⁵ The question remains open: Did Rustin ever learn to do that? Whatever the case, Rustin was correct to say that it was those lessons he learned that influenced his actions during those days leading up to the golden age of the civil rights movement. For example, Rustin said that their work in the 1940s and 1950s was the forerunner to similar and more famous actions in the 1960s and beyond. For example, Rustin led the Journey of Reconciliation which came fourteen years before the Freedom Riders. This, in Rustin’s view, laid the groundwork for his and Randolph’s vision of a mass movement for civil and economic rights. Rustin later said, “I think we helped to lay the foundation for what followed, and I feel proud of that.”²⁵⁶ Rustin and Randolph not only set the foundation together with other friends, they participated in the continued fulfillment of their vision for a just society.

Later events showed how strong their friendship was, despite Rustin’s early betrayal. Rustin struggled with the NAACP about tactics during King’s early rise to preeminence in the civil rights movement. While Rustin was working on outmaneuvering the NAACP, Randolph “allowed himself to be used as a cover, . . . a cloak for Bayard.’ As Rustin pushed for mass

²⁵³ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 31–32.

²⁵⁴ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 147.

²⁵⁵ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 67.

²⁵⁶ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 129.

action, he could present himself as acting on Randolph's behalf. 'Mr. Randolph asked me to, or Mr. Randolph wanted me to' were refrains he often used."²⁵⁷ This connects the dots among the tripartite friendship of Randolph, Rustin, and King as three generations of civil rights leadership struggled and marched together for justice even while making known their opposition to the strategies of some other civil rights groups, and sometimes even fighting amongst themselves.

When Adam Clayton Powell threatened to publicly accuse Rustin and King of a sexual relationship he struck the nerve of King's hesitancy. Unfortunately, as King backed away, few people came to Rustin's defense, save some voices like Nat Hentoff and James Baldwin.²⁵⁸

Randolph, however, did come to Rustin's aid, as Randolph himself had a falling out with Powell years earlier. While many Black activists abandoned Rustin, Randolph continued to keep Rustin working in the civil rights movement. Furthermore, Randolph voiced his frustration that Rustin was so regularly discarded by many of the folks who needed him the most. Rustin, as we know, did stay engaged, in large part thanks to Randolph's continued encouragement and protection. Randolph even offered Rustin a job at Randolph's newly created organization, the Negro American Labor Council, but Rustin turned it down in favor of continuing efforts to lead the southern march against racial tyranny.

Randolph was one of the few powerful friends that stuck by Rustin in the good times and the bad. It is no wonder that to whatever degree Rustin drifted from his Quaker faith (and there is

²⁵⁷ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 265–56.

²⁵⁸ Lloyd points to Baldwin as an example of a secularist whose life and work provide substantive theological insight. I am arguing that the same is true of Randolph, but my focus here is to examine the theological insight he provided specifically to Rustin as one aspect of the means of grace that was their friendship. And, rather than focus on what the secularist Randolph himself can teach us, though a worthy endeavor, I am concerned with how his friendship with Rustin was instructive for Rustin and how that friendship can be instructive for those with overt theological commitments as they work with, march with, and learn with and from those from other religions or no religion. See Lloyd, 39–59.

a debate to be had about that) it was likely because it was Christians were quick to turn their backs on him and the secular Randolph was always ready to embrace and uplift him. This is a good place to remind readers that biography as theology gives contemporary communities a lens through which to view themselves and their practices. For instance, the church can look at this life and this friendship and ask how this story might inform their contemporary practices. Who, now, is being excluded and what and how should it be handled?

When King was about to give up on the boycott in Montgomery because people were literally getting tired of walking, not to mention mentally and spiritually weary, Rustin called Randolph. He asked Randolph to arrange cars for people refusing to ride the buses, and Randolph tapped his connections to get cars to help folks get where they needed to go.²⁵⁹ Randolph's willingness, as an atheist or at least an agnostic, to be faithful to Rustin in good times and bad offers one explanation for why Rustin's faith seems to fade as his life goes on because it was Christians who were abandoning him while this atheist friend stood by him, and Rustin helped point Randolph back to the God of his youth. This indicates the importance of how Christians live as friends because friendship with one another might very well affect friendship with God, something we will investigate more in Rustin's life. "Through his period of exile from the civil rights movement, Rustin had remained close to Randolph. The trust and affection between them ran deep. It was fed by dreams and goals they held in common. It rested on the bonds that develop when two comrades in struggle face bitter disagreements and then repair the damage."²⁶⁰ This, the virtues of courage, fidelity, and justice, epitomizes peripatetic friendship,

²⁵⁹ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 189.

²⁶⁰ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 326.

and it was out of this friendship, two friends dreaming together after years of walking side-by-side, that the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was born.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Rustin traveled internationally to advise revolutionary movements. He returned to the United States in 1962 to continue working for *Liberation*, the magazine that he had helped edit for years. He quickly resumed work with “his old mentor A. Philip Randolph and on that project that would lead to his and Randolph’s picture on the cover of *Life* and make Bayard Rustin a name of national significance.”²⁶¹ Randolph may have valued Rustin both as a person and as an organizer more than anyone else. During one of Rustin’s many trips overseas, which were mainly focused on his peace work and advising the leadership of newly free nations or those trying to fight off colonial powers, Randolph had given Rustin his blessing to go. But Rustin heard from other friends Stanley Levison and Tom Kahn that Randolph actually “wanted Rustin back in the States to organize a project he and King and Wilkins planned for the summer of 1960: demonstrations at the Democratic and Republican national conventions, demanding progressive civil rights planks in the parties’ platforms.”²⁶² One might think that these three brilliant men, stars of the civil rights movement, would be able to pull off such actions, especially with their many backers and subordinates, but they knew that Rustin might be the only person who had the requisite skills to make it happen. This, as was often the case during this period, pulled Rustin in different directions by his great loves, the global peace movement and the civil rights movement. One of his longtime friends, Stanley Levison, wrote to him, saying, “One of the reasons you are so valuable is because of your

²⁶¹ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 129.

²⁶² Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 129.

acquaintance with so many people.”²⁶³ Rustin was in high demand not only because of his brilliant mind and exceptional organizing skills, but because he had been intentional along the way to build friendships with folks within every possible movement for justice.

However, the very people who capitalized off of their relationship with Rustin turned on him, saying they were wary about Rustin leading the March on Washington. Yet Randolph still endorsed him. When Strom Thurmond attacked Rustin on the record in congress, it was Randolph who led the charge to defend him. Randolph used his social capital on behalf of his friend who had quickly ended up with little social capital of his own due to people’s reactions to his past choices. This is another way to speak about peripatetic friendships in economic terms, only it is in the economy of social and political capital. Randolph had earned a lot of that capital over the years and he spent it on and entrusted it to Rustin whose capital had been stripped from him. In the end, it benefitted both men and strengthened their friendship.²⁶⁴

Later, upon another betrayal by King and other civil rights leaders, Randolph went as far as lending his own name to Rustin in order for him to build his own organization, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, through which Rustin was able to do the justice work he was still passionate about. This gave the man called “the Socrates of the civil rights movement” and “American Gandhi” an organizational home.²⁶⁵ In their friendship Rustin learned from Randolph over and again that “the struggle must be continuous, for freedom is never a final act.”²⁶⁶ The final act is friendship, but it is also the series of acts that build to the point of civic friendships in which

²⁶³ Anderson, 223.

²⁶⁴ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 348–49. For more see also Levine, 142, and D’Emilio 373–74.

²⁶⁵ D’Emilio, 374. For more information about the institute see D’Emilio, 414–15.

²⁶⁶ D’Emilio, 494.

freedom and justice are celebrated alongside intimacy, mutual concern, and the inefficiency of friendship that disrupts unjust social and economic forces that are otherwise hellbent on efficiency even at the cost of human lives.

Rustin's friendship with Randolph was able to weather nearly every storm, including Rustin's torn allegiances between the peace movement and the civil rights movement, attacks by Adam Clayton Powell and others, Rustin's own rise and fall, and the flow of time itself. In the summer of 1962, when Rustin was fifty and Randolph was seventy-three, they were visiting together in Randolph's Harlem office where they conversed about Black unemployment and the southern civil rights marches and acts of civil disobedience. The details seem unclear in the different sources, but in Anderson's telling, he says that Randolph had been in discussions with the NALC and AFL-CIO. "The civil rights movement, Randolph said, couldn't more appropriately mark the centenary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation than by organizing a massive Emancipation March on Washington calling national attention to the unfulfilled social and economic promises of a hundred years."²⁶⁷ Randolph and Rustin's friendship had come full circle, and they were back to work on fulfilling their shared dream of a massive march in Washington.

Over twenty years after their first planned march on Washington, one that ultimately did not happen, the two were now planning something bigger than would have been possible or even considered in years past. The march ultimately became known as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which "underscored Randolph's [and Rustin's] long-held conviction that

²⁶⁷ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 239.

black political advancement would be meaningless without accompanying economic gains.”²⁶⁸ It must be noted that while Rustin and Randolph did a lot right in putting together the march, Pauli Murray rightly wrote Randolph to challenge him for not including women in the key planning and speaking roles for the march, and this was as much Rustin’s fault as anyone’s.²⁶⁹ He had women like Rachelle Horowitz in leadership roles helping him plan the march, but no women were in public positions, including speaking on the day of the march. This was one of Rustin’s few moral failings regarding justice, but it was an important one that cannot be overlooked. He and Randolph’s friendship and their friendships with others should not have excluded the contributions of women.

Even so, the highlight of their decades of friendship was the March on Washington. The public’s recognition of the work they put in together over the decades was capped off by their picture together with Lincoln’s statue in the background, on the cover of *Life* magazine. They had marched together against racial and economic justice, building a peripatetic friendship that was now being noted for the all the world to see. And this friendship continued for many years afterward.

When Randolph thought it was time that Rustin have his own organization to run, they co-founded the A. Philip Randolph Institute and Rustin became the organization’s first president. Rustin, out of gratitude to Randolph, only wanted to take a five-thousand-dollar salary, but Randolph insisted that the director of a national organization must make more money, and thus

²⁶⁸ Anderson, 240.

²⁶⁹ I recognize that I am, in part, perpetuating the problem of patriarchy by not writing much about Rustin’s female friends. I chose to focus on Rustin’s close friends who were among a small circle of the most visible leaders within the movements of which he was a part, all of whom were male. There is interesting work to be done on other of Rustin’s friendships, including those with women like Pauli Murray, Rachelle Horowitz, and Ella Baker, and I hope to return to this material in the future.

Rustin ultimately ended up with a ten-thousand-dollar salary. The institute was successful at bringing together trade unions with civil rights leaders in keeping with Rustin and Randolph's commitment that Black folks needed economic uplift as much as, or more than, other social and political aspects of the movement. In fact, Rustin even said that it had become time to place economic issues first, ahead of race issues, something that civil rights leaders like James Farmer, a friend of Rustin's, and others criticized. Others, like Michael Thelwell, recognized that Rustin had not really departed from his consistent, lifelong logic at all. After all, he had been one of the key figures who brought together the economic justice and peace movements together with the civil rights movement. Rustin's socialism had always seen economic issues at the core of the variety of other social ills including racism, both personal and systemic.

One of the new Randolph Institute's first big ventures was to create the "Freedom Budget for All Americans" with the lofty goal of abolishing poverty over the next decade. Rustin, along with Randolph, and to a lesser extent King, provided the moral framework for the Freedom Budget, but they brought in economist Leon Keyserling to attend to the economically technical aspects of the budget. Keyserling had served as chairman of Truman's Council of Economic Advisers and a congressional consultant on economic issues. The importance of the Freedom Budget is covered in chapter four.

As historically important as the March on Washington still is, perhaps the most relevant joint achievement of Randolph and Rustin was their Freedom Budget, as it can easily be translated into modern day numbers and address the ongoing and growing problem of wealth inequity, especially as it effects minorities, including African Americans, which May sums up with the descriptor "neoliberalism." A progressive caucus of labor, religious leaders, new wave civil rights leaders, and other relevant parties should attempt to resurrect a modern equivalent to

the Freedom Budget, yet other than The New Poor People's Campaign hinting at it, the budget has largely been lost to history even though it has as much modern day import as any policy proposals or movements of that era.²⁷⁰ The groups opposing it then might still be the ones who oppose it now, "fiscal conservatives and sadly peaceniks . . . who argued that you couldn't have both guns and butter."²⁷¹ The latter group does not believe America can abolish poverty nationally without ending or curtailing overseas military action. The argument has also been made that the military needs poor people so it can have a steady stream of folks ready to enlist because it is their only option for a career or a way out of poverty.²⁷² However, the Freedom Budget argued that it could accomplish its goal of abolishing poverty in America without taking from defense spending.

The Freedom Budget was not the only evidence that Rustin might have softened his radical views on pacifism. He also condemned King and others for speaking out against Vietnam as representatives of the civil rights movement, although Rustin was not alone in this criticism of King; many other civil rights leaders likewise discouraged King from taking such a bold and public stance on the war. On this, Randolph did not come to the defense of Rustin as he so often had done before, but instead put his support with King, or rather King's position. Randolph was

²⁷⁰ As will be discussed further in chapter four, the proposals of the Freedom Budget have been considered fringe economic ideas through the end of the twentieth century and the first two decades of this century, but recent changes in economic discussions have begun to bring some of these ideas closer to the mainstream again. Some of the economists, as well as other types of scholars, promoting ideas like full employment point to the Freedom Budget as inspiration. It does not seem to be a coincidence that at the same time Rustin's story and ideas are gaining in popularity.

²⁷¹ Anderson, 290.

²⁷² Rustin himself addressed the tragedy of the economic draft. For an in-depth look at this issue see Justin Bronson Barringer, "Communal Responses to the Business of War" in James McCarty, Matthew Tapie, and Justin Bronson Barringer, eds. *The Business of War: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Military-Industrial Complex* (Eugene: Cascade, 2020), 161–78.

never a pacifist, so it is surprising that the lifelong (up to that point) pacifist Rustin did not speak up against the war but Randolph did. He opposed Rustin, saying, “Opposing wars and fighting for civil rights have natural and complementary motivations,” which was Rustin’s clear conviction earlier in his life.²⁷³ This was one of their few public disagreements, although Rustin had not abandoned his pacifist stance completely.

Even this disagreement is instructive because it shows that difference need not be an obstacle for folks on the move but can actually exemplify moral integrity and put the virtues of friendship on display, while simultaneously growing those virtues in those who are disagreeing.²⁷⁴ Lloyd, drawing on Melissa Snarr, argues, “Encounters with difference play an important role. . . . They are a crucial part of organizing not because they are needed to build power and win campaigns but because they enlarge the moral agency of those participating in organizing.” In fact, Lloyd’s argument continues in a way that summarizes my own argument about peripatetic friendship as a school for virtue with its cycle of learning to march and then reflecting on the march, which then prepares one for future marches, and so on. Lloyd continues, “Through struggling with difference while working on a joint project advancing shared goals, participants build their capacity to be sensitive to difference in the future. Furthermore, organizing across difference makes participants more aware of their interdependence conceived theologically as ‘our creation by God as social beings.’”²⁷⁵ When Rustin talks about the “brotherhood of man,” he is pointing toward our interconnectedness and the implication that we

²⁷³ Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 301.

²⁷⁴ The word “impede” and its variations evolved etymologically from a word that meant to put shackles on someone’s feet.

²⁷⁵ Lloyd, *Religion*, 121.

will encounter difference. Even in heated arguments that arise sometimes as folks address their differences, peripatetic friendship can not only hold them together; it actually absorbs knowledge and wisdom from these encounters that take place in the midst of their shared marching against devastating injustices.

Rustin and Randolph's friendship, because of their years of shared struggle, ran so deep that even after this heated public disagreement Rustin became Randolph's primary caretaker in the final years of Randolph's life. Rustin moved Randolph in next door to his own apartment. "Rustin was his most solicitous friend and guardian." One of their mutual friends, Arnold Aronson, told the story of a time when they had all shared dinner together. He said, "It was a moving thing to see. . . . Bayard was encouraging Randolph to eat, as if Randolph was the child and Bayard the parent. Bayard would cut the meat and feed Randolph bits of it, with such tenderness and caring. It reinforced my old feeling that Randolph was the father Bayard never had, and that Bayard was the son Randolph never had."²⁷⁶ Rustin and Randolph had walked a long way together, learning, growing, and leaving more just socio-economic systems in the dust cloud of their marching. Rustin's friendship very well could have been a means by which God used Rustin to call Randolph back to Godself because Randolph had lived more faithfully than many who wore the badge of "Christian." Rustin's hands acted as God's as he cut his friend's food and fed him, just as his feet had been as God's when they walked together. This act was not unlike Jesus washing his disciples' feet during a meal with them because they were dirty and weary after marching with Jesus. Jesus called his followers to do likewise, and Rustin responded, "Send me."

²⁷⁶ Anderson, *Troubles I've Seen*, 287.

We can all hope for a friendship so tender and deep, one born out of struggle, grown by marching together, and in its waning days held together by the affection that only those who had faced such hardships together could know. Randolph had taught Rustin about the economic significance in the struggle for racial justice, the value and importance of having fidelity toward one's friends, pragmatic approaches to political and protest movements that still reflected one's values, and many more lessons that Randolph modeled as well as instructed. Yet Randolph was around during the first part of Rustin's supposed turn to the right, so the question remains whether he counseled Rustin at this time and if Rustin was willing and able to listen. Whatever the case, this is a friendship for the ages, and one that can be replicated in many ways by folks willing to march together toward the ever-elusive goals of charity and justice.

2.4 Conclusion: Our Friends Make and Break Us

It is the common narrative that Rustin turned sharply to the right in his politics during the last two decades of his life. I argue that while Rustin did indeed have a change in political direction it was not as opposed to his earlier politics as is often supposed, and that to whatever degree his politics changed it can be tied to a change in his friendships, starting from his decision to focus on partisan electoral politics. That is to say, as Rustin's politics changed so did his friendships, and as his friendships changed so did his politics. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to draw a direct line showing the order of causation, but there is undoubtedly a correlation between who Rustin counted among his friends and the type of political involvement and ideas he had.

For instance, I talked about the parting of ways he had with many radicals who denounced him for writing his essay "From Protest to Politics" and for offering relatively uncritical support for Lyndon Johnson because Johnson signed the voting rights act. Rustin

should have been a key, and very vocal, figure speaking out against the Vietnam war, but instead was not only quiet about it, he criticized King for doing so because he thought that one could not both lead the civil rights movement and protest the war. This is odd as it was Rustin who connected the peace movement with the civil rights movement and spent most of his life ,at the intersection of those commitments, seeing them as essentially one and the same.

Rustin's change of political vision and action will be taken up again in the next chapter after I examine a different type of friendships for Rustin, namely those he respected, but who were among his key ideological sparring partners, including Malcolm X and the older Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), and virtually any Black separatist he could find.²⁷⁷ For now, what is important is that nearly all of Rustin's radical political friends faded from his life either because of disagreements or death, and he grew new friendships with people with partisan political power and less radical inclinations, including Lyndon Johnson and Golda Meir. Rustin has also been accused of playing a role in the growth of neoconservatism. Levine argues that it was Rustin's anti-communist and anti-Soviet convictions that drove his political thinking during the 1970s and 1980s rather than his direct concern for justice. Rustin was now defining his politics by what he was *against* rather than what he was *for*. At previous times the *against* was motivated by the *for*, but here it is reversed. It was this prioritization that Levine says Rustin's "views and those of the 'neo-conservatives' overlapped."²⁷⁸ Yet Levine then argues that while Rustin agreed with a number of neo-conservative stances, including several views and actions of Reagan, "putting Rustin in the neo-conservative camp would be a mistake." Rustin

²⁷⁷ I will refer to him as Stokely Carmichael because through most of his relationship with Rustin he went by that name, but I wanted to note that he did change his name to Kwame Ture in 1978.

²⁷⁸ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 237.

was anti-Soviet and anti-communist, “but he was also a social democrat all his life. He scorned Reagan’s domestic proposals.”²⁷⁹ The question is still open regarding the degree to which Rustin’s theory and praxis morphed, but that question is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, my focus is to merely remark that scholarly consensus points to changes in Rustin’s approach but then diverge on the details of that change and its implications. I then suggest that his change in politics and in friendships, along with their peripatetic aspect, are best understood as corresponding to one another in a self-perpetuating fashion. Nonetheless, near the end of his life, Rustin would march again, even in the United States, only it was not for racial or economic justice at home but against violent oppression and for more just social arrangements in other parts of the world.²⁸⁰ The memory of his earlier peripatetic friendships and the lessons they taught him never fully left Rustin, but those lost friendships and Bayard’s wandering away from the revolutionary capacity of the peripatetic school they provided rightly invites questions and criticisms.

Of the three major friends discussed in this chapter and the next, only Randolph lived long enough to be around when Rustin went through his most drastic political changes, though hints of those changes started in 1965 and grew over the rest of the 1960s and 1970s. Randolph became relatively feeble in his old age and thus did not have the public role he had earlier and he played less of a role in Rustin’s political commitments even though the two remained close until Randolph’s death in 1979. However, without King and Muste, and many of Rustin’s other

²⁷⁹ Levine, 238.

²⁸⁰ See Levine, 236–42. More recent essays address Rustin’s move away from his prior approach and even his change in moral commitments. For example, see Shawn Gude, who criticizes Rustin for cozying up to the Democratic Party. Shawn Gude, “The Tragedy of Bayard Rustin,” *Jacobin*, May 23, 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/05/the-tragedy-of-bayard-rustin/>.

radical leftist friends, Rustin took a different path in the 1970s thanks to the influence of folks already named as well as friends like former Trotskyist Max Shachtman, Norman Podhoretz, and others connected with the rise of the neoconservative movement. But biographers like D’Emilio reject the characterization of Rustin as a sellout, noting that his basic political and moral commitments stayed intact but played out in different ways due to the changing times. Rustin himself said, “I know that I have changed, but the changes have been in response to the objective conditions.”²⁸¹ Rustin may have believed this, but it is incongruent with his own earlier words arguing, essentially, that peripatetic friendships were necessary in all situations where injustice reigns.

In the meantime, to close this chapter, I will briefly reflect on the two friendships examined above to see what effect they had on Rustin’s understanding of and commitment to justice in general and economic justice in particular, as well as the way Rustin helped shape others, in order that they might serve my argument in the last chapter in which I create a Rustinian friendship theology in response to wealth inequity. Of course, Muste, Randolph, and King (in the next chapter) are merely representatives of Rustin’s friendships, and throughout these chapters I discuss many of Rustin’s other friends as well. But they represent the folks who nurtured Rustin’s commitments, which Rustin described later in life in a list that looks like a modified version of his understanding of the social teachings of Jesus, now more invested in the work of the state, but still with limits on state power: “The principal factors which influenced my life are 1) nonviolent tactics; 2) constitutional means; 3) democratic procedures; 4) respect for

²⁸¹ Eric Pace, “Bayard Rustin Is Dead at 75; Pacifist and a Rights Activist,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1987, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/25/obituaries/bayard-rustin-is-dead-at-75-pacifist-and-rights-activist.html>.

human personality; 5) a belief that all people are one.”²⁸² With Muste and Randolph, Rustin literally marched, and in fact many of the most memorable parts of his life are connected with marches: first for peace with Muste, then the March on Washington Movement and Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom with Randolph—which also involved King—and, of course, the most famous event to which Rustin is connected, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where King solidified his spot as the most influential voice in the civil rights movement, and Rustin and Randolph became household names. But I would be remiss if I only talked about their literal putting one foot in front of the other, failing to acknowledge their figurative march forward, bending the arc of the universe toward justice with their collaborations on countless speeches, demonstrations, protests, and writings and their simple acts of hospitality and charity toward one another and folks from across races and classes.

Muste nurtured Rustin’s Quaker faith, especially his commitment to nonviolence. They worked together on many nonviolent interventions and peace projects around the world, and Muste helped shape Rustin’s theological vision, as is evident in *Speak Truth to Power*. Their friendship also taught Rustin, not to mention Muste, about the pressures of working together for justice in a world that fights to block every new step, and about holding together a friendship through work that would have likely otherwise broken apart. The shared commitments and pressures of their work held them together, and that is a significant lesson in the connections between friendship and justice. Muste was one of the first to encourage Rustin’s activist inclinations working across racial lines and calling others to join in. At the same time, their friendship was a real-life example of the fragility of friendship, or at least the tension between

²⁸² Pace.

fragility and durability of peripatetic friendships facing adversity that either press it together or rend it apart. For Rustin and Muste there were elements of both, which will also prove worth comparing to the classical and Christian traditions on friendship. Their relationship gives us a glimpse into a friendship in which both friends feel betrayal and thus lack fidelity. Can their relationship be called a friendship because of its initial intensity and continued collaboration even after mutual betrayal? Or is it simply what Meilaender refers to as camaraderie that is formed in battle but is replaceable when the battle calms? And is camaraderie preferable in the civic realm?²⁸³ While the intensity of many moments of peripatetic friendship have similarities to shared moments in war, peripatetic friendship has tied the means of the way of nonviolence with the ends of just and peaceable reconciliation, making it far preferable to mere camaraderie in battle.

Randolph opened Rustin's eyes to economic disparities, that they ought to be fought at the same time that Rustin was fighting for peace and racial harmony. He made sure that Rustin saw them as inseparable causes, something that Rustin carried with him throughout his various political phases. Rustin, in fact, tended to eventually see economics as the fundamental concern for equity, noting that while Black folks might now have the right to eat in a restaurant or stay in a hotel, if they cannot afford to do so, then they are still not free. This, of course, extends to poor people of all races, and thus it was economic justice (such as the economic bill of rights that he worked on with Randolph and ideas like full employment and basic income for those who could not work) that enlivened Rustin's political imagination and gave him much of his drive.

Randolph and Rustin showed one another great care and tenderness, even exchanging roles in

²⁸³ Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981), 68–69.

their friendship over time. As Randolph first nurtured Rustin and helped him rise to prominence, so later did Rustin care for Randolph and make him more famous than he had ever been before. In a more personal way Randolph raised Rustin up and later, when Randolph could no longer fully care for himself, Rustin became his caretaker. Their friendship shows us, with brief exception of Rustin's undermining of Randolph early on in their relationship, the beauty of lifelong fidelity in friendship, the deepest level of friendship, one that I follow Aelred in calling spiritual friendship.²⁸⁴ Are such friendships rare, as they seemed to be in life, and if so, then who can we rely on as we, too, join the march for justice?

²⁸⁴ Aelred would probably only call it a spiritual friendship if it was between two Christians, but as I showed, their friendship, especially its peripatetic form, was a means of grace, serving as part of God's work to redeem and sanctify humanity.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Introduction: Rustin's Friendship with King

Rustin's Quaker faith informed his friendships and their political implications and set him up as a unique example among civil rights leaders. For instance, "Through a theological analysis of Bayard Rustin's Quaker moral and political arguments, [Azaransky] argues that Rustin was one of the most important midcentury American religious thinkers."²⁸⁵ King recognized this early on, and he used Rustin's compelling ideas and arguments to guide the masses. King was persuaded by Rustin's vision of peripatetic friendships, and built on it to talk about the beloved community. Azaransky writes, "What King called a 'network of mutuality'—that linked King, Rustin, [and others]—was sustained through personal connections, sharing strategies, and decades-long friendships."²⁸⁶ King's network grew, in large part, through his friendship with Rustin.

Furthermore, King used Rustin's basic theological rationale for nonviolent direct action. King's many sermons and speeches often reflect Rustin's best ideas. For example, King was persuaded to follow Rustin's own logic regarding nonviolent direct action. "The key, Rustin explained, was the disposition of the practitioners. Because nonviolence arose from a 'religious basis,' according to Rustin, 'action for transforming the social order can be effective only if done

²⁸⁵ Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 14.

²⁸⁶ Azaransky, 14.

in joy and gladness and without fear; such action is possible only for those who have constantly the experience of unity with God and their fellows.”²⁸⁷ King took on this disposition and broadcast this message globally.

King learned to embrace nonviolence fully through conversations and joint action with Rustin. And he learned about the importance of having a truth-teller in one’s life especially as one gains notoriety of the sort that produces sycophants. King also learned a lot of language to express ideas about civil rights and economic justice from Rustin. Yet even as Rustin continued to be truthful with King and a completely trustworthy ally and friend, King allowed the pressure of the resistance to their marching to cause him to retreat from Rustin’s friendship on multiple occasions and to fail to acknowledge Rustin’s influence on much of not only his activism but his written work. This is complicated in that while King did not credit Rustin in his books, it is at least in part due to Rustin’s own concerns that his reputation as one with previous ties to communism would stand in the way of the movement. Rustin’s part in this actually strengthens my argument about friendship. It shows that Rustin was a sufficient friend that he worried more about the common love between him and King and their journey than credit for his ideas.²⁸⁸ As Rustin had become the primary Gandhian in America, so King became the primary Rustinian when Rustin was not around and when Rustin swerved off the path that he had trod for most of his life. Their friendship shows us what it looks like when one friend pours themselves completely

²⁸⁷ Azaransky, 103.

²⁸⁸ Bayard Rustin to Yone Stafford, 14 November 1958, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/bayard-rustin-4>. Rustin wrote, “In regard to King’s book and my name being left out—this was my decision and a very sound one, I believe. I do not know if you know that the reactionaries in the south have distributed several pieces of literature accusing King of being a Communist and linking me ‘a Communist agitator’ with him. I did not feel that he should bear this kind of burden.... For your information, the first draft of King’s book listed the tremendous help which I had given him and the movement. I mention this only because I would not want you to think that Martin is the kind of person who would take my name out because of fear. I want you to know that I insisted that he do so.”

into a friendship by showing absolute fidelity when the other friend pours a bit less of themselves into the friendship. Can one be a fickle friend and yet be a faithful ambassador of their friend's best commitments?

3.2 Rustin and King: A Friendship of Utility

Rustin was King's mentor, but eventually King became Rustin's ambassador, speaking in a Rustinian register when Rustin's priorities shifted. Over the years their friendship waxed and waned, more regularly than Rustin's friendships with Muste and Randolph, mostly because of King. If Aristotle were to evaluate their friendship, he might call it a friendship of utility, at least from King's vantage. Again, however, Aristotle's account is found lacking, both because of the depth of friendship, as previously discussed, and in the way that friendships, perhaps especially those forged in the crucible of the peripatetic school where they both got their training, influence virtues even when a friendship ends. That element of friendship is important for investigating friendship itself but especially for understanding the concept of a network of friendships that makes a community, whether a community bound together by their marching or the mundane activity of sharing meals. Paul Wadell highlights a number of issues, such as friendship and justice as a way of life, that are instructive for understanding how friendships affect not only the friends but the world around them. Centrally, Wadell argues that a "truthful and reverent vision" is necessary to live a morally good life, and the place to learn such a vision is through friendships.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 121.

Here, I will examine their thirteen years of friendship with an eye to how it was shaped by their marching together, both literally and figuratively, as Rustin entrusted King with his vision, helping shape King's conception of nonviolence and the contours of justice and pointing King toward what King later called "beloved community": a network of friendships founded upon character and justice rather than socio-economic status and race. I will trace their friendship from the Montgomery bus boycott to the Meredith March Against Fear, showing how Rustin helped King embrace economic concerns in his racial justice work, along with inculcating King with his nonviolent commitments. I will then show how King represented Rustin's best ideas at a time when Rustin was struggling to embrace those ideas himself.

In 1956, after decades in "the movement," Rustin traveled to Alabama to help a young minister who was struggling to hold together a prolonged bus boycott in Montgomery.²⁹⁰ Rustin brought with him his years of experience in nonviolent civil disobedience and movement organizing. He was excited to see a mass movement, especially with church leadership in the South.

Rustin was entranced by the evidence of religious leadership. Unlike his own experience as a Quaker, where there was a heavy emphasis on social change in the world, the Baptist tradition of many Southerner black ministers was about 'soul saving' and 'come to Jesus.' Montgomery might portend to, he thought, 'a revolution in the Negro church,' with enormous consequences for the future of the black freedom struggle.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Before even meeting King, Rustin joined Stanley Levison and Ella Baker, with the support of Randolph, to start a fundraising group to help with the struggle in the South named *In Friendship*. "It raised money for farmers whose credit had been cut off because of their activity for school desegregation; it provided emergency funds to buy food and clothing for families evicted from their tenancies. With Randolph as its titular chair, *In Friendship* pressed the socially conscious wing of the labor movement to contribute financially to the battle for racial equality in the South. . . . Just as *In Friendship* was taking shape, word reached New York of a new manifestation of black discontent. In Montgomery, Alabama, a boycott of city buses had begun. . . . To coordinate the boycott, the leadership formed a permanent organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association, and selected a recent arrival in town, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., to serve as its spokesman. . . . The *In Friendship* group quickly grasped the potential of Montgomery," and *In Friendship* became a fundraising arm of King's work in the South. D'Emilio, 225–26.

²⁹¹ D'Emilio, 226.

It turns out that Rustin was correct about the potential. This young minister became one of the most recognized and honored leaders in history. And the Black church in the South was central to the civil rights gains of that time. The Black church in the South is still doing that work today.

A couple days after arriving in Montgomery, Rustin and King finally met. In that meeting and in the events of Montgomery, Rustin finally saw the start of the revolution that he had been hoping and working for nearly his entire life. Wadell argues that hope is essential but that it must happen in a community with friends. He writes, “None of us can hope alone. We need companions in hope. This is why hope is connected with friendship.” Then Wadell gestures toward the peripatetic reality of just friendships, writing, “Just as we are less likely to get lost on a trip when a friend accompanies us, so too none of us can make our way alone on the journey to God’s kingdom without getting sidetracked.”²⁹² The focus for this section is not hope so much as vision, but Wadell is right to point out that vision is shaped by hope, and hope requires friendships.²⁹³ In his friendship with King, Rustin saw someone whom he had been hoping for. The time was right, the mood of the people was ready for the modern nonviolent civil rights movement to begin, and Rustin was one of its most important catalysts especially as his friendship with King grew over the years.

When they did meet, they became fast friends. They talked theology and tactics, nonviolence, and Gandhi. While King knew a little about nonviolence Rustin said that King was not yet a pacifist. Further, Rustin recalls that King knew very little about nonviolence as a

²⁹² Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 136.

²⁹³ Wadell writes, “Vision is a neglected quality in our moral and spiritual formation, but it is absolutely crucial.” The connection he makes between vision and spiritual formation, which he later ties to contemplation, illumines the truth that moral formation is rightly a part of spiritual formation and that vision then shapes our moral and spiritual formation or malformation. Wadell, 121.

lifestyle and a tactic. Rustin stepped in and began teaching King and others about nonviolent direct action that built on the walking together that they were already doing. Friendship is commonly thought of as a school for virtue, a claim with which Wadell agrees, but the peripatetic aspect of it actually helps shape people's vision in deeper ways because it enhances the intensity with which friendship helps scrape away the dross of an immoral vision in order that the moral quality of the vision is strengthened. Wadell clarifies the importance of a "truthful and reverent vision" by writing, "There is an intrinsic connection between truthful vision and virtuous actions because we cannot *act rightly* unless we first *see rightly*."²⁹⁴ Rustin's vision was explored in the previous chapter, but it can be summarized by saying he envisioned a world in which every person is treated with dignity, decency, and equity, and that nonviolent civil disobedience, often in the form of marching, is the means to this end. That is the vision that he shared with King and the vision that King proclaimed to the world.

As the two men got to know each other over the coming days and weeks, Rustin taught King a great deal about nonviolence, no doubt sharing stories from his own experiences. This was the start of Rustin shaping the twentieth century's most famous proponent of nonviolence. Yet when they first met, King still had guns and even armed guards. Rustin did not blame King or the other leadership because he saw the difficulty of their situation. He pointed to their

²⁹⁴ Wadell, 122. He invites readers to consider "what it is like to live or work with someone who gazes upon the world through eyes of anger and resentment. All of their behavior is shaped by the belief that they had been unjustly slighted or denied. Or what happens to the person whose vision is characterized by bitterness and cynicism? Everything they do is born from a desire to strike back and to hurt." Rustin, of all people, could not be blamed for adopting either of the above visions, nor could most Black and poor folks in America, because he and they have been treated unjustly in a way that could breed contempt. But Rustin had a different vision, one that attacks injustice while loving the unjust. This is the vision he passed on to King, and one wonders if it was this vision that ultimately separated Rustin and King from the Black nationalists and Black separatists. We do know that Rustin and King both articulated that vision and lived it in compelling ways, and that they respectfully but vigorously argued for it with many of their civil rights peers.

peripatetic friendship, calling it “struggle” to point to King’s growth in virtue as he walked and talked with Rustin. Rustin later said about King and the boycott, “He had not been prepared for it: either tactically, strategically, or his understanding of nonviolence. The glorious thing is that he came to a profoundly deep understanding of nonviolence through the struggle itself, and through reading and discussions which he had in the process of carrying on the protest.”²⁹⁵ Rustin just described how precisely their peripatetic friendship formed King into the great nonviolent leader he was to become. King’s growth came largely as a result of the vision Rustin gave him. The most profound growth in King came in the struggle and in the conversations had during that struggle, in part because he learned and taught discipline, which has some place in general discussions of friendship but is particularly important in peripatetic friendship.²⁹⁶ This foreshadows the way King continued this growth as he taught and learned with others on the Meredith March.

One aspect of Rustin and King’s friendship that Rustin points to for their differences in understanding initially was their dissimilar upbringings. King grew up in a relatively wealthy and prestigious family and went to the top Black college and on to a prestigious doctorate program. He had it pretty good and never faced a lot of hardship nor spent much time with poor Black folks prior to being thrown into the southern Black freedom struggle. This was quite different

²⁹⁵ Rustin, Oral Interview Four, 138. Glenn Smiley also confirmed this, saying, “King” ‘knew nothing’ about Gandhian nonviolence. D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 231. Rustin also said elsewhere, King “did not have the ability to organize vampires to go to a bloodbath” Houtman et al., *Troublemaker for Justice*, 94.

²⁹⁶ Wadell argues “Virtuous action hinges on truthful seeing, but acquiring a reverent and truthful vision is hardly easy; indeed, it is essentially an ascesis, a demanding and sometimes daunting discipline by which we break through the deceptions and illusions of our lives so that we can see everyone and everything ‘more clearly, more justly.’” Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 125.

than Rustin's experience as poor Black person and as one who had already been through a number of experiences in which he had been beaten and imprisoned.

As a way of helping King better understand nonviolence, Rustin taught him about what he had learned in India, that most of the people following Gandhi only believed in nonviolence as a tactic, but that leadership of a nonviolent movement needed to embrace it fully as their lifestyle, and thus King and his other top leaders must get rid of their guns. Rustin taught King about the unique burden of being a nonviolent leader. He explained that

because the followers will seldom, in the mass, be dedicated to nonviolence in principle, that the leadership must be dedicated to it in principle, to keep those who believe in it as a tactic operating correctly. But if, in the flow and the heat of battle, a leader's house is bombed, and he shoots back, that is an encouragement to his followers to pick up guns. If, on the other hand; he has no guns around him, and they all know it, they will rise to the nonviolent occasion, of a situation.²⁹⁷

In the midst of the work and these conversations, Rustin introduced King to his friend Glenn Smiley, a white minister from the South that King could trust to help organize the boycott. Smiley, too, had conversations with King about nonviolence, and by the end of the boycott King no longer carried guns nor had armed guards. King had exchanged a "fantasy," as Wadell calls it, for a vision. He describes fantasy as "manipulative and self-serving and always results in injustice and harm."²⁹⁸ King mostly gave up such a fantasy, except, perhaps ironically, in his

²⁹⁷ Rustin, Oral Interview Four, 139–41. It is also noteworthy that Rustin and King's friendship might have been viewed as a bit odd for some of the reasons already mentioned, like Rustin being Northern Quaker laity and King being Southern Baptist Clergy, or Rustin not having finished college and King having earned his doctorate. They were an odd pair. This indicates the type of friendship I call peripatetic because it allows for people from various spectrums to be friends so long as they seek virtue together.

²⁹⁸ Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 124. Wadell also perceptively points out that when confronted with a vision those who have been living in fantasy react either in "contrition and repentance" or "violence." This was precisely what civil rights marches and protests intended to provoke with the hope that wealthy and white oppressors would repent rather than act violently, yet they were prepared to respond to fantasy with their own commitment to a just vision. Wadell also offers a helpful list of possible sources of fantasy, sources that Rustin and King, mostly, rallied against. Wadell writes, "Obvious candidates for fantasy in our society today are the ideologies of consumerism and materialism, ideologies of power, ideologies of racism and sexism, or dangerous linking of identity with self-

friendship with Rustin, as King had a tendency to use Rustin's services as a master strategist and organizer but discard Rustin the moment Rustin's realities threatened King.

King's full embrace of nonviolence is indicative of the way that friendships, particularly peripatetic ones, even at the level of mere utility, have the ability to both connect folks (not to mention change them) that would otherwise likely not have connected. They are drawn to one another because they share in the same struggle, either by choice or by necessity. I mention it here because this typifies the way that Rustin brought together unexpected and broad coalitions via the vehicle of friendship. For instance, it is worth celebrating that at the end of the bus boycott King took a ceremonial first ride in the front seat of the bus and sitting beside him was Glenn Smiley. What a commotion that picture alone must have stirred among not only the local community but nationally as well. And, it would not have happened if Rustin was not committed to introducing his friends to one another as they struggled and marched toward a more just future.

In Montgomery this somewhat unlikely friendship between Rustin and King formed because Rustin found what he had been looking and struggling for, and King was willing to take a risk because he desperately needed a tactician with experience if the boycott was going to succeed. Nonetheless, even though King gave Rustin the chance in Montgomery, at later times he showed moments of true hesitancy, abandoning Rustin, at least officially, all the while taking his ideas and moving them forward even when Rustin himself deemphasized those values for the sake of what he saw as expediency in serving his causes.²⁹⁹ King seems to have used Rustin, but

assertion, our endless fascination with violence, and our foolish costly thoughtfulness toward the earth itself." Wadell, 124. Of that list it was on the issue of sexism where both Rustin and King missed the mark.

²⁹⁹ In fact, when King talked about the March on Washington, he would not talk about Rustin's central role. Thankfully, D'Emilio, Anderson, Levine, and others in the twenty-first century have sought to correct that omission

Rustin also seems to have used King, so their friendship could easily be read as one of mere utility. But it was deeper, in May's sense, and more complex than that, as it still was the catalyst for momentous societal changes. In one sense King may have viewed his friendship with Rustin as one of utility, but that utility was not particularly for King himself but rather for those for whom King had become spokesperson and leader.³⁰⁰

Nonetheless, in the relatively short time Rustin and King were friends, King's vision was enhanced and his mission clarified through his friendship with Rustin. King went from having an idea of justice to having a vision for it. Wadell rightly describes justice by taking a standard definition and modifying it via a focus on friendship. He writes, "Justice is the virtue of living in right relationship—a kind of friendship really—with God, with other human beings, and with the whole of nonhuman creation."³⁰¹ Again, prior to meeting with Rustin, King had a conception of justice, but it was in their early and ongoing work together that gave King a vision, or a "dream," as he called it.

Even if this friendship could be classified as one of utility that does not negate the friendship's power to radically change the friends' lives. Such a transference happens in the bonds of friendship, especially peripatetic friendship. Wadell puts it this way: "If the heart of justice consists in respecting the dignity of persons and giving them their due, these are precisely

through their work showing overwhelming evidence of Rustin's role in the civil and economic rights and peace movements of the twentieth century. I am adding to this scholarship by showing the role his faith and friendships played in his influential position in those movements.

³⁰⁰ This not to say that the way King treated Rustin was acceptable. What it does reveal is that a peripatetic friendship can work for the common good in spite of the misuses of that friendship in the way one friend treats the other because the friendship is, in large part, tied to a cause that brings the friends into something larger than themselves and aims the friendship at not only a telos of virtues within the friendship but also for a more virtuous community and society that is pressed to learn charity and justice.

³⁰¹ Wadell, 142.

the dispositions and skills that are honed in us through friendships.”³⁰² He offers another useful claim, that justice looks different in different relationships. While Wadell then goes in a different direction than I will go here, this insight helps us understand how a friendship of utility can still benefit the wider society, exemplified in King’s case where he often failed to treat his friend justly yet was able to be prophetic about justice to the wider society and to give them himself. King owed Rustin more, owed him fidelity and gratitude, grounded in the courage King is so noted for. Yet King was only able to offer those to the cause of civil rights for justice that helped millions, most of whom King never knew.

The point is that while King was able to learn justice from Rustin, King was often not able to exhibit justice to his friend. Yet the unfortunate way he treated Rustin does not change how even a friendship of utility was able to be a peripatetic friendship that instilled in King the vision he needed to become the great leader he was. This is both a testament to the power of all types of friendships, especially peripatetic ones, and a critique of King for not being the kind of friend to Bayard that he should have been.

But at the early part of their friendship, Rustin and King made a perfect pairing for many reasons, including their shared Christian faith. D’Emilio insightfully comments, “Though their spiritual traditions were different, they shared a moral impulse to bear witness against evil. Rustin had been acting publicly on that impulse for two decades. King was taking his first steps.”³⁰³ While it is noteworthy that they came from two different “spiritual traditions,” I emphasize that their shared faith in Jesus and following his Way had given them, at the very

³⁰² Wadell, 153.

³⁰³ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 236.

least, this common moral directive to resist injustice. King wanted to do so before he met Rustin, and Rustin had been doing so for a long time, but it was through the development of their friendship that Rustin was able to help King, all the while increasing his virtue, at least in relation to his commitment to the nonviolent way of Jesus. For instance, there is no evidence that suggests King would have ever had any reason to object to Rustin's summary of the key social teachings of Jesus, or that Rustin objected to any of the trappings of King's Baptist tradition and the southern Black church's style of worship, preaching, or its other commitments.

Rustin brought a unique mix of ideas to the friendship that influenced King, and King became torchbearer when Rustin made his turn "From Protest to Politics," a turn to be addressed later. D'Emilio delineates what precise influence Rustin had on King, namely that which made up Rustin's activist theology. He writes, "Rustin had melded Quaker, Gandhian, and Marxist persuasions in ways that were unusual, if not unique. His Christian faith, which ran deep, kept his moral outlook clear and in focus; the Quaker inflection to his faith, with its pacifist tradition and nonconforming stance, made social activism his gospel."³⁰⁴ D'Emilio also argues that King's "grand vision of social change" came about even in his short career because Rustin's influence was so powerful. "Rustin was as responsible as anyone else for the insinuation of nonviolence into the very heart of what became the most powerful social movement in twentieth-century

³⁰⁴ D'Emilio, 236. He continues, "In Gandhi's biography, Rustin had found a practice that breathed life into his values, promising their realization in this world, not just the next. And from Marxism, Rustin drew the conviction that the pursuit of peace and racial justice was inextricably bound to the quest for economic justice. Putting these influences together made Rustin a radical strategist able to combine vision, values, and program." Most of this is similar to the development of a lot of liberation theology, but Rustin had put these pieces together decades before Cone or liberation theologians had put pen to paper. I contend that Rustin was an early Black liberation theologian.

America.”³⁰⁵ In summary, King’s life and national influence were largely a result of his friendship with Rustin.³⁰⁶

Rustin recognized his own influence on King as he reflected later about how much King needed him, in particular because Rustin told him the truth. According to classical and Christian visions of friendship, this speaks to the fact that their relationship was indeed a friendship, not just a strategic partnership, as friends speaking truth is a standard part of descriptions of friendship. It was because of this aspect of their friendship that King could be open with Rustin even about how King was dealing with the stress of being a leader of such an important and volatile movement. Thus, it was from the beginning that their friendship was peripatetic even before they literally marched beside one another. And, on top of the friendship between these two men, when King visited New York for the first time, Rustin introduced him to Randolph, Muste, and Farmer, all of whom had the experience and expertise King needed. This is the beginning of a demonstration of how Rustin created coalitions not simply based on some shared interest or values but actually via friendships, all of which, in this case, were formed and forged in the struggle, the ongoing march toward justice.

In fact, Rustin and King kept up their metaphorical march together while planning and executing literal ones. For instance, a year after the Montgomery bus boycott, they planned a

³⁰⁵ D’Emilio, 237.

³⁰⁶ Amazingly, King’s first ever publication was actually ghostwritten by Rustin. Rustin realized his own name was still viewed with suspicion or contempt by many, and he wanted to help King grow his national profile. Rustin wrote a piece on the new era of the civil rights movement that celebrated the uprising that Montgomery represented for Black folks across the South and the nation. The piece was published in *Liberation*, the magazine Rustin had helped create and for which he was an editor and regular contributor. Nearly everyone has missed out on how important Rustin was to both the formation of King and the whole of the civil rights movement. In part, this was because of Rustin’s willingness to work behind the scenes, as his Quaker faith informed a sense of humility and a willingness to do whatever was necessary, and moral, to help the movement. In this case that meant propping up King as the primary spokesperson. But also, Rustin has been forced out of view in history because of his sexuality. See D’Emilio, 238.

prayer pilgrimage, because Rustin wanted to capitalize on King's growing popularity to help grow the mass movement for which he had yearned. Rustin was still working with *In Friendship*, and by early in 1957 they had infused the movement in the South not only with cash but with new energy. *In Friendship* later raised funds specifically for King's work. They held a concert at which Coretta sang, and Rustin put together "a special issue of *Liberation* commemorating the anniversary of the boycott; Eleanor Roosevelt, Ralph Bunche, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Randolph were among the contributors."³⁰⁷ Rustin saw King as the key to keeping the momentum up, so Rustin worked to help King strategize as well as offer King encouragement.

For the next few years, up until about 1960, Rustin made it his mission to grow King's influence. Rustin played the roles of writer, editor, and promoter, helping King, for instance, get *Stride Toward Freedom* written, published, and publicized, and helping him write speeches which often included pieces of Rustin's prior talks in Africa. He also advised King for important meetings with folks including Richard Nixon. Rustin was King's guru, helping him see the big picture within which his work fit, especially the importance of broad-based economic justice as a fundamental part of helping Black folks in their struggle for freedom.

He, of course, introduced King to many other friends including those from CORE and the AFSC as well as labor leaders who could contribute financially to the struggle. Furthermore, given King's lack of ability to organize, Rustin, who wanted to have an organization that could counterbalance the NAACP, began putting together the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), with King's blessing. "While the NAACP had been successful in the courts, the SCLC would use nonviolent direct action to secure civil rights for African Americans

³⁰⁷ D'Emilio, 241. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from gaining access to the full collection of issues of *Liberation* or I would have included information directly from that source.

throughout the South.”³⁰⁸ During this time, Rustin was also still traveling to other countries speaking and acting for international leaders who were trying to help their own countries fight colonialism or organize after they had expelled colonial rulers. This occasionally worried King. While Rustin was on a trip to Africa to advise leaders of several countries fighting colonial rule there was the possibility that he could be arrested, which greatly distressed King because King knew how much he and the movement relied on Rustin. Also, during this time, Rustin was still officially working for the WRL, but they seemed to recognize the connection between ending war-making and ending racial and economic violence.

Near the end of the 1950s, their friendship, and Rustin’s mentoring of King, were complicated when Congressman Adam Clayton Powell threatened to go public with an accusation that Rustin and King had a sexual relationship. Although false, this threat caused a rift between Rustin and King, one that never fully healed, even though it found some resolution a few years later because of the famous March on Washington. In the meantime, some folks, including James Baldwin, spoke out criticizing King for his pusillanimity that caused him to betray his friend, while others noted that King would not even be such an important figure if it had not been for the tireless work of Rustin. In this case, King was unable to meet one of the key duties of friendship, fidelity. The same incident caused Stanley Levison to also end his friendship with Rustin. Thus Rustin, at least temporarily, lost two of his most important friendships, along with his primary work all at once simply because King did not have the same integrity or perseverance in his friendships as he did in his protests. Thankfully, other friends, namely Randolph, came to Rustin’s aid, but it was not enough to get Rustin back to the place he

³⁰⁸ Houtman et al., *Troublemaker for Justice*, 94.

deserved to be after years of enduring harassment, beatings, arrests, and other hardships for the cause of racial and economic justice. Even so, King marginalized Rustin once more.

It was Rustin's continued on and off again place at the margins that shaped him to be faithful not only in the difficulty of the work itself but in being committed to his friends even when they did not reciprocate. Rustin's fidelity was solidified because he knew firsthand the need for a helping hand, and he was therefore ready to offer it whenever his friends returned to him seeking help, even after they had betrayed or denied him. One wonders if he learned this from Jesus. Returning to peripatetic friendship, Rustin continued walking the straight and narrow way, always ready for his friends to rejoin him as he continued to march toward justice in his relationships. Franny Lee, one of Rustin's New York friends, wrote to Rustin, "The joyous thing for me about you . . . is that the setbacks have never set the direction. You still see the road ahead."³⁰⁹ Rustin not only saw the road ahead, but he kept walking it even when it seemed he was walking alone, though he was always willing to invite friends to walk with him.

Walking, specifically marching, became the symbol of American protest, and remains so right up to this very day, but that was not the case before the famous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This march made protest marches legitimate and effective ways of attaining justice. The march as protest had a huge impact in a nation for which protest was part of the national mythos, and now marching has become central to that mythos as well. On a more personal level for Rustin, it was this march that brought King back to Rustin, seeking his wisdom and guidance. This is evidence of the power of marching together, especially literally but also metaphorically, for justice as a kind of solder for friendships.

³⁰⁹ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 358.

In fact, the march, according to Rustin, had brought about unprecedented solidarity. Rustin declared that this was a rare time in which the whole of the Black community was united, along with white allies, and it was largely due to Rustin's example to King of fidelity in friendship that catalyzed this pervasive sense of oneness. Rustin's fidelity to King points to one more virtue of friendship worth mentioning. Rustin was no doubt hurt by King and quite angry with the way parts of their friendship played out, but Rustin understood their common cause and the longer story of marching toward justice with others, so he forgave King. Forgiveness in a peripatetic friendship may be compelled by the acknowledgement of the shared work, or it could be a result of the affection, a sense of solidarity, formed in the shared struggle of marching together through hostile territory. Rustin's forgiveness serves as another witness to the God who walks with the folks at the margins as they march for justice. Wadell writes, "We who have been reconciled to God and to one another through the cross of Christ must never allow hurt or brokenness to prevail."³¹⁰ Rustin was deeply hurt by King who treated him unjustly and betrayed him through infidelity, but he knew that hurt or brokenness could neither prevail in the world nor in his friendship with King. In this way, Rustin set an example for not only King but the other leaders of the March on Washington, and example that appears to have helped them overcome their own differences in order to work together for the common good.

The march up to the March had brought about unity, perhaps genuine friendships even, among folks who often were so at odds with one another that they could not cooperate, and the march itself had solidified that unity in a way that made collaborative work for justice more possible for years to come. This epitomizes peripatetic friendship, in which the metaphorical

³¹⁰ Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 161.

walking or marching together and the literal marching together toward the common goal of justice has a unique power to form and strengthen bonds, to create friendships, and to turn those friendships into even more than the sum of their parts as a stronger force. It is a sort of cyclical endeavor in which friendship and justice are goals that support one another just as the metaphorical and literal marching make one another possible over the years.

Although Rustin and King's friendship was healed during and after the march, especially once they had both decided to turn their attention to economic justice (on issues like full employment and/or a universal basic income), eventually homophobia snuck back in and once again pushed King away from Rustin. The FBI threatened Rustin and King both about Rustin's sexuality and his former communist ties, and again King cowered back. Levison again joined King, saying that Rustin and his friend James Baldwin should lead a "homosexual" movement instead of the work on behalf of Black and poor folks. Whereas Rustin showed tremendous fidelity, King seemed to struggle with that in multiple areas of his life.

Nonetheless, Levine argues that starting from their friendship in Montgomery when Rustin was offering "direct advice and service to King, arousing northern consciousness of what SCLC was trying to change, and raising money," he was often in other places, especially New York. Yet they maintained continuous communication, "a communication that would keep up, even when the two disagreed, until King's assassination in 1968."³¹¹ This friendship only lasted a little over a decade, and had some very rough spots, yet it set the course for much of United States and global history for generations to come. For the rest of his life, anywhere in the world, if anyone questioned Rustin's bona fides, all he or his supporters had to do was show doubters

³¹¹ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 91.

pictures of Rustin with King and talk about Montgomery and the March on Washington to note his friendship with and mentoring of King, and folks understood his importance. This connection made it possible for Rustin to help out with other mass movements in places including, for instance, Poland.³¹² Yet during the mid-1960s after many of Rustin's friends, King chief among them, had deserted Rustin and departed from the road, Rustin kept marching, and the media noticed. He was regularly in the news, and the New York Herald Tribune even referred to him as "the Socrates of the civil rights movement," perhaps referring to both his brilliant mind and his marginalization by the very people who benefitted from his brilliance, namely Martin Luther King, Jr.³¹³ Yet it was also King who became the greatest articulator of Rustin's vision because King learned to rightly see through his friendship with Rustin, even as Rustin himself seemed to be distracted from the vision, perhaps even by fantasy.

3.3 Rustin Loses His Way, King Takes Up the Mantle

Not long after the March, Rustin asserted his belief that African-Americans had entered a new era in their work for justice, namely what he called a shift "From Protest to Politics." It is necessary here to discuss Rustin's shift in strategy if not ideology in order to understand how his friendship with King changed during this period and how King took up Rustin's mantle of radical politics, including during the Meredith March Against Fear, which will be discussed in

³¹² See Levine, 239.

³¹³ That is not to say that Rustin did not have some significant issues with King, particularly King's hypocrisy around sexuality. The Nobel Peace Prize trip that Rustin planned was perhaps the most pointed example. During that trip folks among King's entourage had prostitutes brought to the hotel, and King himself might have been implicated, and this is especially ironic given King had been so critical of Rustin's own sexuality. He was frustrated because he was now tasked with maintaining the reputations of heterosexual men, many of whom were clergy, while his own sexual identity and activity was so heavily scrutinized by King and his clergy friends.

the next chapter. Additionally, this discussion will set the stage for a later constructive section on a theology of friendship in which I will argue that Rustin's changing friendships and his changing political strategies and sometimes ideas are concomitant.

The basic argument moving forward involves a threefold interpenetrating set of choices: 1) Rustin discarded the literal peripatetic element of his friendships and political action; 2) Rustin put his energy into partisan electoral politics, particularly regarding supporting certain candidates and giving more attention to voting and building the Democratic Party; and 3) Rustin encircled himself, to a significant degree, with a new set of friends. At the same time, he abandoned many of his former movement friends by choosing proximity to power over his prior successes with friends at the margins. None of this is to say that Rustin quit caring about justice, and in fact it was at the start of this time that he orchestrated the creation of the Freedom Budget. Rather, it is to contend that this triad of changes rendered Rustin less effective than before and that his moral compass was a bit askew.

Rustin published "From Protest to Politics" in 1964. Muste died in 1967, King was assassinated in 1968, and others among Rustin's friends had also died, like Malcolm X who was killed in 1965. There is good evidence to suggest that Rustin's friend and romantic interest, Tom Kahn, who was a more pro-establishment and institutional thinker, at least helped write, and perhaps even ghostwrote, this famous essay.³¹⁴ That could potentially serve as case in point regarding my argument about the way Rustin's friends shaped and reshaped his political vision.

³¹⁴ Rachele Horowitz, one of Rustin's closest friends and work associates and also a friend of Tom Kahn, argues that Kahn ghostwrote pieces for Rustin, Randolph, King, and others. Rachele Horowitz, "Tom Kahn and the Fight for Democracy: A Political Portrait and Personal Recollection | Democratiya," *Democratiya*, no. 11 (Winter 2007), https://www.dissentmagazine.org/democratiya_article/tom-kahn-and-the-fight-for-democracy-a-political-portrait-and-personal-recollection. Long and Neagle confirmed that Kahn had written the essay. Long noted that one of the early drafts of the essay had Kahn's "name or initials on it." Michael G. Long and Walter Neagle, email correspondence with author, February 18 and 19, 2021.

Rustin took on politics instead of protest because his friend literally gave him words to do so. It is difficult to know to what degree Rustin had really adopted the ideas in that essay at the time of its release, but he moved toward that position over the next several years. I will, however, proceed as if Rustin had adopted those views, though a debate could be had at this point about the degree to which he shared Kahn's views at the time the essay was released and, for the most part, for the rest of Rustin's life. Rustin removed the peripatetic aspect of peripatetic friendship. The loss of this school of continuing education allowed Rustin to be a little more detached from the folks that he needed to continue learning with and teaching. Rustin was still for friendship, justice, and the like, but by removing the peripatetic element, friendships changed and so did his vision of the way to a just society. While Rustin opted out of marches for civil rights in the United States, he still participated in a number of other marches, demonstrations, and protests in other places for various justice-related causes. Rustin recognized marching as a useful political tool, but he missed its pedagogical capacity.

Other friends claimed Rustin had abandoned his principles. As such, many of his radical movement friends distanced themselves from him, though they claimed that it was Rustin who created the distance. At the same time, Rustin was building stronger friendships with labor leaders, politicians, and others with power. One cannot draw the direction of causation, and it in fact was probably cyclical in that the loss of old friends caused Rustin to head in new directions and the decisions he made as a result caused him to lose some friends. Either way, the combination of Rustin's new approach to socio-political issues and the change in his friend group exacerbated each other, rendering Rustin less effective and faithful to his call. That is not to say that Rustin stopped caring about and working for justice causes nor that he gave up his most fundamental theological and moral commitments. Nonetheless, this needs to be explored in

order to understand how friendships affect who people are. I will look at the change in Rustin's strategy as well as how Rustin's friendship so effected King that King became the voice for ideas about which Rustin spoke less often and with less vigor.

From 1964, it is more difficult to refer to Rustin as an "ambivalent anarchist" as he turned his attention to partisan politics, yet he never lost sight of his commitment to others' flourishing as siblings in their shared humanity. For example, he saw building coalitions of potential voters in the Democratic Party as a way to push President Lyndon Johnson to the left, even though Rustin openly said he did not trust Johnson, even if Johnson had defeated Barry Goldwater, a racist with regressive ideas. I see it as similar to Barth's *Grenzfall* in that Rustin was unwilling to be backed into a corner and was willing to use a new strategy that still fit his basic beliefs because it had become necessary in his mind.³¹⁵

Voting and engaging in partisan politics were not, for Rustin, about merely the lesser of two evils. They were about continuing what he had been doing his whole career, namely forcing elected officials and the populace that supported them, to move in more just directions through whatever nonviolent means necessary. He realized that without the decades of prior work and the way it had formed hundreds of thousands of people, that voting for politicians who were less evil than their opponents would merely be a bandage that would only cover wounds of injustice, leaving voters with little recourse other than trying again the next cycle, which would lead to

³¹⁵ *Grenzfall* means something like a borderline or extreme case. Barth used it to talk about being open to the possibility that God might indeed command the use of violence in certain moments, and Christians should therefore be open to the command of God. In Rustin's case, the alliance with Johnson and the Democrats very well could have been an extreme case because Rustin believed strongly that God was calling Christians and others of goodwill to create a more economically just society. He saw the signing of Civil Rights Act and other legislation as an important step toward that goal. However, it was the threat of Barry Goldwater's election that created the conditions that seemed to indicate that God was calling Rustin to prevent that, which Rustin determined required his vocal support of Johnson.

endless justifications of just being a little bit better than the other party as being a sufficient political goal. Instead, the protests had built into those folks both the virtue to settle for nothing less than justice with the hope for the possibility of friendships, and the ability to mobilize if elected officials did not meet expectations. Such mobilization would not primarily focus on getting the next person in office but on the same kind of work they had been doing for years, moving toward justice. They would bring it about with or without elected officials, but in a way that would most likely push or pull those elected officials along until they used their authority to help with the cause. For Rustin, this was just a new stage of political imagination, of tactics, one that could be discarded if it became ineffectual, just like other previous tactics. For instance, he noted that this focus was for “this year,” indicating that plans could change in future years depending on the particulars of the injustice being faced and the goals of that moment to be met. And even when he used fiery rhetoric, such as, “We will stay in these damn streets until every Negro in the country can vote,” the focus was not on voting itself but a populace with the virtue necessary to vote smartly and to back up their votes with politics of other sorts.³¹⁶ Rustin’s politics remained essentially thoughtfully ad hoc to a degree that *ambivalent* anarchist is still an apt descriptor.

For example, Rustin recognized that Selma and other battlegrounds across the South had tested the efficaciousness of nonviolence and raised questions about how that force could be brought to the legislative halls of D.C. He thought the time was right to get other federal legislation passed like The Freedom Budget that he soon put together with some of his friends. Rustin did, however, want to use the particular vehicle of the Democrat Party in the South as a

³¹⁶ D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 406.

way of getting such legislation passed, but he argued that the only way for Black folks to be able to achieve goals of racial liberation was for them to also gain economic equity.

Additionally, Rustin saw that battle as not only local but national and not merely about ballot boxes but a comprehensive social program in which whole communities and the network of communities of the nation were to work for changes that included individual citizens, businesses, politicians, nonprofit organizations, and every other grouping of people of goodwill. For Rustin, tying voting rights to economic justice seemed to be primarily because he recognized that the recalcitrance of the political right in regard to voting also reflected their resistance to the changes already being brought about. Their fight against the Voting Rights Act was a last-ditch effort for certain white southerners to demonstrate their dominance over Black people, something that they could translate into holding onto their own economic dominance or, for poorer whites, their aspirations. Rustin's concern was primarily about severing another, seemingly final, thread that legally held together the dominance of white people over Black folks, and once that thread was cut a new garment could be sewn, a garment that included economic access for every poor person, especially Black folks who had been most disenfranchised. Rustin saw the lack of access to voting itself as a hurdle for economic access, even if he knew that voting might be part of his overall ad hoc approach that took each moment and assessed the political realities and most effective responses, thus showing a willingness to refocus efforts away from the ballot box if those efforts did not bring about desired results. Likewise, Rustin knew that for voting to be of any importance, the voting populace needed the virtues necessary to recognize and pursue justice, virtues mostly formed through peripatetic friendships.

3.4 Inside with Power, Outside Without

Many of Rustin's friends and colleagues, including Bob Moses of SNCC, stood outside the White House in protest of President Johnson's racist and oppressive policies in Southeast Asia. At the same time, Rustin was inside watching President Johnson sign the Voting Rights Act. "To the pacifists outside the White House, Rustin's presence inside symbolized a parting of the ways."³¹⁷ This assessment could be right because it really might have been the point at which Rustin, in part, started to lose his way. It is sad that he had, in the name of one good, been willing to be silent on other evils, something that the Rustin many decades prior would have abhorred. In fact, Rustin had gone to prison years earlier not only because of his belief that all war was wrong, but also because he believed killing people of color on the other side of the world represented a threat to people of color at home. Younger Rustin would have protested the Rustin of this moment, and rightly so.

King, as Rustin's protégé, took up the mantle, and in words that were near verbatim to Rustin's words against World War II, King spoke out against Vietnam, criticizing the president even when it was against his other political interests.³¹⁸ In fact, it was not long before the signing of the Voting Rights Act that Rustin himself penned a "Declaration of Conscience," in which he linked the problems in America to those in Vietnam. Yet now he was silent about the latter in order to change the former. Thus, I trace Rustin's turn to the right in later decades, and his new group of friends over that time as well, to his decision to focus on the vote, even if he was better able than most to recognize the political power of the masses in the streets and the virtue

³¹⁷ D'Emilio, 407. D'Emilio seems critical of Rustin along similar lines, though with less emphasis on the role of the fight for the vote than in my own analysis.

³¹⁸ Immediately after the Nobel Peace prize trip in 1964, Rustin quit the WRL where he had been working for over two decades. His stint as a professional anti-war organizer and protestor was officially over. Soon after, Randolph helped Rustin found the A. Philip Randolph institute, which Rustin led until his death.

necessary for political engagement and economic advancement. Rustin's success here might indicate the beginning of his failures of conscience later, perhaps evidencing the adage about power corrupting. My intention here is in no way to criticize Rustin for fighting for the rights of African-Americans and others to have free and equal access to vote, as that has and is still rightly a central focus for African-American movements for justice. Rather, I am highlighting that Rustin turned his attention from many of the practices that had been so effective, like marching and protesting, toward the collective power of voting. My argument is that when Rustin turned his attention to ensuring that certain folks were elected he neglected his former avenues for venturing toward a more just society, avenues that were effective and politically powerful.³¹⁹

Many of Rustin's friends felt Rustin had betrayed them, and some of them, notably David Dellinger, criticized him for losing his way. Rustin's own previous words also condemned his move away from peripatetic friendships as he moved toward the Democratic Party as the vehicle for achieving his goals. In 1946, Rustin wrote a response to Thurgood Marshall who was cautioning against marching and radical nonviolent civil disobedience. Rustin wrote to Marshall, "Unjust social laws and patterns do not change because supreme courts deliver just decisions. One needs merely to observe the continued practice of Jim Crow in interstate travel, six months after the Supreme Court's decision, to see the necessity of resistance. Social progress comes from

³¹⁹ My own antipathy toward voting, given my anarchist commitments, definitely shows here and perhaps distorts my vision regarding the importance of voting to marginalized people, and no doubt, from my privileged position, I can downplay that importance. It is necessary that I clarify again that I do not want to discourage African-Americans or others, especially oppressed minorities, from voting, and that I am absolutely supportive of free and equal access to the voting booth for all people. At the time I am writing this, the issue of voter suppression has become especially salient again as many states have passed disgusting legislation that clearly disenfranchises people of color and folks in poverty. Those laws should be overturned as they are blatantly racist and classist. My problem with Rustin's shift in focus is that, as I will show in the conclusion via the work of Terrance Wiley, Rustin perhaps began to undervalue the political power of protest. That is one reason why I have titled this project "Politics and Protest" because they are inherently intertwined, and I am convinced that coalition politics is at its best when it springs out of protest and the peripatetic friendships that come with it.

struggle; all freedom demands a price.”³²⁰ Rustin’s claim here does not depend on partisan political commitments or even the government, broadly speaking, to fix broken social and moral systems. Yet he later claimed that his shift in politics was merely a change in strategy based on the newfound access Black folks supposedly had that would allow them, along with a coalition of labor and liberals, to create a more just society without walking, marching, and struggling together. Rustin had removed his most valuable tool for social change, cutting off the next generation from learning in the peripatetic school that shaped Rustin and nearly all his friends. He exchanged his birthright place among the pantheon of the greatest peripatetic friends and leaders in history for a bowl of watered-down soup of abdicating responsibility to politicians and the state, rather than winning it by marching with his friends. None of this discounts partisan electoral work per se; it only contextualizes it as one potential way of working for a more just society, while maintaining the claim that no societal changes will ever put an end to the need for peripatetic friendships, both for their own sake and for the sake of the world.

Now that Rustin had left the path that he had so faithfully been marching on, his friends continued walking while letting Rustin know he should rejoin them. Rustin’s mates and co-editors at *Liberation* responded to his “From Protest to Politics” with an essay, “Coalition Politics or Nonviolent Revolution,” in which Staughton Lynd called Rustin’s new approach a “kind of elitism” that impeded the growing power of disenfranchised masses. His words were written in anger and with a sense of betrayal as he called Rustin a “labor lieutenant of

³²⁰ Rustin in Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 115. Rustin continues, “But if anyone at this date in history believes that the 'white problem,' which is one of privilege, can be settled without some violence, he is mistaken and fails to realize the ends to which men can be driven to hold on to what they consider their privileges. This is why Negroes and whites who participate in direct action must pledge themselves to nonviolence in word and deed. For in this way alone can the inevitable violence [they encounter] be reduced to a minimum.”

capitalism” and continued his salvo with several barbs intended to sting Rustin to his core.³²¹ The critiques were swift and harsh, but at least now they had substantive arguments (though laced with direct attacks), as opposed to most of the earlier critiques of Rustin that focused on his sexuality or his previous and brief ties to communism or some other ad hominem. Readers of Dellinger and Lynd’s critiques can sense hurt and betrayal, but they still point to some of the issues at play and try to make a case that Rustin himself would have been likely to make in earlier times.³²²

The question in all of this is if such accusations were true and if Rustin’s turn in strategy actually was a turn in mentality and basic commitments even if that would not become totally apparent until much later. Or was it more complicated because Rustin’s politics and pacifism transcended traditional frameworks? Rustin could be and often was an equal opportunity critic when commenting on various conflicts. The answer is unclear, but we do know that rather than sitting back expecting politicians to fix everything Rustin approached Johnson’s election by calling King to rally people who would keep Johnson accountable. This shows that for Rustin, voting was not an end and was hardly even a means, but instead it was simply an addition to hard political work. Voting was a blip on his radar screen in the work for justice, which is part of the reason it is so unfortunate that during this period he focused so much of his attention there rather than on his previous work.

³²¹ Staughton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Nonviolent Revolution?,” *Liberation* 10, no. 4 (July 1965), 18–21.

³²² Dellinger was one of the primary voices who argued that Rustin’s sexuality would not impede his work at the WRL. Dellinger argued this with Muste, backing Rustin completely even when Muste resigned in protest of hiring Rustin. Dellinger definitely saw Rustin as a traitor or sellout later when Rustin would not say much against the Vietnam War.

In fact, Rustin might have even overestimated the value of spending so much time and energy trying to get Johnson elected as it only took a short time for Johnson, in spite of his signing of the Voting Rights Act, to actively push against many of Rustin's dearest commitments. In "From Protest to Politics" Rustin did not disavow radical political factions and approaches and actually said they were needed. Unfortunately, Rustin had perhaps created too much distance between himself and many former radical friends, especially because of the way he became increasingly quiet about the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, the coalition that Rustin wanted to build in the Democratic Party was falling apart as many radicals moved away from partisan electoral politics and his religious friends were protesting the war, even as Rustin counseled some of them, including King, to focus on issues in the United States. Establishment Democrats continued to invest in the party and paid little heed to Rustin, while many other constituencies also had their focus squarely on ending the war rather than Rustin's progressive agenda for national affairs. Rustin was unable to wrangle the different groups as he had done in the past while many of his friendships were fading. D'Emilio succinctly describes what happened during this period. He writes, "Rustin kept moving toward the Democratic Party but almost no one from his earlier political worlds followed. His allies became figures like Wilkins, whose vision of racial justice extended just a few paces beyond the ground of formal legal equality, or union leaders for whom liberal reform, not the restructuring of the political economy, was the outer limit of what they could imagine."³²³ Rustin's friend group changed and Rustin's politics seemed unable to account for these changes just as many of his friends were unable to support Rustin's political vision that made partisan electoral politics central to achieving his

³²³ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 453.

goals. He had lost sight of the truth that, according to Wadell, “Our primary social responsibility is not to be a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, but to be a people who astound others by the goodness, truthfulness, justice, mercy, peace, and joy they see in us.”³²⁴ Rustin still cared deeply about the uplift of Black and poor folks, but perhaps he had forgotten the element of witness or, in Quaker terms, testimony that placed truth above power as the means by which liberatory work was to be conducted.

Rustin failed to recognize that even the most radical organizations institutionalize and begin to seek their own continued existence over their original commitments, whereas some of his radical friends realized just that. Thus, right as Rustin started to put his faith in institutions, namely the US government, even with his reservations, some of his friends were moving away from even previously radical groups in favor of new movements that seemed aligned not with power but the powerless. Rustin was badly wrong in his belief that he could, with any group, move an existing political party as far in any direction as he would like it to go. He had thus pinned his hopes, as many do today, on the false hope that their party will own their values rather than protect itself and minimalize political change while maximizing investment of many in the propping up of the party by getting out the vote, even when a candidate is at best suited for harm reduction. Rustin had settled and instead of setting and meeting radical political goals of previous times in his life, he now struggled to even keep his own political imagination intact.

With all of that said, I do wonder if this does not represent the turning point down a road that eventually led Rustin too hard to the right and the more problematic positions he held later in life. It is likewise interesting that Rustin was most effective when he was at the margins. The

³²⁴ Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 120.

closer he moved to power the more ineffectual he became and the more his views departed from his earliest Quaker commitments; his faith itself largely dissolved, though Rustin never publicly disavowed it.

Whatever the case, Rustin was able to keep a connection with King, and even grow close to him again. King helped Rustin keep hold of his moral commitments during this confusing and uncertain time for Rustin, and Rustin remained convinced that King was the most important public figure of the movement. King also expressed some of Rustin's current ideas, arguing that for Black folks the march toward justice required partisan politics. Yet King was adamant about marching and other nonviolent civil disobedience even while looking to partisan politics as an additional tool to be used in the continued struggle. This struggle went beyond where people could sit on the bus or eat dinner to issues like adequate housing, quality jobs, and excellent public education. King asserted Rustin's central belief at the time that Black folks needed to create partisan political coalitions with others because they did not have enough clout on their own to bring about legislative and socio-economic changes they sought. King expressed this all during a speech at a gathering of the SCLC, a gathering for which Rustin created the economic agenda that the group endorsed. Rustin essentially presented a summary of the forthcoming Freedom Budget, addressing employment, healthcare, and other measures to abolish poverty. All of these ideas made their way into the Freedom Budget, but Rustin and King's work together during this time indicates Rustin's ongoing commitment to political friendships that connected with economic justice.

3.5 Rustin and King Face Down Black Separatism and Militancy

As Black militancy and separatism began to rise again during the late 1960s, Rustin took a stand against that position, and that stand can be seen in his influence on King, something that

will be explored later in a discussion on King, the Meredith March, and peripatetic friendship in the next chapter. In the meantime, Rustin left an indelible mark on King, so even as Rustin's politics shifted, one can look at his relationship with King, the one who kept earlier Rustin's vision alive, to see exactly how Rustin's political attitude had shifted. Rustin and King still agreed on the end goals, like racial freedom and broad economic equity, and some means like nonviolence, but King kept on making the peripatetic aspect of the political activity central, while Rustin drifted toward a less dynamic approach.

King was open early on to nonviolence and adopted Rustin and Smiley's instruction and advice, but he was now reluctant to follow Rustin's lead on other political ideas and strategies. Yet in the middle of the 1960s, King spoke as if the Rustin of the 1940s and '50s was his speechwriter. King pushed political alliances, addressed domestic economic issues, and called for people to organize and march to gain partisan political power. King seemed to be among the minority of Rustin's close friends who did not reject his "From Protest to Politics" approach outright, though King's version beckoned others, including Rustin, to adopt an approach of protest *and* politics, which was faithful to Rustin's complete vision. King likewise joined Rustin, as he had done before, in criticizing Black separatism, nationalism, and potentially violent militance. Together they took on "Black power," arguing that the key issues now were economic, and that lower socio-economic classes needed to join together across racial lines to improve their collective financial situation. Rustin and King still shared a vision to remake the whole of American society.

While Rustin and King did work together and shared similar political visions, the overlap is overlapped inasmuch as King still managed to keep his radical politics alive. For instance, King spoke out against Vietnam, and even used language nearly identical to that which Rustin

had used in his protest of World War II. However, Rustin and King were often on different pages, with King on pages Rustin had written with his earlier life, and Rustin now offering advice to King that King was wary to accept even though Rustin had previously been King's master strategist. In fact, looking back, before the March on Washington, Rustin worked with King on what they called the Prayer Pilgrimage. Like the march, this prayer pilgrimage took place at the Lincoln Memorial, and there King delivered another address. In this address, which foreshadowed Rustin's shift (represented in his essay "From Protest to Politics), King bellowed "Give us the right to vote! Give us the ballot and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs into the abiding good deeds of orderly citizens. Give us the ballot and we will fill our legislative halls with men of goodwill."³²⁵ At the time Rustin told King that he needed more religious language and less focus on the ballot box.

In fact, it is almost as if the two had done a reversal, as Rustin had read the speech and thought that it did not have enough "spiritual content," nor "enough emphasis on nonviolence. Rustin, the increasingly secular man, had advised the man of God to be more spiritual. The man of God had ignored Rustin and given an almost entirely secular speech that emphasized not nonviolent direct action but traditional politics."³²⁶ Things seemed nearly the opposite at the March on Washington, and certainly as Rustin turned more toward electoral politics, King remained steadfast in his commitment to mass movements. Here we can see how the friends influenced each other even as they sometimes seemed to take on the other's position. Sometimes they were on different pages precisely because they had listened to one another. Two things are

³²⁵ Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 100.

³²⁶ Levine, 100.

notable here. First, there is evidence that Rustin was not secularizing to the extent Levine claims, as Rustin talked about the importance of his Quaker faith in interviews at the end of his life. Also, if Rustin was secular at this time as Levine claims, then it is fascinating that he wanted to lead a venture called the Prayer Pilgrimage and exhort a pastor to include more spiritual content. Second, this speech by King is not as well remembered while his Dream speech is among the most famous in American history and is thus quoted often. The former is about the power of the ballot box whereas the latter speaks to a deeper reality in the human soul. The Dream speech was largely about justice and friendship as the means and ends of their work via the power of nonviolent direct action, by marching and protesting together, and eventually befriending those who were thought to be enemies, rather than focusing as much on partisan politics and voting.

Returning to the mid-1960s, King became more committed to the idea that racial justice required economic justice, an idea that Rustin had planted in his head a decade earlier and had watered down over the years. As King was looking to expand his work into other parts of the country, a largely unsuccessful venture, he finally grasped fully the need to eradicate poverty as part of a racial justice agenda. At this point, they both turned their attention to paving the way for public acceptance of the Freedom Budget that was soon to come. King wanted to see the same sort of coalition that Rustin envisioned, but it is possible that Rustin had pushed away some of the key constituencies and strategies that might have helped the Freedom Budget become law.

Rustin and King had some disagreements over how to approach the idea of Black power, but they were relatively minor, especially compared to their different responses to the Vietnam War. Rustin quit speaking up against the war while King ramped up his efforts to critique the war. Rustin was wary that speaking out against the war might impede social progress in the United States, while King understood, in part thanks to Rustin's tutelage, that the war could not

be neatly separated from issues closer to home. Yet as time went on, Rustin advised King to quit speaking out against the war. This was to be expected from some of King's other advisers, but it was almost shocking coming from Rustin who had spent his entire adult life speaking out against war, and more so, making connections between the global peace movement with the national civil rights movement. One need only look back a few decades to see the language with which Rustin spoke out against World War II, and the detailed salvo against militarism in *Speak Truth to Power*. Rustin appears to have done a full reversal, which is difficult to explain apart from his new closeness and allegiance to President Johnson and the Democratic Party. Was he afraid to protest because that might move him away from other political goals or because it might move him away from the center of power? Was it Rustin who was now showing timidity while King demonstrated courage?

Even though Rustin was right that there would be political blowback for King speaking out against the Vietnam War, King's words could have been written by the Rustin of the 1940s and '50s. D'Emilio puts this well:

Two decades earlier, when Rustin had delivered the William Penn lecture to American Quakers, he proclaimed that the violence of the cold war was leading to "moral suicide" in America, and that "the spark of God in each of us is . . . all but completely smothered." He held out a moral challenge: "We cannot remain honest unless we are opposed to injustice wherever it occurs." These were the sentiments he had brought to King early on. Now the pupil had surpassed the teacher. King was reaching audiences larger than any that had ever heard Rustin's antiwar message, but Rustin neither listened nor approved. While King was now declaring, "We must stop this war," Rustin seemed to be saying, "I will not let this war stop me."³²⁷

And yet it was stopping him. Rustin was trying to get people to support his Freedom Budget, but everyone was preoccupied with anti-war work, and many did not want to ally themselves with

³²⁷ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 459.

Rustin precisely because he was refusing to speak out against the war. Even King, who had signed his name to the Freedom Budget and written its foreword, gave his attention to speaking out against the war and thus had little time for supporting Rustin or the Freedom Budget.

3.6 The Power of Influence in Peripatetic Friendship

King had been influenced by Rustin enough, however, that he was not giving up on economic justice work. He wanted to put together a poor people's campaign, employing the very civil disobedience and direct-action tactics he had learned from Rustin.³²⁸ Yet Rustin seemed to oppose such tactics being brought to DC, even though that was Rustin's plan for the March on Washington only four years prior. During this time King and his circle paid little attention to Rustin, which had happened before, but this time it was Rustin who turned his back on King and his other friends. Although Rustin's motives are unclear (it could be speculated that it was Rustin's newfound place of prominence and power, or perhaps just a genuine change of mindset regarding tactics, or something else) he nevertheless vocalized his dissent. Rustin had hastily made the decision to follow a new path, and now it was not King failing to march with him but he failing to march with King. That is not to say that Rustin had strayed completely from the path, only that he was now lagging behind, taking the occasional detour. Thankfully, King kept marching, sticking with the ideology and strategies his friend Rustin had taught him. The next chapter will show how King became a Rustinian ambassador, as on the route of the Meredith

³²⁸ On the subject of unforeseen influence, Rustin had a vision for that as well. According to Azaransky, "History proves, according to Rustin, that refusal can have far-reaching effects. Thoreau's refusal to pay taxes, though impotent to stop the Mexican-American war or the spread of slavery, nevertheless had greater effects than he imagined, for it influenced Gandhi and the movement he inspired: 'Thoreau's resistance was to move through history and help bring freedom to four hundred million people, far exceeding the number Thoreau attempted to free in the middle of the 19th century.' One person's refusal had world-changing results, Rustin argued." Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 158.

March, but now I will glean from these friendships and prior my theological and philosophical work on friendship to create a “Rustinian Theology of Friendship” that foregrounds important aspects of friendship that can then be utilized to show how friendship is a proper Christian response to wealth inequity.

The point here is to highlight the way that friends influence one another, and that one friend might need the other to carry on the other’s ideals. It also reemphasizes the relationship between friendship and justice because when one friend becomes sidetracked, even with the best of intentions, the other friend can keep on the journey as a witness, beckoning the lost friend to come back to the path that they had trod before, the road on which their peripatetic friendship could continue to grow and be the means by which the virtues of personal and social justice could be realized. The work of justice is largely the work of preemptive friendship, in that the ones working for justice ought to assume that their work is also an invitation into friendship and the justice therein. It is the prevenient grace of God that has reconciled us to God, and that grace works through our efforts at friendship to reconcile us with others. King knew this because Rustin taught it to him, but Rustin then left it to King to carry on that particular aspect of Rustin’s work until King was tragically gunned down.

3.7 King as Disciple on Meredith March

I have begun making connections among Rustin’s friendships in the work of the Montgomery bus boycott and some of the ways those friendships led to the famous March on Washington, and its centerpiece, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, as well as what folks thought about the march both during it and immediately afterwards. King brought all of this with him

into the Meredith March three years later.³²⁹ James Meredith, who began the march, was shot in 1966, and several prominent leaders, among them King and Stokely Carmichael, decided to join up and complete the Meredith March. These leaders linked arms at the beginning and the end of the march in a show of solidarity, as well as peripatetic friendship. As they walked and talked, King, Carmichael, and others debated the future of the movement.³³⁰

The Meredith March, like many others, served as a peripatetic school as they argued about the value of violence and nonviolence, about the inclusion or exclusion of white folks from the movement, and especially about the slogan “Black Power.”³³¹ Many people wanted to popularize the slogan “Black Power,” and believed that violence might be a necessary part of

³²⁹ While King had pushed Rustin out of his inner circle, Rustin was building relationships with young activists, including those who founded SNCC. When King later wanted to connect with those young activists to harness their growing collective socio-political power, he then brought Rustin back into the fold, presumably to get access to the network Rustin had built. That network included folks like Carmichael and others who were the up and coming leaders of the movement. Without Rustin’s connections to them, King might not have even had a relationship with his key interlocutors on the Meredith March. But thanks to Rustin, King was able to not only connect with these younger activists but to also, almost ironically, be Rustin’s mouthpiece during that march.

³³⁰ It wasn’t just King whom Rustin had influenced. For a good while Carmichael was one of Bayard’s biggest supporters and admirers. At one point, during Rustin’s trouble after his arrest and exile from the movement, Carmichael said, “Bayard was one of the first I had direct contact with [of whom] I could really say, ‘That’s what I want to be.’ He was like superman, hooking socialism up with the black movement, organizing blacks.” Anderson, *Troubles I’ve Seen*, 238. Of course, by the time of the Meredith March, Carmichael had lost “faith in Rustin’s approach to the civil rights struggle, a transformation that led him gradually into a passionate embrace of Black Power.” Anderson, 238. Daniel Levine says that right after the March on Washington, “Rustin even seemed to anticipate the ‘Black Power’ slogan. ‘The need of the civil rights movement is not to get someone else to manipulate power. They will not do it in our interests. Our need is to exert our own power, and the main power we have is our black bodies, backed by the bodies of as many white people as will stand with us. We need to . . . create a situation in which society cannot function without yielding to our just demands.’ But he made clear that this disruption could not be violent. ‘If violence could ever be justified, it would be justifiable now.’ But the aims of the civil rights movement cannot be reached with guns. ‘We need to go into the streets all over the country and to make a mountain of creative social confusion until the power structure is altered.’” Levine, *Civil Rights Movement*, 148. These emphases were picked up by King who discussed them with fellow leaders in the Meredith March, which is later documented in three books: *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* by Martin Luther King, Jr.; *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton; and *Three Fiftths of a Man* by Floyd McKissick.

³³¹ See Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads*. He shows that much of the debate on the Meredith March was over two slogans or ideas, “Black Power” and “Freedom Now,” with Carmichael the key proponent of the former and King as the main voice for the latter.

gaining or asserting that power. Others, like Martin Luther King, Jr., continued to call for nonviolence, eschewing the slogan. In Sunflower County, King spoke to the crowd arguing that violence was futile. He said, “When I die I’m going to die for something, and at that moment, I guess, it will be necessary, but I’m trying to say something to you, my friends, that I hope we will all gain tonight, and that is that we have a power. We can’t win violently.”³³² King was not opposed to Black power; he believed that Black people had power in their nonviolent resolve. Whatever the various connotations of “Black Power,” the phrase stuck after the march and became a springboard for what became known as African-American Liberation Theology.

Historians have said that the marchers acknowledged that friendship was an important factor in strengthening their resolve to finish the march and continue on as activists. Likewise, others have recognized that in all of their sharp disagreements, King and Carmichael respected one another, which hints at some sort of friendship. No doubt they had many deep disagreements and each man had some intractable beliefs. Over the course of the march, they exchanged many rhetorical salvos, some in private and others in public. The irreconcilability of some of their competing positions also led to a bit of animosity, yet they continued the conversation with some level of mutual respect. It is worth noting at this point two claims that might suggest that Carmichael and King did indeed have something of a friendship, even if it was not of the deepest sort.

3.8 Rustin and Malcolm X: A Brief Excursus on a Complicated Friendship

³³² Goudsouzian, 181.

Rustin's friendship with Malcolm X is significant, but it lacked a literal peripatetic element. Nonetheless, this friendship is instructive for my purposes in at least two ways. First, it demonstrates the potential for friendships to be versatile in that they need not be limited to any particular categories. And second, this friendship begins to explain how it is that King shared in peripatetic friendship with Carmichael and others on the Meredith March.

Howard University was reluctant to have Malcolm X speak on their campus because they did not want to be seen as promoting his separatist, and potentially violent, agenda. That a university, particularly a well-respected, historically Black university, refused to have one of the great Black intellectuals of the day to speak on their campus incensed Rustin who was committed to the exchange of ideas and fighting ideological battles in hopes of preventing physical ones. So, Rustin hatched a plan, calling the administration at Howard to suggest that they invite him and Malcolm to debate, so they would not be seen as promoting Malcolm's ideas, but students would still have the chance to hear them and could evaluate/assess the ideologies presented and figure out what, if any, movement they should support.

Rustin objected to almost every part of Malcolm's approach, yet years later in his near end of life reflections Rustin said, "Malcolm and I were quite, very good friends."³³³ In fact, Carbado and Weise comment that "although Rustin objected to armed self-defense on principle, and rejected Malcolm's by-any-means-necessary mantra, he managed friendly relations with the firebrand minister."³³⁴ And thus it was that Rustin arranged for the debate at Howard. "I told Malcolm that I could arrange his appearance on the campus but strictly on my terms. 'What are

³³³ Rustin, Oral Interview Three, 103.

³³⁴ Carbado and Weise, *Time on Two Crosses*, xxvii.

your terms?’ he asked. I said, ‘we’ll have a debate. You’ll present your views, and then I’ll attack you as someone having no political, social, or economic program for dealing with the problems of blacks.’ He said, ‘I’ll take you up on that.’”³³⁵ Rustin’s advocacy for Malcolm to have a platform at Howard, and his semi-joking way of informing Malcolm about the event both indicate a departure from most classical views of friendship, but they point to the possibilities of friendship for Christians who can extend or accept the invitation into friendship with folks very unlike themselves.

In an Aristotelian view, it would seem that these men could not be friends based on their radically different childhood and young adulthood circumstances alone. Could men so different, from such different circumstances, holding such different views be friends? Aristotle has a presumption that equality is a necessary precondition for true or complete friendship. I will address Christian friendship, and particularly the Black church’s and Rustin’s understanding of friendship in chapter four, but let it suffice for now to say that one of Rustin’s core beliefs, the equality of all people, made it possible for him to befriend someone whose life and circumstances and beliefs were radically different than his own.

One of Rustin’s first encounters with Malcolm was on a radio interview in which the two were invited to have a discussion on race relations in America. In the debate Malcolm started by extoling the virtues of Elijah Muhammad. He then moved on to talking about the economic program he supported, following Muhammad. Malcolm said, “US New and World Report pointed out that Mr. Muhammad was successful in stressing the importance of economics. The point behind his program—farms to feed our people, factories to manufacture goods for

³³⁵ Carbado and Weise, xxvii.

ourselves, businesses to create jobs for ourselves—is to be economically independent rather than sit around waiting for the white man to give us jobs.”³³⁶ When Rustin got his chance to speak, he immediately addressed Malcolm’s assertion that Black folks were just waiting around for white folks to give them jobs. Rustin said,

I believe the great majority of the Negro people, black people, are not seeking anything from anyone. They are seeking to become full-fledged citizens. Their ancestors have toiled in this country, contributing greatly to it. The United States belongs to no particular people, and in my view the great majority of Negroes and their leaders take integration as their key word—which means that rightly or wrongly they seek to become an integral part of the United States. We have, I believe, much work yet to do, both politically and through the courts, but I believe we have reached the point where most Negroes, from a sense of dignity and pride, have organized themselves to demand to become an integral part of all the institutions of the U.S. We are doing things by direct action which we feel will further this cause. We believe that justice for all people, including Negroes, can be achieved.³³⁷

Rustin approved of most aspects of Malcolm’s theory except for the lynchpin idea holding it together: Black separatism. Rustin rejected the idea both on religious and moral grounds (believing in the equality of all people and their need of one another) as well as on practical grounds (recognizing that a minority people, most of whom were poor, could not just get some land from their oppressors and turn it into a Black paradise). Perhaps ironically, Malcolm stressed how he wanted to acquire land that the Black man could call his home. One wonders if he considered Black Africans who already had their own nations or who were in the fight for independence, several with the help and counsel of Rustin. Why did there need to be a place for Black folks when such a place already existed? And, if Malcolm and his sympathizers decided to

³³⁶ Malcolm X, quoted in Rustin, *Time on Two Crosses*, 164.

³³⁷ Rustin, *Time on Two Crosses*, 164.

get land “somewhere on this earth,” would that then make them colonizers just the same as those who they were fighting against precisely because of colonization?

It is pertinent to briefly mention that both Bayard and Malcolm had religious commitments that shaped their speech and action, sometimes in very different directions. Lee C. Camp offers some insight here as he compares the narrative logic of the Jesus story and the Muhammad story. Camp for instance notes the words from Jesus about enemy love, along with Paul’s words of blessing one’s persecutors and avoiding vengeance, whereas he notes Muhammad’s words to retaliate in a manner similar to an eye for an eye. Now, Camp is not making an argument that Islam is inherently violent. Rather, he says that the logics of the Jesus story and the Muhammad story lead in different directions, while further claiming that the Christian just war tradition functions more in line with the Muhammad story than the Jesus story as the Jesus story points to nonviolence all the way down. If Camp’s analysis is correct, then he sees the Muhammad story to which Malcolm is attached as offering an avenue for violence in limited circumstances, which comports with Malcolm’s own understanding of violence not as the first measure but a last resort in the pursuit of justice, while, of course, Bayard’s place in the Jesus story causes him to embrace nonviolence.³³⁸ In fact, Rustin’s own logic in essays like

³³⁸ Camp summarizes the logic of the two different stories by writing that “the narrative logic of the Qur’an and of the New Testament are not ‘basically the same.’ The fundamental storyline of the two differs: Jesus comes announcing the kingdom of God, is persecuted for his message, calls his followers to ‘take up their cross’ and follow in that way, and loves his enemies unto the very point at which they kill him. His early followers . . . embody this narrative logic in their life together. Muhammad comes proclaiming the rule of the one God, proclaiming monotheism in the midst of a pagan and warring and unjust culture; is persecuted for his message of justice and mercy; tells his followers not to fight back—for a while—and then, in time, permits the measured use of violent force on behalf of justice.” It is correct to place Rustin squarely in the narrative logic of the Jesus story and Malcolm in the logic of the Muhammad story. Lee C. Camp, *Who Is My Enemy?: Questions American Christians Must Face about Islam—and Themselves* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 44.

Speak Truth to Power accord well with Camp's telling of the Jesus story and how those who are a part of that story should conduct themselves.³³⁹

Rustin continues with a key insight, saying, "Now affection for the other fellow is not possible without a great sense of dignity of oneself, and therefore the dignity of the Negro for me is not something that is an aside. It is an essential of the struggle."³⁴⁰ Rustin also adds this little bit that is important in talking about the success of the Montgomery bus boycott: "When they believed in themselves they could be socially affectionate to the opposition while at the same time they could be extremely militant and walking and being prepared for sacrifice."³⁴¹ Friendship, for Rustin, then, is at first based on love for oneself, but then just action, especially with others, helps grow that love for self until one is also able to love neighbors and even enemies. One might paraphrase Jesus here that we are to attempt to befriend our neighbors as we befriend ourselves. This is the concrete outworking of love in its larger, more general sense, and for Rustin is both the faithful and practical attitude and action of befriending others as one befriends oneself.

Here Rustin sums up peripatetic friendship, the affection that grows for oneself and one's neighbor, even one's enemy, when one joins in the march toward justice, in this case actually walking, militantly even, knowing that your sacrifice has the power to change your enemy into a friend and to strike at the edifices of structural oppression. The basis for peripatetic friendship is

³³⁹ As for Malcolm, he came to embrace the mercy aspect of the Muhammad story more deeply after he participated in Hajj. He returned with a clarified understanding about the possibilities of folks from different races living in communion and even friendship with one another, perhaps.

³⁴⁰ Rustin, *Time on Two Crosses*, 171.

³⁴¹ Rustin, 171.

walking through the struggle of learning to love one's neighbor as oneself, and when another does so that reciprocal love will make the friendship and propel each friend onward in the march.

Rustin's friendship with Malcolm definitely did not prevent Rustin from being critical of Malcolm's ideas. Rustin's review of Malcolm's autobiography exemplifies this. He notes that Malcolm was the son of a Baptist preacher who supported Marcus Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement. So, we can see already the difference in Malcolm and Bayard's childhood. Malcolm also experienced lots of violence as a child, mostly in the form of white folks killing his family members. He likely had PTSD and predicted that he too would die by violence. This might explain why he embraced a potentially violent way to free Black folks from oppression. If one expects that one will die by violence then it should follow that one embraces violence as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy; the one who lives by the sword will die by it (Mt. 26:52).

Now that we've seen how Rustin could be both friendly and critical of those proposing "Black Power" or any form of nationalism or separatism, let us look at how Martin Luther King was a sort of Rustinian ambassador who carried on the conversation on an actual march where people were living out the literal meaning of peripatetic friendships. As King was disciplined by Rustin, so too did he try to disciple others in a way that is reminiscent not only of Aristotle's Peripatetic School but of Jesus's own peripatetic school in which he literally walked with his disciples for years teaching them about the kingdom of God and its peaceable, just, and hospitable realities.

3.9 Returning to Rustin, King, and Peripatetic Friendship on the Meredith March

The meaning of friendship is challenged when considering how Rustin and King might have been friends with folks like Malcolm X and Carmichael, but there were at least the beginnings of a friendship present if Aelred is correct in writing, "Friendship begins with a

simple dialogue between two people who respect one another and have learned to listen to each other.”³⁴² It is questionable how much they really did listen to one another, but the fact that they thought one another worthy of engaging during the march and beyond it in their writings suggests mutual respect. Second, there is a proverb that likewise suggests that Carmichael and King might have indeed had a friendship even in the midst of their heated quarrels. Proverbs 27:6 says, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (NIV). The two men continued to wound one another, but those wounds were doled out primarily in direct ways as they attempted to work out the best way to achieve liberation for Black people. Whether this counts as the reciprocated goodwill that Aristotle says is necessary for friendship remains an open question for now, but we can see that wounds from a friend are to be trusted as these men, along with others, shot barbs at one another throughout the march as they tried to figure out how the movement should move forward. Every leader wanted justice even as they disagreed on what that justice entailed and how to achieve it. However, the friendships formed on the march strengthened the resolve of activists. For instance, one young marcher, Coby Smith, recounted “how the march’s routines, friendships, and stresses, and delights molded his future as a militant activist.”³⁴³ Smith shows that at least one among the number of marchers recognized the role of friendship in his own development as an activist.

Further, I argue that although Rustin was not at the Meredith March, perhaps his friendship with King was evidenced in King’s words, in that they had a kind of “union of the will” along with their “mutual affection,” both classic hallmarks of friendship. At the very least,

³⁴² Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, 13.

³⁴³ Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads*, 100.

King's commentary is drenched with Rustin's influence, a conclusion based on the near identical arguments that Rustin has with Carmichael elsewhere. Ultimately, "Black Power" became a popular slogan, to the dismay of Rustin and King. It was not that they opposed the idea, but they thought the slogan was counter-productive, especially to their vision of the beloved community, or brotherhood of man. Based on his experiences in Montgomery and Washington with Rustin, King saw Black power as the power of nonviolence and interracial cooperation to form the beloved community. He saw Black power in loving friend and enemy alike.

3.10 Conclusion: Fidelity in Friendship

In terms of fidelity in friendship and the work for justice, we now have three friendships that exemplify three different ways in which fidelity, or lack thereof, can play out as friends march together, learning, teaching, and calling into being a more just world. I have narrated and evaluated Rustinian examples of friendship in order to point to Rustin and his friendships as a source for theological and Christian communal reflection on friendship and its relationship to justice. I suggest that peripatetic friendship, which is demonstrated throughout Rustin's life, opened Rustin up to the broadest possible range of friendships so long as they were seeking virtue and as long as they had some level of virtues like fidelity and truth-telling that maintain the friendship, especially in the struggle for justice. Rustin is part of a tradition, several really, that passes through generations as King becomes a Rustinian ambassador, imitating him in disagreements with "Black Power" advocates and other Black separatists during the Meredith March Against Fear, even while King shaped them into his own language. Rustin's friendships with Muste, Randolph, and King provide significant fodder for attempting to understand how

friendship shapes tradition and how in turn tradition shapes communities. Thus, we who call ourselves Christian, and call ourselves pacifists, and call ourselves justice advocates, and call ourselves adversaries of economic inequity can be a part of this tradition as well. But we need to learn it as if we are also friends of Rustin and his other friends and their activists and scholarly descendants. This recognition gives us reason to ask what we can learn from Rustin, especially in his friendships, and helps us answer that question by examining the peripatetic nature of his friendships and the place of fidelity in that unique world of the interpersonal struggle for justice.

If Rustin embodied a life of faithful peripatetic friendships, and those friendships served as a school for virtue and social change, as I have contended, then the lessons highlighted in those friendships and Rustin's faith are instructive for today. I have already discussed numerous ways that Rustin's friendships and the virtues learned and shared in them have import for the twenty-first century. It is appropriate now to draw on those lessons in order to more comprehensively flesh out what a Rustinian friendship theology in response to wealth inequity looks like, both in what Rustin did as the culmination of his commitment to economic justice and in what such a theology might illumine for current and future scholars, activists, politicians, and all who are called to walk the narrow way.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Introduction: Rustin's Quaker Legacy

Rev. Dr. William Barber, contemporary master of peripatetic friendship building and teaching and activist heir of Rustin and King, noted in a 2016 speech about Quaker contributions to the Black struggle, “If it wasn’t for brother Rustin, the march wouldn’t have ever got out of the gate. . . . Nobody else could handle all those egos, putting them in their place.”³⁴⁴ Of course he is talking about the famous March on Washington, but this could rightly be said about Rustin for most of his life as he marched and brought others along with him, something that Barber recognizes Rustin was uniquely qualified to do as a Quaker who could bring order to potential chaos, something Rustin really did for his whole life. For example, David Yount argues that “Martin Luther King, Jr.’s dream was a Quaker dream based on the conviction that there is that of God in every person regardless of race, culture, gender, or faith. In 1964 the Quakers nominated Dr. King for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ironically, Dr. King’s death provoked violence across the nation. Quakers successfully defused violent confrontations, helping return the fight for civil rights to its nonviolent roots. Bayard Rustin, a lifelong Quaker, made nonviolence his mission.”³⁴⁵ Again, we have considerable civil rights heavyweights whose visions for their

³⁴⁴ Rev. Barber: *Bayard Rustin and Quaker History* (American Friends Service Committee), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmN8rsgjubo>.

³⁴⁵ David Yount, *How the Quakers Invented America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 129–30.

activism is both inspired and shaped by Rustin's influence, one who was his friend in real life and one who is his friend through books and speeches and other documents.³⁴⁶

I argue that Rustin was able to do the work that he did because of the network of friends (and Friends) Rustin had around him who were plotting, marching, and otherwise working and learning together about what it could mean to help make the world more just both for minority races in the United States and for poor people of all races. Looking at his life as narrated in previous chapters, I will take his intellectual biography (the story I have told about his friendships and interlocutors) and his work for justice (particularly economic justice) to create a Rustinian friendship theology in response to wealth inequity with a particular focus on universal basic income as an appropriate outworking of such theology. As part of this effort, I will also situate Rustin in the Black radical tradition and the Black liberation theology tradition, arguing simply that he should be read seriously in these traditions to see where scholars place him and what they might learn from him in the ongoing work for the liberation of African-Americans as well as all poor people.

4.2 Rustin's Activism and Responding Theologically to Wealth Inequity

My wording throughout, as it relates to wealth and money, has been that of "inequity" instead of "inequality," because the former at least connotes if not denotes unjust division of

³⁴⁶ See James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), in which he suggests that we can journey with people of the past through their writings. In fact, they can become a sort of friend to us that offers guidance, consolation, wisdom, and more. Reading Rustin and about Rustin has caused me to see him as a friend with whom I am journeying in order that I may be challenged to reflect on my own life and help my church community do likewise. In Smith's arrangement, biography as theology could be combined with the theological writings and justifications people offered for their actions, which makes for a friendship that transcends time.

goods and services. From the very beginning of his work as an activist, Rustin was concerned with the financial well-being of others, first with specific groups with whom he had interactions, then eventually for the whole nation. Later in life, Rustin talked about the civil rights movement as one limited to the South and only focused on three objectives: “The right to vote, the right to use public accommodations, and the right to send your child to the school of your choice. It had nothing to do with the North, fundamentally . . . and it did not address itself in any way to the economic and social problems of black people. . . . [The civil rights movement/marches] succeeded because its objectives were very concrete and exceedingly limited.”³⁴⁷ Rustin brought some of this with him to the Freedom Budget at least to the extent that he wanted to discuss concrete proposals though their scope was not “exceedingly limited” in the same way. The abolition of poverty, adequate housing for all, jobs and/or incomes for all people, and other objectives of the budget were concrete and the budget’s plan made that even clearer, but they were grand in their scope. This, clearly, did not dissuade Rustin from working on and promoting the budget, but it did not achieve the same success as many of his earlier efforts.

Thus, as Rustin had always been interested in the improvement of Black folks’ and others’ economic situation, he dedicated much of his time in the mid-to-late 1960s to the economic sphere, working with Randolph to create and run the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which worked closely with the AFL-CIO and other unions to help create jobs and higher

³⁴⁷ Bayard Rustin on *The Success and Failures of The Civil Rights Movement (1979)* (reelblack), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grSbGG8uM-0>.

wages.³⁴⁸ It was during this time that Rustin and Randolph pulled together a team to work on the “Freedom Budget for All Americans,” which was intended to abolish poverty within a decade.

Soon after King’s assassination, a number of scholars and activists published an Economic Bill of Rights, something that King had argued for during the later part of his activist career and life as well as in his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, published in 1967. Rustin took the five general statements included in that Economic Bill of Rights and turned each one into specific prescriptive legislative acts that would help ensure that each element of the Economic Bill of Rights had practical ways in which it could be achieved.³⁴⁹ The primary document expounding on concrete ways to abolish poverty was the “Freedom Budget for All Americans,” in which Rustin and a number of friends spell out a plan to end poverty within a decade.

4.3 The “Freedom Budget for All Americans” as Rustin’s Response to Poverty

Rustin is largely known for the success of the March on Washington, yet his and Randolph’s most important work lost its early traction and appeal, eventually fading into obscurity. I intend to bring it back into focus as both a way of understanding Rustin’s commitments better and for exploring the possibility of its theological promise for thinking about poverty and vast wealth inequity as a theological and moral problem that needs a response.

Bayard Rustin worked closely with friends like A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King Jr. and with economists like Leon Keyserling to create the “Freedom Budget for All

³⁴⁸ Today the APRI is considered “The Senior Constituency Group of the AFL-CIO” according to their website, <http://www.apri.org/>.

³⁴⁹ A bullet point version of King’s Economic Bill of Rights with Rustin’s policy ideas along, with an older version by the Franklin Roosevelt administration can be found at <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/68ebr.htm>.

Americans.” It was a fairly concrete document proposing various types of public policies that would make for a more economically just society. The Budget was tied to the notion that America ought not only have a Bill of Rights, but it ought to also have an Economic Bill of Rights that would guarantee all Americans a basic, but dignified existence in which they could either find fair paying jobs or receive a basic income. While trying to drum up support for the Freedom Budget, Rustin wrote a number of letters. Michael Long, in his introduction to a collection of Rustin’s letters, describes the Freedom Budget project this way: “As head of the APRI, Rustin was looking for a dramatic way to give expression to both the ‘Negro-labor-liberal’ alliance he was building and his tactical shift from protest to politics. He settled on an idea—a fully developed policy, really—that he named ‘The Freedom Budget for All Americans,’ and on October 26, A. Philip Randolph introduced the budget to a national media corps that then gave it wide play.”³⁵⁰

By the time of the creation of the Freedom Budget, Rustin was heading up the newly-created A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI), an organization that was created, in part, to give Rustin leadership over an organization since he had primarily worked under others up to that point. The APRI had and still has strong ties to unions, particularly the AFL-CIO, in part because of Rustin’s friendship with George Meany, who was the organization’s leader at the time, so it makes sense that Rustin finally turned his attention to economic matters in a more focused and concerted way than he had before, even though those issues were part of his activism all along in a variety of ways. Rustin’s friendship and close working relationship with Meany made Rustin obligated to the AFL-CIO as well as the Democratic party to which Rustin had already shown

³⁵⁰ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 320.

loyalty. Meany's approach was different than Rustin's in that Meany said that his work involved "supporting your friends and punishing your enemies," which also lead Meany to be an ardent supporter of a two-party system because it allowed for such political behavior.³⁵¹ Some have said this made Rustin beholden to those funders and their interests, which has some truth, but Rustin carried on being concerned with economic and class issues just as he had been doing since his early days working with Randolph.

Whatever the case, Rustin was still working with Randolph and King. King wrote a short foreword to the document, which notably was written in October 1966 around the same time that King published *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, which had many similar themes, and was published a year after the Meredith March during which King served, in part, as a Rustinian ambassador, arguing these issues with other civil rights leaders. It is in *Where Do We Go from Here?* that King wrote his most fully developed theology of community. That theology rightly focuses on the abolition of poverty, which was the primary stated goal of the Freedom Budget. For example, in the foreword to the Freedom Budget, King writes,

The long journey ahead requires that we emphasize the needs of all America's poor, for there is no way merely to find work, or adequate housing, or quality-integrated schools for Negroes alone. We shall eliminate slums for Negroes when we destroy ghettos and build new cities for all. We shall eliminate unemployment for Negroes when we demand full and fair employment for all. We shall produce an educated and skilled Negro mass when we achieve a twentieth century educational system for all.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Jerry Flint, "George Meany Is Dead; Pioneer in Labor Was 85," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1980, <https://www.nytimes.com/1980/01/11/archives/george-meany-is-dead-pioneer-in-labor-was-85-outlived-friends-and.html>.

³⁵² Martin Luther King Jr., foreword to A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Martin Luther King Jr., "A 'Freedom Budget' for All Americans: A Summary" (A. Philip Randolph Institute, January 1967), <https://www.prrac.org/pdf/FreedomBudget.pdf>, page number unknown.

Here, King directly responds to Carmichael and others who wanted to focus on Black separatism and Black power, which King and the budget authors respond to with force and incredulity. They emphasize that this budget was for *all* Americans, not just African-Americans or poor folks.

This follows with Kingian and Rustinian thought about the equality of all people, and the recognition that helping impoverished folks in general would make life better for African-Americans. Also, what King called the “beloved community” and Rustin called the “brotherhood of man” was the temporal, earthly reality of human flourishing for all folks (at least in America) as an expression of the Kingdom of God in that time and place. I call this peripatetic friendship, both as a means and an end. In order for this to happen, the invitation to peripatetic friendship on the road to justice must be open to all and concerned about all people with an emphasis on folks in poverty whose invitations to friendship were often limited by their socio-economic circumstances.

King further writes in his foreword, “This human rights emphasis is an integral part of the Freedom Budget and sets, I believe, a new a creative tone for the great challenge we yet face.” And, “The Freedom Budget is essential if the Negro people are to make further progress. It is essential if we are to maintain social peace. It is a political necessity. It is a moral commitment to the fundamental principles on which this nation was founded.”³⁵³ In short, King starts off the Freedom Budget with a shot across the bow at Black separatists and others who thought a peaceful society required segregation and separation, but it is also an attack on politically and fiscally conservative folks about their moral failings related poverty and racism in America. King, like Rustin, believed that a healthy American society required integration, financial equity,

³⁵³ King, foreword to “Freedom Budget,” page number unknown.

and opportunities for people to form friendships to create his vision of beloved community.

Randolph, the least religious of the group, in his introduction to the Freedom Budget about the group who met to create the document, writes, “These forces have not come together to demand help for the Negro. Rather, we meet on a common ground of determination that in this, the richest and most productive society ever known to man, the scourge of poverty can and must be abolished—not in some distant future, not in this generation, but within the next ten years.”³⁵⁴

The audacity to write this, let alone believe and plan for it to come to fruition, is incredible, but it is a reflection of the kind of boldness that had become a hallmark of this group of friends as they had marched and worked together over the decades.

Randolph offers another important insight, one that Rustin believed wholeheartedly as well, writing, “The tragedy is that the workings of our economy so often pit the white poor and the black poor against each other at the bottom of society. The tragedy is that groups only one generation removed from poverty themselves, haunted by the memory of scarcity and fearful of slipping back, step on the fingers of those struggling up the ladder.”³⁵⁵ This is important because it recognizes the role of powerful elites in pitting poor white and poor Black folks against each

³⁵⁴A. Philip Randolph, introduction to Randolph et al., “Freedom Budget,” page number unknown. I have neither space nor inclination to delve deeply into one common objection that Christians, in particular, bring up when people start talking like this, but it is necessary to note. Often, when faced with the possibility of the abolition or eradication of poverty, Christians will quote Jesus, without context of course, noting that he said in Matthew 26:11 that the poor will always be with us as if that is intended to discourage people from seeking ambitious goals regarding poverty. What these Christians do not realize is that Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 15:11, which commands care for the poor. Thus, what Jesus had in mind is that as long as poverty is present, then it is society’s responsibility to do something about it, or at least that it is the job of the church to fight poverty. Further, it suggests that if there are poor people, that responsibility rests on our shoulders because God has provided enough if we would simply be better sharers, an important part of being a good friend.

³⁵⁵ Randolph, Introduction to “Freedom Budget,” page number unknown.

other but offers a clarion call for them to join forces for their shared economic well-being.³⁵⁶ Likewise, it is an indirect critique of proponents of Black power and Black separatism because Rustin believed that it undermined the possibility of class consciousness and solidarity, and ultimately it left powerful people mostly unchecked. But, as is often the case in the writings of Randolph, Rustin, and King, it does not name anybody in particular because all three men held onto hope that they could still work with these other civil rights leaders of matters of shared concern. In a way, the Freedom Budget itself serves as an invitation to a variety of Black leaders, reminding them that poverty was and is the most pressing issue in the African-American community because along with economic power could also come power to address other issues facing them.³⁵⁷ Likewise, it is a call to poor white folks to overcome their racism, recognizing the truth already stated above that their own freedom and well-being was tied to that of their fellow citizens of other races.³⁵⁸ The Freedom Budget declares that racial justice is tied to economic justice for everyone, Black or white. It needs to be stated again: The Freedom Budget assumes that the civil rights movement could not ultimately find its telos without correcting injustices against poor white folks, a group most often associated with hatred and violence toward Black folks. This demonstrates as powerfully as anything I have yet said that Rustin and

³⁵⁶ This might seem like a purely Marxist idea, but rather it comes straight out of the pages of the New Testament in which communities of friends lived, served, worshipped, and fellowshiped together as a way of life so that every person's needs would be met by the community.

³⁵⁷ See Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," in *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context*, ed. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 90–112. Rustin saw the various social and political interests involved and knew that such changes could be quite complicated, but he knew that removing people from poverty was a good worth pursuing in its own right, yet it is also likely to have positive residual effects of social and political status.

³⁵⁸ This is a remarkable gesture toward white folks, some of the very white folks of the Strom Thurmond type, who had been so hostile to Randolph, Rustin, King, and thousands of their compatriots. It is both an amazing act toward reconciliation and an indication that Black and white folks could and should work together for one another's liberation, especially among poor Black and white folks.

his friends like Randolph, King, and others were committed to the equality of all people and to working for a world in which even one's own tormentors are properly cared for. Along with being a powerful expression of grace, forgiveness, the offer of reconciliation, and especially friendship, the Freedom Budget works on the assumption that abolishing poverty would itself contribute significantly to the demise of racism.³⁵⁹

The Freedom Budget is incredibly ambitious. Its authors claim it “is a practical, step-by-step plan for wiping out poverty in America during the next 10 years.” Not only that, they claim it is good even for richer Americans, arguing, “It will mean more money in your pocket. It will mean better schools for your children. It will mean better homes for you and your neighbors. It will mean clean air to breathe and comfortable cities to live in. It will mean adequate medical care when you are sick.”³⁶⁰ The authors claim to have something for everyone.³⁶¹ In terms of its ambitious scope the authors go on to say, “For the first time, everyone in America who is fit and able to work will have a job. For the first time, everyone who can't work, or shouldn't be working, will have an income adequate to live in comfort and dignity. And that is freedom. For freedom from want is the basic freedom from which all others flow.”³⁶² In short, King and Rustin shared a theological vision in which human flourishing and opportunity were central and both demanded the kinds of normal and political friendships that Rustin had been forming and

³⁵⁹ There could be all sorts of debate over these claims, particularly about whether ending poverty would also end racism, but the point is not to say that Rustin and company were right in their assumptions here. Rather, it is only to note that this is what they believed and for which they peaceably fought.

³⁶⁰ Randolph et al., “Freedom Budget,” 7.

³⁶¹ This seems to be the majority of the progressive political agenda in America to this day. Did the Freedom Budget overpromise? Perhaps, but we will never know precisely because most of it was never adopted or implemented even though it did get a hearing in Congress.

³⁶² Randolph et al., 7.

advocating for all of his adult life. For Rustin, this became his new form of marching, a significant departure from the literal marching, in part hindering the metaphorical march toward justice. Notably, King, again as a sort of Rustinian, continued that kind of work until his assassination, presumably because he still saw the connection between means and ends in which such actions were part of creating a more just and peaceable society. It is worth noting that for Rustin his focus on friendship and community and protest had more effect on policy than his involvement in partisan politics. In earlier times he was able to be less partisan, or largely nonpartisan, and thus unite wider groups in order to bring about a more just society. He focused on building peripatetic friendships and helping grow those networks of friendships crucial to his mission. In short, Rustin lost sight of something he knew before, namely that good policymaking often requires peripatetic friendship and protest.³⁶³

Reading the Freedom Budget can lead one to perceive it as utopian, and perhaps it was in the sense that the authors' objectives have remained mostly unfulfilled. But Randolph argues, "It is not a visionary or utopian. It is feasible. It is concrete. It is specific. It is quantitative. It talks dollars and cents. It sets goals and priorities. It tells how these can be achieved."³⁶⁴ Perhaps the most utopian part of the document was Randolph's statement, "And it places the responsibility

³⁶³ McClendon argues that something similar happened to Bonhoeffer as his community in the Confessing Church dissolved. Bonhoeffer was left with just brute politics, that is, politics removed from the community of discernment and friendships discerning the common good, and thus he gets caught up in the plot to assassinate Hitler. See James Wm. McClendon, *Ethics*, vol. 1, Systematic Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 199–208. For Bonhoeffer, as with Rustin, being disconnected from peripatetic friendships seemed to have deleterious effects, leaving both men less effective and less faithful, at least to their own stated commitments, than they had been at prior times.

³⁶⁴ Rustin is also adamant that this plan was not "pie in the sky" but was a viable guide to ending poverty within a decade. He calls the plan "just a simple recognition of the fact that we as a nation never had it so good. That we have the ability and the means to provide adequately for everyone—white or Black; in the city or on the farm; fisherman or mountaineer may have his share in our national wealth." Randolph et al., "Freedom Budget," 8.

for leadership with the Federal Government, which alone has the resources to equal the task.”³⁶⁵ His argument is understandable, and even correct so far as it goes, but it is utopian to expect the federal government to embrace such a bold set of reforms even under the best of circumstances, let alone during the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. The federal government could only possibly take up the Freedom Budget if it received the same “in the streets” kind of work that led to, for instance, the passage of the Voting Rights Act, but it never did. By the mid-1970s it had lost virtually all momentum, yet its stated goals and plans are worthy of attention even today.³⁶⁶ We might not expect to see the broad reforms it calls for, but aspects of the Freedom Budget certainly ought to be able to gain popular support with the right leadership and spokespeople. This points to Rustin’s failure, going back to “From Protest to Politics,” that he had forgotten about the power of peripatetic friendships. Rustin no longer marched and he discouraged others from doing so. In this, Rustin had lost sight of one of the key pieces to his moral formation.

To some degree Rustin’s hope in the federal government without the pressure of the massive protests and civil disobedience was naïve, as though he could smoothly maneuver through the political morass that is Washington, DC in order to persuade legislators of the efficacy of the Freedom Budget. Rustin should have relied on what had gotten him to this point,

³⁶⁵ Randolph, Introduction to “Freedom Budget,” page number unknown.

³⁶⁶ One significant factor that hindered the adoption of the Freedom Budget was the rise in popularity of the Libertarians like Milton Friedman as well as organizations like the Mont Pelerin Society that helped an essentially libertarian economic mindset win the day over Rustin and others’ socialism or even Keynesian approaches, and that has arguably led to the greatest wealth inequities since the French Revolution. There were numerous other reasons, too many to go into, why this happened, but I do not want to focus on the why as much as the fact that I think if Rustin had kept literally marching and protesting there would have been more likelihood of success, at least based on his prior track record and the noted concern by multiple Presidents about large scale marches on Washington as well as various civil disobedience tactics.

namely marching with his friends to show the force behind the Freedom Budget in a way that a list of signatories simply could not do.³⁶⁷

Nonetheless, Rustin, naturally, put a short moral case for the budget right up front. He writes,

The moral case for the Freedom Budget is compelling. In a time of unparalleled prosperity there are 34 million Americans living in poverty. Another 28 million live just on the edge, with income so low that any unexpected expense or loss of income could thrust them into poverty. Almost one-third of our nation lives in poverty or want. . . . Just as compelling, this massive lump of despair stands as a threat to our future prosperity. Poverty and want breed crime, disease, and social unrest. We need the potential purchasing and productive power the poor would achieve, if we are to continue to grow and prosper.³⁶⁸

Further, Rustin quotes Randolph who rightly notes that “here in these United States, where there can be no economic or technical excuse for it, poverty is not only a private tragedy but, in a sense, a public crime.”³⁶⁹ This language of the latter half of the statement is not too different than that of many of the early church writers, and it reflects the best of the Christian tradition that has

³⁶⁷ Granted, the list of signatories is impressive, to say the least. For example, it includes John Lewis, Reinhold Niebuhr, Ralph Bunche, along with countless other academics, including economists, sociologists, theologians, law professors, clergy, celebrities, political leaders, and activists. It even included Stokely Carmichael, but it lacks the emotional appeal of a march or the threats of nonviolent civil disobedience if the Freedom Budget was not heeded. And, sure enough, even with all the supposed support for the budget, it never got legislated, at least in part because Rustin had forgotten about or abandoned the power of peripatetic friendships en masse calling for justice. He knew all the way back from his work with Randolph on the march that never happened because the President conceded, that even just the threat of that sort of action could sway the legislative process, yet his group of friends was changing and this new group was not as fond of building their friendships around marching for justice even if the friends did indeed care about justice. Justice may not require peripatetic friendship, but achieving it sure does benefit from friends marching in the struggle together.

³⁶⁸ Randolph et al., “Freedom Budget”, 8–9.

³⁶⁹ Randolph et al., 8.

almost always and everywhere considered poverty to be a failing of the church, if not the society as a whole.³⁷⁰

The Budget's stated goals are high-reaching, thus the accusations of utopianism:

"The Freedom Budget provides seven basic objectives, which taken together will achieve this great goal within 10 years. They are:

1. To provide full employment for all who are willing and able to work, including those who need education or training to make them willing and able.
2. To assure decent and adequate wages to all who work.
3. To assure a decent living standard to those who cannot or should not work.
4. To wipe out slum ghettos and provide decent homes for all Americans.
5. To provide decent medical care and adequate educational opportunities to all Americans, at a cost they can afford.
6. To purify our air and water and develop our transportation and natural resources on a scale suitable to our growing needs.
7. To unite sustained full employment with sustained full production and high economic growth."³⁷¹

The basic plan was to work off of the expected economic growth over that decade and use that growth to fund the projects, and their primary focus was on creating enough well-paying jobs for everyone willing and able to work. The budget also asserted that if there were enough of these sorts of jobs, discrimination would necessarily end because people could easily move to another job, thus giving employees a bit of a more level playing field with employers and subdue at least a substantial part of the effects of racism and classism in American society.

³⁷⁰ See Basil and Chrysostom especially for writings on poverty the community's guilt for it, which is also a reflection of why Ezekiel said that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, because their citizens were arrogant, apathetic to the plight of the poor, and gluttonous, rather than generous (See Ezekiel 16:49–50).

³⁷¹ Randolph et al., 9. There is certainly a question about to what degree it is possible to have ongoing economic growth without destroying the environment. It seems that is one reason that Freedom Budget should be brought back into public conversation because it could inform The New Green Deal and other efforts that take Rustin et al.'s concerns seriously but also be environmentally friendly and sustainable. It is also possible that this could be rolled out like a jubilee where every generation or two there is a new Freedom Budget of sorts that changes to address the needs of the time, including both care for the land and impoverished and oppressed people.

One unique facet of the Freedom Budget is that it claimed it would not take any money away from national defense, which is odd given Rustin's work for peace. However, when one considers that one of Rustin's first big activist projects was working with Randolph for the integration of the military and defense industry, this does not seem as curious. It was not that Rustin wanted anyone to join the military, as his own imprisonment for refusing the draft attests, but he knew the Freedom Budget had a better chance of being enacted if assurance was given to more hawkish members of Congress. Like the work on integration years prior, Rustin prioritized the possibility of coalition building and the recognition of the equality of all people. In the Freedom Budget Rustin also addresses economic theory, working from a framework that utilizes some modern economic ideas. For instance, he writes that it will not interfere "with private supply and demand," but rather employ "just an enlightened self-interest, using what we have in the best possible way."³⁷²

The budget summary also has a question-and-answer section. The first question and answer are important for how we talk about the economy today. It asks if the economic growth at the time was helping poor folks, to which the response is basically "no." This is similar today

³⁷² Randolph et al., 12. Interestingly, there is a sense in which this plan affirms Adam Smith's claim that folks work out of their own self-interest but takes an approach that demonstrates that our own selfish interests are actually deeply intertwined. In a sense it might be a version of economically-based friendship inasmuch as one needs the other and they thus work together starting from and building up a sense of connection that actually looks a lot like Rustin had been doing his whole life as he formed a variety of friendships, many of which had mutual benefit but also reached out to benefit others. This plan, I think, reflects Rustin's earliest and most robust commitments about the equality and connection of persons as one human family based on his belief that each person was created and loved by God. In a way, Rustin and his compatriots were trying to use the federal government as a sort of conduit to disciple the American people to realize that their individual journeys were actually bound up with one another, not just in some vague moral sense but in actual economic practice policy. It should likewise be noted that Rustin and others stated in the budget their belief that this would decrease crime, including violent crime, thus reflecting another of Rustin's key commitments. For Rustin, this budget was not simply to help folks have more buying power, it was intended to help folks increase their moral acuity as well, whether that be having options other than violence and crime for survival on one hand, or realizing that sharing resources not only benefits others, it can benefit those sharing resources as well, on the other.

when folks talk about the NASDAQ going up as if that is a good indicator of how average Americans (let alone poor Americans) are doing. The same is true of talk about unemployment numbers as many jobs are part time or low wage, so they are not helping decrease poverty but may in fact be exacerbating it. This is why Rustin and others were so adamant that wages must be federally controlled at least on the bottom end and for those unable to work.

In the second question and answer, they argue that folks want out of poverty, and if presented with real opportunities to escape poverty, poor folks will work hard to make it happen. Thus, the cycle of poverty will be broken under this plan because it provides those opportunities as well as other important helping factors like quality housing and the destruction of ghettos that have the power to trap people within their confines.³⁷³ If anything on the part of the poor has held them back it has been their despair, but with good opportunities that despair would be assuaged and thus poor folks would not be forced to make decisions from that frame of mind. The next question asks if poor people can even be relied upon to keep a job. That relates to the question and answer above, because in many cases poor folks get demoralized at low-paying jobs where they are treated poorly and thus sometimes quit or get fired. With good paying jobs and access to a different kind of lifestyle, folks in poverty will be more inclined to want to keep jobs than under the current circumstances. The answer Rustin gives claims that

20% of those in poverty are in families whose breadwinners already work full-time but at wages below the poverty level. Another 40% are victims of unemployment or underemployment; their problem is not unwillingness to work but the absence of jobs. Thus, fully 60% of the poverty problem could be eliminated if we achieved full employment at decent wages. The remaining 40% of those in poverty either cannot or should not be working. Included are the physically disabled, the elderly, women with

³⁷³ It is worth noting Tommie Shelby argues against the destruction of ghettos because of their importance for Black solidarity. Rustin would push back against that as it sounds a whole lot like the Carmichaels of his own day. Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

young children, etc. For the ‘Freedom Budget’ improved public assistance, social security and other payments, culminating in a guaranteed annual income.³⁷⁴

Now, folks with policy expertise may certainly be able to poke holes in the details of the plan, but one can tell it was carefully crafted to try to assuage concerns of various political positions. It tried to appeal to fiscal conservatives and social liberals at the same time. Certainly, they did not appeal to anyone who believed in small government as they put the necessary work of the federal government right out front. In many ways this plan resembled The New Deal in its push for public works projects, such as building 9.3 million new housing units paid for by the federal government with the expectation that economic growth would cover the cost after the fact.³⁷⁵ It would accomplish two goals at once: building decent housing for poor folks and putting people to work. Likewise, jobs would be created through works on environmental projects combined with expanded utilities services. Next the plan points to the need for hundreds of thousands of new classrooms and new teachers as well as improvements to institutions of higher education. Healthcare facilities and staff were also to be added. All of this would increase the number of jobs as well as increase salaries, thus meaning more people would be paying more taxes to cover the cost of the improvements. The private sector would benefit as well in their plan. It should also be noted, as Michael Long does, that the key economist behind the plan, Leon Keyserling,

³⁷⁴ Randolph et al., 18. This idea is only a hair’s breadth away from the universal basic income that I advocate for later.

³⁷⁵ For a contemporary discussion that covers similar ground, Matt Bruenig argues for something similar today. See Matt Bruenig, “Nickel-and-Dime Socialism,” *Matt Bruenig* (blog), February 11, 2014, <https://mattbruenig.medium.com/nickel-and-dime-socialism-47fcec406295>. Also, see Matt Bruenig, “Why We Need Social Housing in the US,” *The Guardian*, April 5, 2018, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/05/why-we-need-social-housing-in-the-us> for one issue that needs to be considered if a new version of The Freedom Budget was to be written in these times.

who had helped formulate the New Deal legislation for President Roosevelt and then served as chair of President Truman's Council of Economic Advisors—was the main architect of the Freedom Budget. According to a front-page article in the New York Times, Keyserling 'said the program would neither require new taxes nor cut into the expenditure for the war in Vietnam.' The economist added that this was possible because 'economic growth dividends' would more than pay for the ten-year budget plan. At the news conference announcing the budget, Donald Slaiman, a representative from the AFL-CIO, also claimed that his labor organization rejected "the proposition that the social and economic progress must be suspended because of the costs of the war."³⁷⁶

Keyserling clearly had the bona fides to put together a plan that needed to be taken seriously.

And it was until it began to disappear, not because of fierce critics, but because of Rustin's own move away from the streets, several high profile assassinations, the height of Vietnam protests, and other political turmoil that distracted even some of the Budget's most ardent supporters.³⁷⁷

The relationship between the Vietnam War and the Freedom Budget put Rustin's varying commitments to the test.³⁷⁸ While Rustin claims "that the Freedom Budget makes no

³⁷⁶ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 320. Rustin wrote to Keyserling to thank him for his contribution, writing, "We have had many requests from government agencies and individuals for copies of the Freedom Budget, and are now mailing them out. We are keeping a complete file of all orders, and I will discuss the follow-up steps with you soon." Rustin and M. Long, 320. Rustin was deeply appreciative to Keyserling and wrote to him as a friend to thank him for his work. He especially focused on Keyserling's ability to communicate across socio-economic lines, and Rustin's note points back to Rustin's own concern for building political friendships among folks who had little in common. Rustin wrote, "I don't know of any greater compliment that we can pay you than to say that you simultaneously created a realistic, complex, and highly developed Freedom Budget and at the same time made it comprehensible to the people in the ghetto." Rustin and M. Long, 321.

³⁷⁷ Why then did Rustin become adamant about not speaking out against the war? That might be answered in part by one critic, economist and "fierce critic of the defense industries," who called Rustin out for being willing "to adopt a guns-and-butter approach" Rustin and M. Long, 321. This is odd given Rustin's own longtime critique of war and the military, for which he even went to prison, but it actually is not too far removed from some of his earliest work with Randolph to integrate the military. For Rustin, the military, and perhaps war, were just realities that needed to be worked with or around sometimes in order to improve other people's lives. Rustin was willing to do nearly anything to help people escape poverty, but at this point in his career he was more interested in passing legislation, even if that meant sacrificing his ability to speak out against the Vietnam War.

³⁷⁸ At times he refused to speak about it and even counseled others to do likewise, but as Michael Long notes, "It would be grossly unfair, however, to depict Rustin as uncritically embracing the Johnson administration's war or its war budget. At his December 6 testimony before the Senate, Rustin accused the administration of 'putting the price of the Vietnam War on the backs of the poor.' A week earlier, President Johnson had announced that he would be either cancelling or deferring more than five billion dollars originally earmarked for domestic programs, and so Rustin asked the senators to 'find some way to slow down' Johnson's announced cuts. 'It is a distortion—a fantastic distortion—of priorities when the President of the United States thinks he can get away with that kind of proposition,' Rustin said. He also delivered a less-than-veiled threat by adding that civil rights leaders 'can no longer

independent judgment about military spending. It assumes the continuation of our present policy,” he also writes, “I believe further that the Freedom Budget is the first major domestic program to present a meaningful political alternative to expanded and increased defense spending.” He also adds, “I think it would be most unfortunate if we made advocacy of the Freedom Budget dependent upon the debate about military spending. I don’t think that one has to be a certified dove in order to be permitted to work conscientiously for the eradication of poverty.”³⁷⁹ This last part also reflects some of Rustin’s basic values, namely a willingness to work with nearly anyone who shared similar goals in a particular area even if they had opposing positions on other issues. He had already shown this willingness by working with racist unions, for instance, in order to help create well-paying jobs because he knew that it would, at least indirectly, help African-Americans have a better chance at quality employment. Such political friendships seem largely absent in today’s partisan political arena, and someone like Rustin can be a guide for getting through this hyper-partisan morass and find ways for folks to work on projects of shared interest, even while opposing other ideas.³⁸⁰ In short, Rustin believed that one

be held responsible for what occurs’ as the ‘alienation’ of African American youth in ghettos increases. Rustin and M. Long, 323. Also, for Lyndon Johnson’s thoughts on economic issues related to the Freedom Budget, see Lyndon B. Johnson, *Lyndon B. Johnson, Joseph W. Barr, and Henry H. “Joe” Fowler on 2 August 1966*, vol. Conversation WH6608-02-10520, Presidential Recordings Digital Edition (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), https://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4000761/notes_open. Was it that Rustin chose to speak/write differently in the larger public sphere than he did in, say, the Senate because he knew the budget needed popular support? And that if it gained such support it would push congress into legislative action? Perhaps he could still speak in congress about his opposition to the war because they already knew where he stood, but he was more focused on relieving poverty in America than attempting to stop the Vietnam War.

³⁷⁹ Rustin and M. Long, *I Must Resist*, 322.

³⁸⁰ In Rustin’s later distinctly partisan approach, he was focused on what he thought was the best way to achieve his objectives, which largely started with the Freedom Budget. But even that document shows Rustin’s nonpartisan inclinations as he tried to suggest that this was a moral and not a partisan issue, and in that he tried to include a variety of concessions that would address the concerns of both Democrats and Republicans. This points to the correctness of Wiley’s thesis about Rustin as an “ambivalent anarchist.”

could be both a friend and an opponent, and that such an arrangement was healthy, at least when both parties realized that *opponent* need not mean *enemy*.

From my economically and politically lay point of view, the Freedom Budget seems like it would have been quite effective at achieving its goals if it had been implemented, but perhaps its fatal flaw was that without the right training, that kind that comes through peripatetic friendship and communities of virtue, persuading enough of the right people to implement it was going to be a monumental task even with the unbelievable support the budget had. During the decade it was supposed to be implemented, the Vietnam War still raged, King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, the sexual revolution and thus dissolution of “traditional” ideas of family was underway, FBI suspicion of Rustin had grown, and Rustin’s own commitment eventually waned as he turned his focus to other issues, not to mention that class issues were an ever-present reality.³⁸¹

Given Rustin’s commitment to the equality of all people, picked up during his Quaker upbringing, it makes sense that he also wrote, “This nation has learned that it must provide freedom for all if any of us is to be free. We have learned that half-measures are not enough. We know that continued unfair treatment of part of our people breeds misery and waste that are both morally indefensible and a threat to all who are better off.”³⁸² It was important to Rustin especially that the Freedom Budget was for all Americans.

³⁸¹ Rhetorically, I think Rustin and his fellow writers also made the mistake that many leaders make, and that is overpromising in a way that almost claims divinity. For instance, the writers called the budget a “final assault on injustice,” thus providing something that stands in direct opposition to Christian eschatology. A. Randolph et al., “Freedom Budget,” 15.

³⁸² A. Randolph et al., 7.

Rustin rightly attached expectations to the Freedom Budget, which meant that Rustin expected regular people to offer their help in getting the it legislated. At the end of the summary is a “What You Can Do” section that offers a list of ten things the average American can do to participate in this effort. The effort relies greatly on electing certain officials to office and convincing them to help enact the Freedom Budget. This is a bit of a departure from Rustin’s earlier work he was focused more on keeping government, regardless of party, accountable to justice by shutting down parts of through civil disobedience and by winning over folks in their moral thinking to join such efforts or otherwise work for economic justice. That is not to say Rustin did not previously avoid getting folks to vote, but is simply a change in apparent emphasis, which some have argued made him more answerable to elected officials than the other way around, as it had been in earlier parts of his life and work. The rest of the list primarily focuses on various ways people could get information about the Freedom Budget out in their spheres of influence and trying to convince legislators to introduce bills that put into place aspects of the Budget.

4.4 Rustin in the Black Radical and African-American Liberation Theology Traditions

I have presented Rustin as both part of the Black radical tradition and the African-American Liberation Theology tradition, something which, so far as I can tell, no one has done, to any great extent yet.³⁸³ However, when one recognizes him in these traditions, one can see the

³⁸³ Wiley writes, “Rustin’s homosexuality meant that for much of the modern civil rights movement he was relegated to the margins, the shadows. But in an ironic twist, Rustin’s marginal status as an openly homosexual Black male has recently thrust him into the center of contemporary academic and activist circles, with queer theorists and queer liberation activists leading the charge to recover Rustin’s story. With a ten-thousand-page FBI file, Rustin’s most influential years might rest in the future.” Wiley, “Dilemma,” 107–8. I trust that Wiley is correct in his prediction, and I hope to contribute to the rise and renaissance of Rustinian studies, inviting other scholars of

contributions he made to them. It might appear that in some ways Rustin is actually an alternative to Black Liberation Theology, but I argue that he plays a part earlier in that tradition that helped shape it and can do so again today if he is read as having contributions to make to it now.

For about twenty years Rustin co-edited *Liberation*, which brought together many of the best minds of the day, mostly from the radical political left, to give voice to a variety of movements for justice, and as the magazine's title suggests. This is but one example that Rustin was advocating for the liberation of Black and poor people, sometimes in a distinctly theological register, and certainly in his life and his friendships well before James Cone came on the scene. Rustin was in a line of African-Americans, and Black folks in other parts of the world as well, working for liberation, and doing so precisely because he was compelled both by the Exodus story and the social teachings of Jesus Christ. It is a mistake to fail to include Rustin as an interlocutor when discussing the growth of Black liberation theology. This is not to say that Rustin is the progenitor of such a stance because he had inherited it from Randolph and others, and he was moved in that direction by his Quaker convictions.

Rustin had at least two significant differences with James Cone, all but solidified during the Meredith March. First, Rustin was adamant that the movement for liberation must be nonviolent. That was born out of his Quaker convictions and proven true in his many experiments with nonviolence. Second, Rustin believed that including white people was absolutely necessary to the movement for liberation, and he made this clear as he opposed any kind of Black nationalism or separatism with a great deal of passion. Cone, on the other hand,

religion, especially Christian theologians and ethicists, to scour the work by or about Rustin to see what theological and moral truths his life offers.

considered white people to be too much of the problem for them to be a significant part of the solution, at least in his earlier writings. And yet, Rustin marched for liberation with his friends all the way back to at least the 1940s, and he often wrote about the cause of liberation, both racially and economically, in secular and theological ways.

My word on Rustin as part of the Black liberation theology movement is not at all intended to be the last or definitive word, as that would be absurd. But rather, it is a clarion call to all theologians and Christian ethicists to take Rustin seriously and include him as a significant interlocutor today as they write about current injustices and how to find liberation from them. There is no doubt that his life, his friendships, his planning and marching, and even his writing are worth further examination by a host of theologians concerned with racial and economic justice today as well as the liberation of Black people and poor people in American society and abroad.

In the wider Black radical tradition, Rustin has a place that has largely been forgotten as well. However, Wiley reminds us that “as a contributor to nearly every major American leftist movement from the mid-1930s through the end of the 1980s, Rustin’s life defies facile definition. . . . There is hardly a leftist cause that Rustin, as a full-time activist, did not contribute to during the period running from 1932 to 1987.”³⁸⁴ It bears repeating that Rustin was involved in or founded organizations including the Fellowship of Reconciliation, War Resisters League, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the 1940s March on Washington Movement, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Congress on Racial Equality, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, AFL-CIO, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, among many others, not to

³⁸⁴ Wiley, 108.

mention, of course, his leadership for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Given all of this, it is no surprise that folks have called Rustin the “mastermind *behind* the modern civil rights movement.”³⁸⁵ Given all the people and organizations Rustin worked with, it is easy to classify him as a Black radical, but Wiley makes a more controversial claim by calling Rustin an anarchist, given “his insistence on the importance of a strong state for the liberation of the marginalized and oppressed. . . . He was many things: black in the Jim Crow era, Communist in the Age of McCarthy, gay before Stonewall, and a pacifist in the age of fascism, Nazism, and the Cold War. But how could he be an anarchist?”³⁸⁶ Well, part of the explanation that Wiley offers is that radical pacifists, like Rustin, had critiques of World War I “that linked the violence of the territorial state to racism and capitalism,” which of course Rustin criticized and worked against for nearly his entire life.³⁸⁷ Wiley also contends that in environments Rustin was raised in and worked during the early and mid-twentieth century, “reformers became radical

³⁸⁵ Wiley, 108. The list of folks with whom Rustin worked is just as impressive, and even though I’ve addressed many of these relationships, it is again worth repeating that Rustin worked with and befriended Eleanor Roosevelt, James Farmer, Ella Baker, Bob Moses, Stokely Carmichael, and many others working on American problems, but he also befriended and mentored Jawaral Nehru, the first prime minister of the newly-freed India, Kwame Nkrumah the leader of post-colonial Ghana, as well as working in South Africa with Desmond Tutu.

³⁸⁶ Wiley, 109. “To answer this question we must simply appreciate that, while many aspects of Rustin’s activist career are open to question, there is no doubt about his status as one of the world’s leading radical pacifists and proponents of nonviolent direct action some three decades before Randolph called on him to organize the March on Washington in 1963. Rustin’s commitment to radical pacifism is crucial for our purposes in that, if I am correct, it has as its implication an anarchist ethic. Specifically, in my view, radical pacifism entails an acceptance of strong anarchism. A person can be a strong anarchist without being a pacifist, yet an absolute pacifist must reject the modern territorial state, and so should be categorized as some kind of anarchist.” Wiley, 109.

³⁸⁷ Wiley, 110. And although Rustin was not involved, nor an expert on it, “the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia excited revolutionaries and reformers, pacifist and socialist alike. The overthrow of the Russian Tsar confirmed a belief that had moved many activists during the end of the second decade of the twentieth century—the belief in the possibility of the radical transformation of society.” Wiley, 110. We can see in Rustin’s life that he certainly believed this. In fact, the Freedom Budget, which came in Rustin’s fifties, was an audacious example of how people like Rustin felt about the possibility for an entire realignment of society.

revolutionaries.”³⁸⁸ Of course, many of these radical revolutionaries considered their radical, uncompromising nonviolence to be part and parcel of their liberation work.³⁸⁹ Wiley also points to a belief that Rustin and many of his compatriots held, that one person living in radical incongruity with a vicious society can help reshape that society. What I think Wiley misses, at least in Rustin’s case, is that it was not just that one person was living out radical nonviolent civil disobedience alone but rather with friends who in turn had likeminded friends. Such a network of friends can become a community with the critical mass needed to shape the public conscience. It is because they chose to live and work and march together in the pursuit of personal and societal virtue, which I have noted is bound up with peripatetic friendship in which each learns from the other until enough people are convicted about both the what and how related to making society significantly better than working in that direction together.

For Rustin, thinking and action were part of his childhood but matured while he was working at the FOR under A. J. Muste. Wiley notes that the political left was crowded for the

³⁸⁸ Wiley, 111. Wiley continues with his argument in a way that is tailor-made to fit Rustin’s own growth into an activist. Wiley writes, “This brings us to the final major radicalizing cause that warrants mention. Anticolonialism in India captivated the world. Mohandas Gandhi’s satyagraha and concomitant nonviolent direct action inspired pacifists from London to Chicago.” Wiley, 111. Although Rustin never met Gandhi, he did become one of the leading teachers and practitioners of Gandhian nonviolence, even teaching King and others about this ins and outs of such a commitment.

³⁸⁹ Wiley describes such radical pacifists well, and he also lays out some of the progression from the radical reformation, the folks considered religious ancestors to Quakers, to more contemporary antiwar and other nonviolent political movements. He writes, “Radical pacifists, as Scott H. Bennett points out, are typically absolute pacifists who oppose “all wars or armed social revolution, support . . . both peace and social justice . . . [and advocate for] nonviolent social and democratic ‘socialist’ revolution.” Wiley, 111. With roots in the radical reformation, the American abolitionist movement, and socialism, radical pacifists maintain that only by radically transforming the social structure can war and injustice be eliminated, and they have insisted that individual persons are in fact capable of instigating social reconstruction. Following Garrison, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, radical pacifists maintain that evil social structures are only able to survive because so many people unconsciously cooperate with the rulers whose interests it is to preserve the structures. Noncooperation is proposed as a way to awaken one’s fellows and as a way to deprive the state of the support that it needs in order to sustain its unjust practices. With the Indian example appearing to confirm the truth of Thoreauvian and Tolstoyan theories of social change, radical pacifists turned to advocacy for and exercise of nonviolent protest, resistance, and direct action, including political and civil disobedience” Wiley, 110.

first half of the twentieth century, but, “What separated Muste’s understudies from other radical leftists during our period was not simply a concern to combat the just mentioned evils or even the decision to pursue change via extrajudicial methods. . . . Muste’s concern to infuse American radicalism with a Gandhian ethos distinguished him from other notable activists and his encouragement of Rustin’s interest in Gandhi proved remarkably important for Rustin’s formation, and is an important factor as we endeavor to make political philosophical sense of Rustin’s early activism and ethical commitments.” Of course I am interested in his theological commitments as they relate to his political, philosophical, and ethical commitments.³⁹⁰

Wiley also offers one of the clearest assessments of Rustin’s commitment to radical pacifism and radical change, writing, “From the mid-1930s up to the mid-1960s Rustin adopted an ethos of love-inflected sacrificial political ethics and embraced Gandhian philosophy in the fullest sense. This is crucial because insofar as one is committed to Gandhian ethics in this way, one will refrain from employing violence to accomplish one’s social and political objectives, even indirectly by calling on the territorial state for support.” Whereas Wiley credits Gandhi with instilling this ethic in Rustin, the evidence shows that he learned it as a child and continued as an adult in the Quaker tradition and larger Christian pacifist and Christian anarchist streams of faith.

³⁹⁰ Wiley, 112. Some of those commitments, especially those Wiley considers core to a Gandhian ethic, guided Rustin. “Most important of course is the commitment to nonviolent resistance to social evil. And vital to this commitment is the mutual concern for self and others that implies love for enemies and underwrites the commitment to nonviolent action. It is the Gandhian’s concern with the oppressor and the oppressed alike that informs the insistence on nonviolence or un-harmful (a-himsa) action. The Gandhian hopes to act in a way that does not harm but does in fact move persons who support oppressive practices. Gandhians hope that their acts of nonviolent resistance to evil will move members of the oppressed and oppressive classes to refrain from complying with oppressive social institutions and practices. In short, Gandhians aspire to convert their opponents, to transform their hearts.” Wiley, 112. Wiley, perhaps inadvertently, describes here the basic commitments of Christian anarchists, particularly the focus on persuasion and changing hearts as well as the refusal to cooperate with oppressive systems. Likewise, many Christian pacifists share similar commitments, so in my mind it is not a stretch to connect at least early Rustin with anarchism though that claim grows more tenuous the closer Rustin gets to political power and almost impossible to uphold once he writes “From Protest to Politics” and commits himself to partisan politics.

Nonetheless, Rustin's "love-inflected sacrificial political ethics" did indeed drive him, and he aimed his love toward the specific ends of reconciliation and friendship. In other words, Rustin believed that even political enemies could be friends. Further, it is right to note that Rustin was mostly at odds with the state, a state that imprisoned him over twenty times, until 1965. His connection with the state, particularly through the Democratic Party, grew as his circle of friends changed, eventually leaving Rustin with world leaders as friends rather than those who always called world leaders to account.³⁹¹

Wiley claims that the change in Rustin around 1965 was because Rustin was "unable to reconcile his commitment to radical pacifism and Gandhian nonviolence with his commitment to economic justice in the postindustrial era."³⁹² This is a reasonable thesis that partly explains the shift in Rustin's commitments, particularly when one looks at the central role that Rustin and his fellow contributors give to the federal government in the Freedom Budget.³⁹³ I argue that two other factors were in play. First, as I already mentioned, Rustin either distanced himself or was pushed out by many of his radical friends: both King and Malcolm X were assassinated, Muste died during the time Rustin was undergoing a shift, and Randolph's influence on the civil rights and economic justice movements was waning as a new generation, led by Carmichael and others,

³⁹¹ Rustin had friendships with world leaders earlier than 1965, but notably he was often in an advising role in those cases and his travel was not primarily about meeting with world leaders but with helping in various peace and justice movements on multiple continents. Wiley rightly notes, "Through the 1940s and 1950s, though, Rustin harbored no doubts about the viability of radical pacifism." Wiley, 113.

³⁹² Wiley, 113.

³⁹³ One might suggest that this is in conflict with an anarchist ethic, but it is key that Rustin's anarchist ethic, like the Christian anarchist ethic defined by Eller, is what Wiley calls specifically "ambivalent anarchism." As a fallen power, the state is a current reality and most Christian anarchists argue against trying to destroy the state, but rather to give it direction to govern justly as long as it does exist while working to undermine it at every turn where it is governing unjustly. For Rustin, the Freedom Budget was a way to help the state govern justly, which is what Rustin did for most of his career, albeit in significantly different ways in prior years.

was jettisoning the ways of nonviolence and the aim of reconciliation. Second, the Vietnam War was escalating and Rustin was concerned that focus on protesting the war would diminish the chances that the Freedom Budget would be legislated, which is one reason why the Freedom Budget clarifies that it would not take from defense spending. Wiley's thesis about Rustin's political shift is true, although it misses these other important elements.

From about 1965 on Rustin got more involved in partisan politics, devoting all his time to that endeavor such that he had not time or energy left to do those things that had made him a recognized success. However, it was not just about time and energy. Rustin believed that since the political realities had changed so should the tactics of those fighting for various facets of justice. He argued that the best way to make political change now was to get certain people into office, but he had apparently forgotten that he needed to then keep them accountable through nonviolent protest, civil disobedience, and, of course, speaking truth to power.

Returning to Rustin's earlier, more radical years, Wiley rightly points to Rustin's essay "The Negro and Nonviolence" to emphasize the way that Rustin extols nonviolence as the best way for radicals to achieve their goals. Rustin wrote, "Nonviolence as a method has within it the demand for terrible sacrifice and long suffering, but as Gandhi has said, 'freedom does not drop from the sky.' One has to struggle and be willing to die for it."³⁹⁴ According to Wiley, "Rustin goes on to explain how his Quaker, Christian ethical commitments relate to his role in society and to state his view that self-reform is a precondition to social reform: 'The primary function of a religious society is to "speak truth to power.'" The truth is that war is wrong. It is then our duty

³⁹⁴ Wiley, 113n7.

to make war impossible first in us and then in society.”³⁹⁵ One way of putting this in Christian language is to say that Rustin believed that this kind of religious and moral commitment was witness or testimony to the truth of Christian faith.³⁹⁶ Wiley writes, “He would rather go to prison than cooperate with the ‘propagation of evil.’”³⁹⁷

Wiley covers other moments in Rustin’s life that suggest Rustin had indeed been a committed Black radical as well as an anarcho-pacifist. About Rustin’s later political changes Wiley writes,

In particular, having organized the March on Washington in 1963, Rustin regarded it as possible to build a progressive multiracial political majority that could revolutionize American society. In droves, white Americans from all over the country flooded the Mall in Washington DC, standing side-by-side with Negroes, demanding the inclusion of Negroes as full-fledged American citizens. Add to this Lyndon B. Johnson’s commitment to racial and economic justice. For the first time in his life, in the year after the March on Washington, Rustin began to believe that it would be possible to transform America via the formal electoral process. It appeared as though the visions of Tom Watson, Norman Thomas, and A. Phillip Randolph were finally possible: a multiracial electoral majority

³⁹⁵ Wiley, 113. Wiley continues, “Rustin echoes other American activists who have preached self-reformation as the precondition to social reformation and thus belongs to the tradition of radicals that emphasizes living and speaking in fidelity to one’s notion of the truth.” Wiley, 113.

³⁹⁶ Wiley does not take this route specifically, but he does describe Rustin’s witness. He writes, “This noncooperation had two intermingled components: (1) Refusing to cooperate with authorities, when the commands in question required commission of unjust acts, served as prophetic witness against those authorities; and (2) it had the potential of disrupting the smooth functioning of the unjust system (i.e. the machine). In addition to the imperative of noncooperation, and perhaps related to it, Rustin had reservations about taking advantage of the religious exemption to military service since that policy discriminated against nonreligious objectors.” Wiley, 114. For more on both of the components that Wiley describes here, see Justin Bronson Barringer, “Subordination and Freedom: Tracing Anarchists Themes in First Peter,” in *Essays in Religious Anarchism: Volume II*, eds. Alexandre Chrystoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018), 132–72. It should also be noted that A. J. Muste was in support of the part of the Selective Service Act that allowed for peace churches to work with the government to run work camps for conscientious objectors, but even so Rustin defied his boss and refused to participate in that exemption because of his desire to bear witness against conscription itself, because Rustin eschewed the state’s claim to make citizens be willing to kill and die for some effort of that state. For Rustin, such a claim could only belong to God, if anyone at all. Further, it is important to note David Dellinger resigned from his position at the FOR over Muste’s support for the initiative, a compromise with the state.

³⁹⁷ Wiley, “Dilemma,” 114. One wonders how the younger Rustin would have responded to the older Rustin who cooperated with the propagation of evil especially during the rise of neo-conservatism and increased American support for Israel’s government and military. Wiley calls Rustin’s “Letter to the Draft Board” “a textbook statement of religiously motivated denial of state sovereignty.” Wiley, 115.

ushering in a socioeconomic revolution. This revelation greatly impacted Rustin's social and political philosophy."³⁹⁸

He went from quintessential outsider to Washington insider, and that changed him.

In effect, Rustin went through his own sort of Constantinian shift, or rather he shifted from an anti-Constantinian Christianity to a Constantinian form, believing that effectiveness was now of a higher value than the faithfulness that had characterized his earlier years. Yet this does not mean Rustin had entirely lost his moral way. He still prioritized the needs of economically marginalized people and continued to be pragmatic, a trait that was sometimes more difficult to see during his younger years because he often seemed idealistic, but it was always there. Wiley argues,

Rustin's stridently pragmatic orientation distinguishes him from many twentieth-century radicals and has led to the classification of Rustin as a political conservative. However, this is a label that does not quite work. As we will see shortly, even as he announced the need for a shift in the means employed by movement activists, Rustin called for revolutionary transformation of political economy and the democratization of the mode of economic production. Rustin was no conservative."³⁹⁹

Perhaps one could say that Rustin had moved, to a fair degree, from the group of Black radical leftists to the group of Black establishment liberals. However, Wiley contends that even then Rustin retained a lot of his radical sensibilities, becoming what Wiley calls a "weak anarchist."⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Wiley, 128.

³⁹⁹ Wiley, 128. He continues, "But let me be clear. I turn to this phase of Rustin's activist career neither to vindicate him nor his staunchest critics. As is so often the case, a portion of the truth rests on both sides of the line. Rustin biographers Anderson, Levine, and D'Emilio all wonderfully capture the debate that estranged Rustin from many leftists. My reasons for turning to this phase are multifold. . . . Doing so will allow us to reflect on the implications of certain ethical principles for other ethical principles and values. As social circumstances change, strategic choices often bring into full view a host of tensions that were previously obscured. As one makes choices in the light of those tensions, often, what one values more or most comes to the fore." Wiley, 128–29.

⁴⁰⁰ Wiley, 129.

Both modes of Rustin's thinking and action might put him at odds with Black liberation theology, especially his commitment to nonviolence and his opposition to Black nationalism and separatism. However, given that Wiley has shown Rustin as both part of the Black radical and Black leftist traditions, and Rustin's own speaking and writing on liberation, it is best to put him in the Black radical and Black liberation theology traditions. Rustin could add to those ongoing conversations and help both Black and poor folks reach greater liberation in American society by implementing Rustin's ideas and seeing his whole life, especially his friendships, as instructive for both the liberatory and reconciling work of the church.

In fact, the church has a long history of teaching on both friendship and justice, so it is also important to explore that tradition in order to understand both Rustin's place in it and his contributions to contemporary friendships in which friends march together for justice. In the next section I will take a brief look at friendship in the classical and Christian traditions, mostly apart from Rustin, so that I can then follow it up with a section on Rustin's relation to some of the key ideas brought up.

4.5 The Promise and Problems of Friendship in Classical and Christian Understanding

Theologian John P. Manoussakis rightly argues that “friendship is ‘historically and logically’ prior to politics . . . and often acts as a force of subversion to the established political order. Its prepolitical nature makes friendship more suitable for, or more understandable within, a Christian context, since the church, and the bonds of communion amongst its members, ought to stand in a similar idiosyncratic position vis-à-vis the political order—‘for our citizenship is in

heaven' (Phil 3:20)."⁴⁰¹ The first part of his argument, that friendship is prepolitical, is evident in pre-Christian writings, such as those of Aristotle, but the latter part requires some significant foundational shifts in thinking. Thus, I will first outline some of the classical ideas about friendship from Aristotle before turning to the shifts in the Christian tradition, and second I will return to a key issue in friendship, equality, or as I will refer to it, equity, as it relates to the possibilities for Rustin's friendships.⁴⁰²

Paul Wadell, perhaps the preeminent contemporary theologian of friendship, notes that while Aristotle's discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* begins by trying to connect morality and politics, Aristotle shifts the discussion to friendship. Wadell argues,

The *Nicomachean Ethics* ends far from where it began. It ends in a discussion of friendship, but it began in posing a relationship between morality and politics. The moral life is a function of the polis, for it represents not the individual's, but the community's pursuit of the good, the community's commitment to discover, embody, and sustain the virtues. The goal of the moral life is not just the virtuous person, but the virtuous community.⁴⁰³

Wadell's reading is intriguing because he suggests that Aristotle realizes his hopes for the polis are essentially in vain and thus the moral life cannot be centered in the city-state, but must instead be centered in friendship and family. Wadell writes, "Precisely because the city-state no

⁴⁰¹ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, "Friendship in Late Antiquity: The Case of Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great," in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, ed. Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Gary M. Gurtler (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 175.

⁴⁰² The distinction between equality and equity that I want to point out is simply that the former suggests the idea of two people or objects being identical, which I do not think any of the writers I am exploring had in mind precisely, whereas equity suggests just and fair relations in which the ground is relatively level for all participants, something that will be important in looking at what obstacles there might be to friendships forming. For the sake of being faithful to the language used by the folks explored here, I will use "equality" initially in discussing their work, but at the end I will move to "equity" language for my own views. Following that I will, at times, use them interchangeably, but always with the understanding that I do not mean identical but rather have the idea in mind of justice and fairness that combat significant disparity among persons in regards to socio-economic factors.

⁴⁰³ Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1989), 46.

longer enables but actually frustrates the acquisition and nurturing of the virtues, Aristotle searches for another way to develop them, and his search takes him to friendship. By the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), friendship has replaced the polis as the context in which the virtues are learned and embodied.”⁴⁰⁴ Wadell then suggests that Aristotle might want his readers to reread the NE through the lens of friendship.⁴⁰⁵ Notably, Wadell writes, “This is not to suggest Aristotle abandons the polis. . . . He needs the polis to keep friendship from stagnation. His is not an ethics of withdrawal. The relationship between friendship and the city-state, is not friendship removed from the polis, not even friendship over against the polis, but friendship within the polis.”⁴⁰⁶

With that in mind, I will now lay out a few key points of Aristotle’s understanding of friendship. Aristotle argues that “friendship is said to be *reciprocated* goodwill . . . [and] friends are aware of the reciprocated goodwill.”⁴⁰⁷ Friendship for Aristotle is in its own category. In fact, he opens up his treatise on friendship in the NE with the ambiguous statement that “it is a virtue, or involves virtue.”⁴⁰⁸ Aristotle is adamant that one cannot be truly happy without friends, thus “friendship is necessary for the good life. It brings pleasure, support, care, encouragement,

⁴⁰⁴ Wadell, 49.

⁴⁰⁵ Wadell, 49. He writes, “The overall structure of Aristotle’s ethics and its constitutive elements of telos, eudaimonia, and the virtues, remains, but exactly what these mean, how they are related, and how they function, shift in light of this focus on friendship. That this is the case is suggested by Aristotle’s otherwise enigmatic invitation at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, ‘So let us begin our discussion.’ Having reached the end, what are we to begin? Could it be that Aristotle asks us to reread the lectures from the perspective of friendship?” Wadell, 49.

⁴⁰⁶ Wadell, 49.

⁴⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 143 (1155b34), emphasis original.

⁴⁰⁸ Aristotle, (1115a1).

and counsel.”⁴⁰⁹ If one, Aristotle rightly argues, “has all the other good things in life—health, comfort, food, shelter, virtue, and even freedom—yet is without friends with whom to share those goods, then one is deprived of the good life.”⁴¹⁰

In this way, friendship is both the grounds in which virtue is cultivated and an addendum to the life of virtue in order for happiness (*eudaimonia*) to be fully achieved. Another way of thinking about it, based on Aristotle’s use of language, is that friendship is a parallel virtue to the other virtues. For instance, he writes, “Just as, in the case of the virtues, some people are called good in their state of character, others good in their activity, the same is true of friendship.”⁴¹¹ This also points to his distinction between the two lesser forms of friendship (utility and pleasure) and complete friendship. Everyone might be capable of having friendships based on another’s usefulness or on gratification, but few can be the sort of person who is competent to enter into complete friendship. According to Aristotle, the complete friendship can only occur between people who are good and similarly virtuous, who wish for good for the other’s own sake and when their own good is advantageous for the other.⁴¹²

At least two issues arise in Aristotle’s conception of friendship that the Christian tradition resolves. First, Aristotle presumes that equality, both ontological and practical, is a necessary precondition for true or complete friendship. And second, he likewise presumes that friendship is dependent upon the virtue acquired by or habituated into the individual friends. In terms of equality, Aristotle claims that friendships across socio-economic lines are impossible. Therefore,

⁴⁰⁹ Aristotle, (1170b7–8).

⁴¹⁰ Aristotle, (1170b7–8)

⁴¹¹ Aristotle, 124 (1157b6–1157b8).

⁴¹² Aristotle, 122 (1156b6–1156b15).

a ruler cannot be friends with an ordinary citizen except as a matter of utility or pleasure for the ruler,⁴¹³ a master and slave cannot be friends (apart from something approximating justice from one human to another as a human),⁴¹⁴ and the gods cannot be friends with humans, nor should humans expect to be friends with the gods.⁴¹⁵ He even argues that if once a friendship is formed there is a dramatic change in the status of one friend, then the friendship must end.⁴¹⁶

Apart from the logical question about whether friendships are possible between people from different socio-economic groups, there is a moral question to be raised regarding Aristotle's anthropology, in that he clearly thought that some people were less than others ontologically, for instance his belief that women are malformed men. His argument that people in different places in the social order cannot be friends simply because of their place in the order into which they were born, an order that Aristotle sees as natural, suggests that some human beings are intrinsically less valuable than others. It assumes that only certain people can be virtuous and contribute to the virtue of others and the polis, which undermines the flourishing of those deemed lesser at least to the extent that their full humanity is not realized, but also inasmuch as that supposed ontological status prohibits their access to both scarce material goods and goods like friendship. Ultimately, the claim ends up being that only people born into certain circumstances have the possibility of being happy, while the majority of the world is

⁴¹³ E.g. Aristotle, (1158a29–34).

⁴¹⁴ Aristotle, (1161b7–12). At least here Aristotle recognizes something that white slaveowners did not, namely that slaves are fully human.

⁴¹⁵ Aristotle, (1158b36–1159a1).

⁴¹⁶ Aristotle, (1158b34–36). A logical problem arises here, in that Aristotle believes only those who are equal can be friends, yet friends wish the best for each other so they want the other friend to succeed even when that makes the other friend move to a superior rank. Thus, Aristotle's "perfect friendship destroys itself" according to Ann Ward. Ann Ward, *Contemplating Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 13.

automatically disqualified from happiness at the moment of their birth. This is at odds with a reasonable conception of justice, though Aristotle is certainly concerned about justice. Yet he places friendship higher than justice, writing, "If people are friends they have no need of justice, but if they are just they need friendship in addition; and the justice that is most just seems to belong to friendship."⁴¹⁷ At first, this might cause advocates for justice to bristle, but it is not an argument against justice. Rather, it is the contention that friendships are necessary for the functioning of a just society and that justice alone is insufficient for human flourishing.⁴¹⁸

It is important that a network of friends grow large enough to have a critical mass walking and working together in the same direction. In other words, one person, even Rustin, need not have a lot of friends, but the person's friends should include other friends who then include others and so on. In a way, this is what the church is doing in evangelism. It is not that the converted person is, in this lifetime, a friend in all senses, given that humans are finite creatures, but in another sense a friend of a friend can be our friend too, as all friends of Jesus find the common ground in him to be friends of one another. It is such a network of friends that is required for a healthy church and society because this network of friendships makes up a healthy community capable of relationally addressing its problems. Aristotle wondered if a large enough network could be created given what he saw as the limitations of who could and could not be virtuous and therefore not be a true friend. However, Rustin, following much of the Christian tradition, saw a lot more opportunities to become friends as they marched together in

⁴¹⁷ Aristotle, (1155a27–29). This one could be problematic, but as I understand Aristotle he is simply stating that friendship necessarily requires justice, at least within the friendship itself, and that friendship adds to justice as it adds to health and all other good things.

⁴¹⁸ See for instance Philemon and Onesimus's story in the biblical book of Philemon.

the pursuit of virtues, namely those of justice, peace, courage, and wisdom or prudence. Thus, given all of the restrictions Aristotle sees, is it possible to create a critical mass of virtuous friendships that would be necessary to build and sustain a just society? And, would it truly be just if most of the society was predestined to live unhappy lives incapable of flourishing?

Aristotle's practical concerns seem more palatable. He thinks friendship is tied to virtue and virtue must be acquired, but some people might not have the opportunity to acquire virtue because all of their time, necessarily, is given merely to surviving rather than contemplating or working to habituate virtue. In the case of many women and slaves, all of their attention was given to others and so they did not have time to think about their own needs. Likewise, for Aristotle, friendship itself requires a fair bit of leisure time in which friends can enjoy one another and reflect on each other's virtue for the sake of their mutual growth. Furthermore, it is questionable to what extent one could even achieve virtue without friends along the way, so if disadvantaged people cannot form friendships then that too prevents the acquisition of virtue and thus happiness.

While these ways of considering the possibility of friendships for folks lower in the social order are less appalling to my own sensibilities, they still end with the same problem that virtue and friendship are only possible as a birthright and that socio-economic and moral improvement are beyond the reach of all but the fortunate few. It is as if certain people, most people in fact, are simply destined to be denied a chance at happiness. The lack of practical opportunity for friendships, given the separations caused by status differences, certainly undermines the possibility of any sort of socio-economic equity, but that was not one of Aristotle's concerns in

his commentary on ethics, even in regards to the virtue of justice.⁴¹⁹ One more concern that I have is that this way of ordering society not only prevents flourishing for those of low social status, it also does so for those with privileged positions as well, because the rich and powerful cannot attain the fullness of virtue without significant interactions with the poor. It is in those interactions where the vices of greed and incontinence are laid bare and the virtues of generosity and justice in distribution find meaning.

In dealing with the first claim regarding Aristotle's restrictive social order I have also, even if indirectly, dealt with the second claim regarding what I see as a problem about friendship resting solely on acquired virtues. As I have noted, most people, according to Aristotle, lack the means to acquire virtue, thus making friendship exceedingly rare. For instance, Aristotle writes, "Clearly, however, only good people can be friends to each other because of the other person himself; for bad people find no enjoyment in one another if they get no benefit," which betrays a lack of understanding of the complexities of human existence.⁴²⁰ Such a view does not take seriously enough mere human struggles between the good and the bad, and while some people may clearly favor one over the other in the way they live their lives, most people are not easily pinned down. Furthermore, within the bounds of a friendship the one who might not typically be considered to be among the good (at least outside of the friendship) can choose to be good precisely for the sake of the friendship itself. Thus, within friendship one who is generally

⁴¹⁹ However, Aristotle's discourse on equality and friendship might provide a potential safeguard against some forms of economic abuse in that it would help keep distance between people of different classes thus, perhaps, preventing some opportunities for the rich or powerful to take advantage of those who were less so, or for those poor and lacking in power to try and seek some advantage from the rich and powerful.

⁴²⁰ Aristotle, (1155a19–20).

considered bad can learn to become good, one who is unjust can learn to be just, and one who is greedy can learn to become generous, even magnanimous.

In addition, if friendship is a sort of parallel virtue and friends love each other because of the other's virtue, yet at the same time friendship is the basic training grounds for virtue, then how is one to enter into that loop? This, I think, is slightly different than the issue Jennifer Herdt raises that she calls the "habituation gap," in which she asks how one goes from merely imitating virtue to actually acquiring it, which she answers by saying that this gap is overcome by loving and being loved by the moral exemplar.⁴²¹ However, this does not answer the question about how unequal people can enter into such a relationship in the first place and thus how a friendship can even begin to form.

Ultimately for Aristotle it comes down to this: "The excellent person is related to his friend in same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself. . . . Anyone who is to be happy, then, must have excellent friends."⁴²² This point, in combination with the earlier definition of friendship that Aristotle gives, shows that for Aristotle friendship consists of two basic attributes: mutual affection and a unity or union of the will between the friends. In other words, the friends must have some concern or care for one another and they should share in common ideals and goals. The degree to which these characteristics will be present depends both on the type or level of friendship and the measure of each friend's virtue. Aristotle's account of

⁴²¹ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 28. She writes, "What is crucial for one's desires to be transformed into those of a virtuous person is that one love and be loved by the moral exemplar set before one." This is an apt description of the role friendships can play in making people more virtuous. When friends, as those who love and are loved by one another, see each other as moral exemplars, which could be evidenced in marching for justice, as just one example, it has the power to transform them both into more virtuous people, and as each is transformed, they help form the other, and thus the cycle continues as long as friends are moving toward virtue together.

⁴²² Aristotle, (1170b19).

friendship offers a number of helpful entry points into discussions on friendship's potential value for economic equity, even if perhaps he relies too much on acquired virtues as the basis and sustenance for friendship. However, his assertions about equality, if they are allowed to stand, would prove to be an intractable barrier for full human flourishing. Thankfully, the Christian tradition, particularly in the premodern era, makes one astounding claim that provides the necessary force to raze that impediment.

Whereas Aristotle scoffed at the idea that humans could be friends with the gods, the Christian tradition proclaimed that friendship with God was the proper telos for human beings. This was a remarkable shift in the way friendship was understood and articulated. This extraordinary claim has resounding implications for friendship in general, especially for the ways that friendships can now grow across all social distinctions. If one can be friends with God, and if God, creator of the universe, chooses to be friends with mere creatures, then the class barriers that Aristotle viewed as necessary in his conception of friendship are nullified. There is no chasm that friendship cannot span, as will become evident later in an analysis of Jesus as friend of sinners.

Rather than belabor the point here with a detailed analysis about the variety of ways Christians before the Enlightenment talked about friendship with God, I will simply note that important Christian figures including Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Aquinas all made it a point to address this theological truth. For instance, one commentator on Augustine's *Confessions* writes, "Friendship with God . . . is portrayed, or rather enacted, on every page. Augustine the author fashioned this genre as a literary strategy aimed at drawing readers into

friendship with God.”⁴²³ Aquinas even says that our *summum bonum* is friendship with God.⁴²⁴ Aelred takes a slightly different tack by declaring that men and women were made equal at creation, but even that claim points to the fact that it is God who makes friendships possible, because whatever barriers there might be are not a prelapsarian reality but are only the result of human sin.⁴²⁵ Aristotle argued that happiness was the human telos, a claim with which Aquinas agreed, but Aquinas believed that happiness was only possible through friendship with God. In other words, the liberating work of God is the invitation into friendship.

Human friendships are made possible through God’s grace irrespective of what real or perceived socio-economic boundaries may be present. Along those lines, Augustine argues that “friendship cannot be true unless you solder it together among those who cleave to one another by charity ‘poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.’”⁴²⁶ Augustine has now also demonstrated that it is not the acquired or habituated virtues of mere humans upon which friendship depends, but rather friendships are a gift from God and they are sustained by God.

⁴²³ Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, & Dante* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 133.

⁴²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.II.23.A1.

⁴²⁵ Aelred writes, “It is from no similar, nor even from the same material that divine Might formed this help mate, but as a clearer inspiration to charity and friendship he produced the woman from the very substance of the man. How beautiful it is that the second human being is taken from the side of the first, so that nature might teach that human beings are equal and, as it were, collateral, and that there is in human affairs neither a superior nor an inferior, a characteristic of true friendship. Hence nature from the very beginning implanted the desire for friendship and charity in the heart of man, a desire which an inner sense of affection soon increased with a taste of sweetness. But after the falloff the first man, when with the cooling of charity concupiscence made secret inroads and caused private good to take precedence over the common weal, it corrupted the splendor of friendship and charity.” Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, 45.

⁴²⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), 97.

Thus, the Christian tradition offers up a response to both of the problems raised regarding Aristotle's conception of friendship, that friendship requires equality and that it is founded solely or primarily on the acquired virtues of the friends. On the first concern, beginning in the Gospels, a different account of equality starts to emerge. Whereas Aristotle presumed that friendships necessitated equality, something he declared in the starkest of terms when he said that humans should not consider being friends with the gods, Jesus made it so that friendship with God is recognized as not only possible but the proper telos of humanity. This is evident in Jesus's declaration to his disciples that he no longer calls them servants but friends (John 15:15). On the second concern, Paul Wadell addresses how friendship can lead to virtue, especially if my definition of human friendship as "two or more people seeking virtue together" holds. He writes,

To enter into a friendship is to take up a new way of life because every friendship in some way reorders our lives and creates new commitments and responsibilities. Too, friendships change us because they form our character, shape our beliefs and convictions, and encourage certain kinds of behavior in us. As the letter of James testifies, this is especially true when the overriding commitment of our lives is to live in faithful friendship with God.⁴²⁷

I will now suggest how this Christian vision of friendship likewise re-envision possibilities for economic justice. There is no greater socio-economic gap than that between God and humanity, yet the Christian tradition says that God closed that gap through Jesus. If all other divides among humanity are lesser than this gap, they too can and must be overcome through the power of God's work in the world. This extraordinary claim has resounding implications for friendship in general, especially for the ways that friendships can now grow across all social distinctions. Wadell affirms this truth when he writes, "When Christians conform their friendship love to the

⁴²⁷ Paul J. Wadell, "Living as the Friends of God," *Christian Reflection*, 2012, 71.

Spirit of love, boundaries are broken, fears disappear, magnanimity reigns.”⁴²⁸ When socio-economic boundaries are broken not only can the rich visit the poor, they can befriend one another. The rich, then, cannot only sympathize with the poor but truly empathize since in their poor friends they see other selves. It is not only the possibility of friendship with God but the actual friendship with God that makes these friendships conceivable.

In addition, various levels of virtue, including generosity, justice in distribution, and magnanimity, can be brought into the friendship and improved upon as friends shape each other, particularly as blind spots become clear in friendships across socio-economic lines. In fact, friendship becomes the primary way that God makes people just. Again, Wadell writes, “The project of genuine human friendships is to make good on the grace from which they began, to pattern their love on God’s friendship love so that this grace is brought to fullness.”⁴²⁹ On this point, it is important to note that Augustine recognizes these sorts of friendships to be everlasting, which might remove some of the restrictions placed on who could form friendships, in terms of both socio-economic considerations and levels of virtue, when the temporal circumstances of people’s lives are put into eternal perspective.⁴³⁰ In other words, friends might be able to see and appreciate contributions of another when the types of contributions one might make to a friendship are expanded beyond the goods of this life, even true goods like virtue,

⁴²⁸ Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 101. I am not precisely sure how Wadell would define magnanimity, but in Aristotle’s account the magnanimous man does not seek or need a reciprocation of his gifts and goodwill, so perhaps he has in mind the fact that while God does not need reciprocated love or goodwill or sustenance, God gives out of God’s own charity simply so we have the opportunity to love and be loved by God.

⁴²⁹ Wadell, 99.

⁴³⁰ Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for St. Augustine* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 201.

precisely because God is working in and beyond time to sanctify each friend, and thus the friendship itself.

Furthermore, because it is through friendship with God that people of different socio-economic classes and levels of virtue can befriend one another, God's abundance, not society's apparent scarcity, becomes the basis for friendship. Recognizing this abundance enables friends to share with each other and invite others into the friendship, even if our finitude in this life means we only have the capacity for a limited number of friends. The reciprocated goodwill that Aristotle says is necessary for friendship can be expanded beyond merely a few people to all those who share in friendship with God because God's friendship is inexhaustible and when we are brought into that we can thus ultimately befriend all of God's friends even if it takes us an eternity to do it. In this way, true to Aristotle's claim that friends have no need of justice, as the circle of friendship expands when each new person enters into friendship with God, and thus with every other friend of God, so too does the justice that friendship entails spread through each of those new friendships.

Wadell nicely summarizes the truth of these three possibilities for economic justice in friendship when he addresses the concern that some have raised about the preferential love offered in friendship. He writes that Christians' "friendship is preferential, but not exclusive, for they welcome others to the way of life through which they will find their fullness in God. Through the preferential love of their friendship on earth, rooted as it is in Christ, they learn to prefer what God does, the perfect community of all being one in God."⁴³¹ This is an apt description of justice. When all are one there can be no injustice against another because that

⁴³¹ Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 101.

would be injustice against one's self.⁴³² Meilaender argues along similar lines that also connect with the idea of peripatetic friendship. He writes, "Life is a journey, a pilgrimage toward that community in which friends love one another in God. . . . Along the way, friendship is a school, training us in the meaning of the enactments of love."⁴³³ If it were not for friendship, where would people be safe to explore the social dynamics of virtues in order that they might use that virtue to benefit the large society?

In this way of seeing friendship, and tangentially economic justice, it is once again important to point out that this is a particularized ethics inasmuch as it must begin with a friendship with God, but from that particular starting point it can become universalizable ethic. Even its particularity though, an ethics based on friendship with God and with God's other friends, can be incredibly expansive. Friendship for Christians can span across every culture of the world as everyone who is a friend of Jesus is to be a friend with every other friend of Jesus. If Christians accept this, it will necessarily entail that, at a minimum, they seek just economics for all other Christians; and because Christian friendship is invitational and oriented toward serving others, even enemies, it will then entail seeking economic justice for all people. Christianity is certainly transnational, transcultural, and trans-socio-economical, though its invitational nature does make Christian friendship something that could be realized as a universalizable ethics, should all people receive Jesus's and the church's invitation into friendship. In the next two short sections, I explore what this kind of embrace of friendship by Black radicals and liberation

⁴³² This could be a sort of negative way of talking about Jesus's command that we love others as we love ourselves.

⁴³³ Meilaender, *Friendship*, 66. Meilaender ultimately comes to some different conclusions about the relationship between *philia/amicitia* and *agape/caritas*, but he is correct about friendship as part of a journey and as a school in virtue.

theologians like Rustin and their allies might add to the conversations about standard theological loci like Christology and Ecclesiology before returning to Rustin's contribution to a theology in response to wealth inequity.

4.6 Friendship and The Black Church on Christology and the Cross

Jacqueline Grant takes Cone's proposal that "God is Black" to another level when she declares that "Christ . . . is a Black woman."⁴³⁴ This declaration is another way of recognizing just how closely God, in Christ, identifies with oppressed people. Jesus identifies with oppressed people through incarnation. Placing two relevant scripture passages beside some of the concerns of Grant and M. Shawn Copeland, along with Cone, will illumine both Jesus's embodiment and his offer of friendship.

First, in Matthew 11:19 Jesus is called friend of sinners. It is perhaps dangerous to use that reference in this discussion as a cursory reading might imply some unique sinfulness of being Black. However, Jesus as friend of sinners is not a self-designation, meaning Jesus never called himself this, and thus should perhaps best be understood not as a comment on Jesus being friends with those who are particularly sinful, but as a comment on Jesus being friends with those who are outcast, marginalized, and oppressed. The ones who give Jesus this designation have called those oppressed people "sinners" as a way to maintain the oppressive status quo. In fact, then, Jesus identifies with these ones classified as sinners by joining them as their friend in their oppression and marginalization, recognizing that the label they have been given is an effort to keep them under thumb, or at least out of the way of those in power.

⁴³⁴ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 220.

James Cone's identification of the cross with the lynching tree makes this case in another way. Those Black men, women, and children were not lynched because of their own sin, they were lynched because it was convenient and necessary for white society to label them "sinners" and punish them accordingly so that white people could maintain their social dominance. Those lynched were not murdered for their own wrongdoing but as a result of the sin of the white society in which they found themselves. Thus, Jesus as friend of sinners is not only to be understood in broad terms, as we are all indeed sinners, but it is also to be understood in the particularity of Jesus as friend of those scorned, abused, rejected, beaten, and sometimes killed; Jesus is to be understood as friend of the battered and lynched bodies and communities of Black people in America. Jesus joined African-Americans as a friend not only by eating and drinking with them but by hanging with them from a tree. On this point Copeland writes, "In his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus showed us the cost of integrity, when we live in freedom, in love, and solidarity with others."⁴³⁵ Jesus's death was the result of Jesus's friendship, so perhaps his command to take up our crosses and follow is a command to form friendships among the abused, enslaved, and exploited. This claim about Jesus as friend of sinners brings God's identification with oppressed people into sharper resolution because it clarifies that God does not identify from afar but in actual embodiment, joining in not only the human situation generally, but in the particular situation of oppressed humanity.

Second, in John 15:13 Jesus foreshadows his death as the ultimate expression of love and friendship. Echoing Copeland's language, Jesus enfleshed freedom by enfleshing friendship as he died for those friends. Copeland tells a story about a young woman named Fatima Yusef who

⁴³⁵ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 81.

was publicly shamed, neglected, and abused by a crowd when as she gave birth next to a busy street.⁴³⁶ She then writes, “Between Fatima Yusef and the crowd lies the potential for an authentic praxis of solidarity—the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. Through incarnate love and self-sacrifice, Christ makes Fatima Yusef’s despised body his own. In solidarity, he shares her suffering and anguish. In his body, in his flesh, Christ, too, has known derision and shame; his broken and exposed body is the consolation of her being.”⁴³⁷ The desecration of Jesus’s flesh, the denigration of his body, the breathing of his last breath were all declarations and the realization of his friendship. Jesus was not just in solidarity with Yusef; Jesus was and is her friend.

Cone claims that Black people of the lynching era were “formed, from infancy on, by the immanent and ubiquitous threat of death.”⁴³⁸ The link here with the life and death of Jesus may not be immediately obvious, but the argument could be made that from early in his life Jesus had a sense of his impending death. Certainly, Jesus was aware of it once he “set his face toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). For African-Americans, Jesus was crucified again each time a Black body hung from a tree at the hands of a lynch mob. While white people yelled “crucify,” Jesus died again in the form of Black bodies ritually sacrificed to the idol of white supremacy.⁴³⁹

Although Jesus’s own sacrifice was to end the need for all other sacrifices, the lynching of Black bodies as a sacrifice, when set beside Jesus’s crucifixion, might serve as a reminder to

⁴³⁶ Copeland, 95–99.

⁴³⁷ Copeland, 99.

⁴³⁸ Cone, *The Cross*, 21–22. It is also worth noting here that poverty is often referred to in similar ways as an ever-present reminder of death, and often causes death itself.

⁴³⁹ This is my attempt to summarize the many haunting and powerful and beautiful verses Cone cites in chapter 4, “The Recrucified Christ in Black Literary Imagination.”

the world of God's invitation into friendship. That is not to say God in any way intended the lynching of Black bodies but rather to say that Jesus's identification with them beckons humanity to the societal friendship that demands and includes justice but also moves beyond it. It should confront white people, and all oppressors, with the truth that friendship with God demands repentance of those who have stood in opposition to Jesus's mission to let the oppressed go free. If one wants to be among Jesus's friends, one must obey Jesus who said his mission was to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18).

It seems safe to say that no group, perhaps apart from the first Christians, has a more complex relationship to the cross than African-Americans. James Cone notes that the cross has been a central focus in the Black church, at least in part, because it symbolizes the truth that "God was with them even in suffering on lynching trees, just as God was present with Jesus suffering on the cross."⁴⁴⁰ At the same time, the realities of terror throughout the history of African-Americans, symbolized in the lynching tree, has caused a great deal of cognitive dissonance for a people trying to understand how it is that their suffering has come from people proclaiming it as the will of God. Again, Cone writes, "Blacks did not embrace the cross, however, without experiencing the profound contradictions that slavery, segregation, and lynching posed to their faith."⁴⁴¹ Those bodies on those trees teach us about that God-man whose body was likewise beaten and hung on a tree. Copeland summarizes this beautifully when she writes,

The cross of Jesus of Nazareth demonstrates, at once, the redemptive potential of love and the power of evil and hatred. On the cross, Jesus overcame evil with great love; his resurrection disclosed the limits of evil. But the cross can never be reduced to a cheap or

⁴⁴⁰ Cone, *The Cross*, 21–22.

⁴⁴¹ Cone, 26.

simplistic solution to the problem of evil. The cross and the lynching tree represent unmeasured suffering and anguish.⁴⁴²

Somehow, this “unmeasured suffering and anguish” has been survived by innumerable Black people who have somehow come to see through the pain with enough hope to see the joy set beyond the cross and the lynching tree, trusting that they will too join God (Heb 12:2), much as Jesus joined them as their bodies hung as strange fruit from southern trees.⁴⁴³ Jesus, as another self of the oppressed, not only died for them on the cross, but hung for them, with them, as them, in friendship, from a noose.

4.7 Black Church Ecclesiology and Friendship

As Jesus had a very real human body made up of flesh, now he has a body made up of the church, people made of flesh.⁴⁴⁴ James Cone and others have explored the significance of the Black church in the formation of the civil rights movement, Black power, and liberation theology in the United States, but they have neglected the role of friendships within those communities and thus have neglected friendship as a moral and theological category in their theological work. It must be noted that the Black church played a significant role in the formation of friendships and alliances that undergirded the civil rights movement and the efforts for economic justice. One way to begin that discussion is to acknowledge the failure of the white church. For example, “A sign outside of an important church in a metropolitan southern city reads thus: ‘We offer

⁴⁴² Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124.

⁴⁴³ A reference to Billie Holiday’s song quoted by Copeland, 121.

⁴⁴⁴ Copeland, 81ff.

riches to the poorest, friendliness to the friendless, comfort to the sorrowing—a welcome to all, step in.’ But every Negro child in that city is aware of the fact that the invitation is not meant for him.”⁴⁴⁵ It is fascinating that this church seemed to draw a connection between friendlessness and poverty, but they failed to extend that connection to the poor, and perhaps friendless, in the Black community. The Black church, on the other hand, was supposed to be a place where the poor and friendless person was dignified, supported, and befriended.⁴⁴⁶

The Black church was, like a friendship, a place of refuge and support; it was truly a sanctuary. “The opportunity found in the Negro church to be recognized, and to be ‘somebody,’ has stimulated the pride and preserved the self-respect of many Negroes who would have been entirely beaten by life.”⁴⁴⁷ Cone recounts the birth of the Black church in America as a place where “for slaves it was the sole source of personal identity and the sense of community.”⁴⁴⁸ Even in the face of grave injustice and immense suffering the Black church made survival possible, and not only survival, but flourishing within the Black church even in the midst of a hostile world.

White churchgoers had accepted Aristotle’s take that friends must be of equal socio-economic status, while of course they shored up the divisions through their continued oppression of Black people. In fact, Cone writes “that white masters ‘accepted’ black slaves in their churches as a means of keeping the black man regulated as a slave. There was no mutual

⁴⁴⁵ Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, “The Black Church: The Genius of the Negro Church,” in *African American Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Peter J. Paris and Julius Crump (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 179.

⁴⁴⁶ Mays and Nicholson explore race relations in the church more on 182ff.

⁴⁴⁷ Mays and Nicholson, 178.

⁴⁴⁸ James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 92.

relationship as equals.”⁴⁴⁹ Thus, Black people created their own independent churches where “mutual relationship as equals” could form across socio-economic lines. As white churches were actively standing in the way of God’s work of justice-enabling friendships in the world, Black churches were empowering people as goodwill was shared with the porter as with the businessperson and back again. Black churches empowered revolution and provided sanctuary. In this way, it is clear that friendship was and is central to the Black church even though the literature omits the language of friendship when talking about the relationships in that community.

4.8 A Rustinian Friendship Theology in Response to Wealth Inequity

A Rustinian friendship theology requires, naturally, the insights from Rustin’s life and work that illumine possibilities for friendships and for responding faithfully to wealth inequities. Thus, this theology will include: 1) further discussion on Rustin’s beliefs about and his actual lived friendships, 2) a combination of Rustin’s commentary on wealth inequity with that of other writers to create the basics of a theology in response to inequity, including three potential Rustinian responses, 3) and finally a suggestion for one possible practical outworking of this theology, namely universal basic income, which will be explored more fully in the next section.

4.9 Universal Basic Income and Rustinian Friendship

⁴⁴⁹ Cone, 104.

Jacques Ellul argues that to lift up Jesus as Lord is to claim that money is not, and Ellul argues that likewise to do so we must profane money. He writes,

“To profane money, like all other powers, is to take away its sacred character. . . . This profanation, then, means uprooting the sacred character, destroying the element of power. . . . There is one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, and act for which money is not made. This act is *giving*.”⁴⁵⁰

Universal basic income might be one of the ultimate ways to profane money as a society and might help that society drop some of the pretensions it has about its civil religious and monopoly over violence in some forms.⁴⁵¹ For Rustin, one of the great acts of violence committed by governments is their creation or at least perpetuation of systems that maintain separation between rich and poor. He was especially outraged that a wealthy country could allow people to live in poverty because poverty is a great form of violence. However, giving to God (in thanksgiving for God’s gracious gifts of abundance-wealth) and to other people (in recognition of God’s desire for them to flourish) has this profaning effect. Such profanation, in its combatting of money’s corrupting and alienating power, gives us the potential to participate in God’s creative action, namely in creating friendships.

Rustin recognized that exchanges, even economic ones, were, or should be, fundamentally relational. In his work for economic equity, Rustin believed in using the gains of the market. However, that use was not to increase his wealth or position but rather to meet a variety of societal needs, thus making markets about the common good rather than serving just the needs of those with capital. For Rustin, the only way for people to be free is not to be free to

⁴⁵⁰ Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, trans. LaVonne Neff (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 110.

⁴⁵¹ Various versions of UBI have been tried around the globe, mostly meeting with relative success. See <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/2/19/21112570/universal-basic-income-ubi-map> for a map of all the places UBI has been tried along with some commentary on what factors help it succeed and what factors hinder the transformation to a more just economic society.

be productive, something that most folks are forced to do for others anyway, but free to flourish by having access to all legal, socio-cultural, and economic means for such flourishing, like housing, healthcare, food, and, of course, time to build friendships with others to share in their flourishing.

In contrast to of relationships founded on giving, Cavanaugh notes that consumerism, that is, spending money on ourselves, creates a different sort of relationship between people. He writes, “Consumerism is a spiritual discipline that . . . lends itself to a certain practice of community. In identifying with the images and values associated with certain brands, we also identify ourselves with all the other people who make such an identification. . . . In the Christian tradition, by contrast, one’s attitude toward material goods is closely tied with concrete solidarity with others.”⁴⁵² Thus, in consumer culture we try to use money, though we are in fact used by money, to purchase a community or identity. Yet, in the Christian faith we were purchased for community with God and others by the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Our identity now rests in him and in his ‘concrete solidarity with others.’ It is to that we now turn.

Rustin spent his life intentionally in solidarity with others and it was this commitment to solidarity from which many of his friendships and his activist works flowed. Rather than dedicate his life to the accumulation of money, Rustin committed himself to a life of solidarity with oppressed people accumulating, instead, virtuous friends who made life richer and helped give it direction. Rustin had friendships that ended for one reason or another, but he never let money be an influence or arbiter of his relationships. Rather, he let his relationships direct his work and thus his earning potential.

⁴⁵² William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 50–51.

Hopefully it has become clear that our relationship to money impacts our relationship with humanity. Money perverts our relationship with other humans by making money and stuff more important than people, which is exacerbated in this age of the consumer economy. Cavanaugh writes, “For a number of reasons, desire in the consumer society keeps us distracted from the desires of the truly hungry, those who experience hunger as a life-threatening deprivation. It is not simply that the market encourages an erotic attraction toward things, not persons. It is that the market story establishes a fundamentally individualistic view of the human person.”⁴⁵³ Rustin recognized the individualism and knew that it was not fundamental to human experience because he also saw each person as tied up in networks of relationships that shaped who they are, and he saw society as having a responsibility to each member because each person was equally made as his kin.

Responses to wealth inequity that take these considerations seriously will be centered around the faithful people of God who rely on the Spirit and look to their tradition because they are equipped to see God’s image in others. They must downplay the role of money as much as possible and must be relational with God and with others so as to avoid idolatry and impersonalization. They must demonstrate a willingness not so much to be good stewards, but to be faithful and obedient givers and receivers. As this cannot happen in stewardship, it likewise cannot happen by pinning our hopes to any given economic system.⁴⁵⁴ If our relationship to other

⁴⁵³ Cavanaugh, 91. Cavanaugh is correct, but money clearly had a similar power in Jesus’s time as well. We see this in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, in which the rich man was unconcerned for the needs of Lazarus because he was blinded by his own hoarding and seeking after wealth. Rather than viewing ourselves as ontologically relational, as those created in the image of the Triune God, our view of money often taints our view of humanity by convincing us that we are solely the makers of our own destiny in need of no one else, and thus others, too, ought not be in need of us. However, as Ellul contends, we must “side with humanity against money,” as we recognize our connectedness to one another. Ellul, *Money and Power*, 99.

⁴⁵⁴ Of course, I would not argue that some earthly cities and economic practices are better than others.

people is to be personal, prizing humanity over money, then we cannot put faith in this or that economic system. Ellul writes, “Trying to solve the problem of money through the total economic system is both an error and an act of cowardice. It is an error precisely because it refuses to consider the human element in the problem.”⁴⁵⁵ It does not consider wealth inequity as a problem of human nature and character but of the “pure” science of economics, which is cowardice because it allows for the system to be scapegoated. Ellul continues, “I don’t have to try to use my money better, to covet less, to quit stealing. It’s not my fault. All I have to do is campaign for socialism or conservatism, and as soon as society’s problems are solved, I will be just and virtuous—effortlessly. My money problem will take care of itself.”⁴⁵⁶ It is the Christian duty to subvert this falsity by asserting once again that we recognize God’s image stamped upon each of us, and thus our response to wealth inequity must be based on actual, personal, concrete relationships with particular others, not upon the convenience of letting this or that system deal with our money problem to assuage our conscience. It is then that we begin to operate on the logic of God rather than on considerations of what is good for the goals of mammon.

In this brief exposition about four relationships—1) God’s relationship to money, 2) God’s relationship with humanity, 3) humanity’s relationship to money, and 4) humanity’s relationship with humanity—I have made clear that relationships two and four are primary by

⁴⁵⁵ Ellul, 12.

⁴⁵⁶ Ellul, 15. “This attitude explains today’s infatuation with economic systems. Young people of the middle class who are aware of their own injustice, whose consciences trouble them either because they have money or because they earn it rather easily at an undemanding job, do not dare examine their own use of money. They much prefer to join a party that works for social justice; they volunteer their time and even their money to take comfort in dreaming of a new society to which they are contributing. It is so much easier than struggling alone with the power of money. So easy and so reassuring.” Ellul, 15–16. Some might accuse Ellul or underwriting a sort of libertarian views here, which I do not think he is doing, but even if he is, Rustin offers a proper counter to that as one talked a great deal about societal and governmental responsibility. Rustin is trying to get the state to do what the church had failed to do, and when the church fails at its work, then the state might be another agent that God uses, just as God has used states in the past, primarily for punishment, when God’s people failed to be just to the poor.

using the preposition “with” instead of “to.” I likewise have demonstrated the way in which relationships one and three, if not properly understood, can be destructive to the other two. With that being the case I now sketch out a few ideas about what it might look like to prioritize these relationships even as we continue to participate in economic transactions.

To take seriously the four relationships discussed above as we put our theology into practice regarding the task of addressing wealth inequity at least four considerations are necessary: 1) creativity and flexibility, 2) a proper view of abundance and scarcity, 3) personal and communal responses, and 4) faithful obedience to God.⁴⁵⁷ Most of these ideas have at least been hinted at above so they will receive only brief attention here. I have established that wealth inequity is fundamentally an issue of relationships and noted that relationships are always in flux. It is therefore necessary for Christians to adopt what Johnson calls “viator economics” an approach that is fundamentally creative and flexible.⁴⁵⁸ She notes that Christians are pilgrims and thus argues, “In a pilgrimage, the path itself matters and is already sanctified, because of what it aims at. For Christians concerned with economic justice, this means that we should not look for a static solution, one perfect system in which to rest. We have here no lasting city. Fostering justice requires local and ongoing negotiation, as does the work of meeting human needs.”⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ While looking over Rustin’s life it has become clear that he was a faithful advocate and practitioner of each of these four attitudes and actions for the sake of helping people flourish as selves but with other people called friends or other selves.

⁴⁵⁸ According to Azaransky, Rustin argued along similar lines. “The Cross would not have been possible without the years of preaching, healing, going the second mile and spiritual ministry which preceded it. The doctrine of the Cross is not a doctrine of futility. It is true that if you lose your life you will gain it. We must not base our theology on the assumption that the existing political and economic order can and must be saved. Change is inevitable and we must find a less destructive way than war for achieving a changed society.” Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle*, 172–73, original in Report on For Retreat at Pendle Hill, April 12–14, 1951, box 58, August Meier Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁴⁵⁹ Johnson, *Fear of Beggars*, 6. Later in the book she writes, “Once we understand that Christian praxis concerning poverty and property is in life- and soul-threatening trouble, we may be able to find the nerve to face the deeper challenges lurking within these questions. But for those willing to follow the path, the Christian pilgrimage is

According to John's Gospel, when Jesus questioned his disciples about feeding the crowd it was a test, presumably of their faith and their willingness to be open to whatever solution God might present, both of which should follow from their relationship with Jesus. Ellul's argument is not dissimilar from Johnson's in that he says that the Bible is a dialogue about and between God and humanity, noting as well that it gets us started on a journey and then we live our lives on that path. The path is the ongoing effort to walk with God as we first seek out God's abundance-wealth in relationship with God, and then second, appropriate ways to bear witness to that abundance-wealth in relationship with others.⁴⁶⁰ It is in these relationships, being on this particular path, that Christians find out that in God there is abundance, not scarcity.

I have worked out my idea of God's abundance-wealth already, so I only want to make note of a couple more related ideas here. Modern economic systems (and for those in earlier times) tend to rely on a belief in scarcity. Cavanaugh argues that "the idea of scarcity implies that goods are not held in common, that the consumption of goods is essentially a private experience," which fundamentally removes consumption from the sphere of relationships.⁴⁶¹

In chapter two of this dissertation, I shared a beautiful story about Rustin caring for Randolph as Randolph aged. Specifically, Rustin moved Randolph in right next to him, and the two shared meals together often. Rustin cut up Randolph's food as necessary and he coaxed Randolph into eating. I find this remarkable in a time where people send their elderly relatives to assisted-living ghettos (even if some of them are nice) so that we do not have to see or tend to

not a dead end. Although this work cannot end with 'And they all lived happily ever after,' it may be able to manage 'Maranatha.'" Johnson, 181.

⁴⁶⁰ Ellul, *Money and Power*, 26. See n33 above.

⁴⁶¹ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 91.

them and we can instead focus on the development of our careers. In this situation, common in America and highlighted by COVID-19, working people often choose to work on increasing their economic security, perhaps in an attempt to stave off their own deaths, while they put their own parents in institutions where other people are tasked with caring for them.⁴⁶² Rustin not only cared for Randolph, but he did so even though Randolph was not his kin. Randolph was Rustin's friend and Rustin was damned determined to care for his friends, even if it stood in the way of some of his own ambitions. Rustin demonstrates for us the beauty and dare I say the value in consuming as a community, in particular a community of friends wherein we make sure each person has what they need to flourish, even when that means taking the (unpaid) time to cut up our friend's food for them to eat. If consuming alone enforces vices like greed, gluttony, and sloth, then perhaps consuming together, like we are invited to do at Christ's table, might, as Basil claims, reverse the curse of the vices of consumer society and even of the fall itself because we choose abundance in our relationships over the scarcity of market competition.

Yet capitalism (and perhaps all economic systems) marks out a different path with each guidepost pointing again to scarcity and the supposed failure of God to be sufficient, let alone abundant. This is the path that has its beginning at the wide gate which beckons humanity to the illusory comfort and protection of money's wealth but which ends in destruction. Therefore, capitalism can be rightly named a heresy. Long contends, "Capitalism is a Christian heresy because of the loss of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity according to which the world is created through, in, and for participation with God, who is not some bare divine unity defined

⁴⁶² The COVID-19 death rate in Africa and Asia is much less than in the United States and what we do with the elderly seems to explain in part why. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/08/briefing/oprah-meghan-interview-biden-stimulus-bill.html>

primarily of will, but who is a gift who can be given and yet never alienated in his givenness.”⁴⁶³

A truly Christian view of God’s abundance brings goods and consumption back into this sphere in which God and God’s creation are viewed as gifts born out of God’s ontological relationality.⁴⁶⁴

In feeding the crowd it is noteworthy that Jesus utilized the personal gift of a little boy and the communal effort of his disciples to distribute and clean up after the meal. I have probably beat this horse beyond death, but any Christian response to wealth inequity must have personal and communal relationships in mind, because this is the appropriate reflection of God’s relational abundance-wealth. This makes the church the ideal center of discussions and activities against wealth inequity. Long, again pointing to Milbank, says that “the church is the basis for a political economy that will flow out of God’s original plentitude and not be grounded in an inevitable scarcity. Even though we see this political economy only through a glass darkly, we must in faith live it and participate in its presence.”⁴⁶⁵ Likewise, Cavanaugh argues, “From a Christian point of view, the churches should take an active role in fostering economic practices that are consonant with the true ends of creation. This requires promoting economic practices

⁴⁶³ D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market*, Radical Orthodoxy (London: Routledge, 2000), 259. Long follows with a line that is congruent with Johnson’s viator economics and Ellul’s notion of dialogue with God when he writes that the work of the political economy of the church necessitates “a poetic encounter.”

⁴⁶⁴ Saint Basil, for instance, argues that recognizing God’s relational abundance allows us to give rather than hoard or merely consume. The more remarkable claim, however, is that he says such giving actually reverses the curse of the Fall. After describing starvation in great detail, he writes that one can “undo the primal sin by sharing your food. Just as Adam transmitted sin by eating wrongfully, so we wipe away the treacherous food when we remedy the need and hunger of our brothers and sisters.” Saint Basil, *On Social Justice: St. Basil the Great*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder, Popular Patristics (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 33. That colossal theological claim points to the Eucharist in which we indeed do experience God’s abundance now as the promissory note of the fullness of that abundance to be experienced in the Parousia.

⁴⁶⁵ D. Long, *Divine Economy*, 260.

that maintain close connections between capital, labor, and communities so that real communal discernment of the good can take place.”⁴⁶⁶ This undermines the alienating power of money while bringing people into communion with one another and with God and is thus the way in which abundance pervades communities, neighborhoods, and cities.

John 6:1–15 sets the argument for stewardship, as presented by Johnson above, on its head in that there is this boy who is the rightful owner of the food, and God in Jesus becomes the steward who takes what is given and distributes it. This story, then, suggests that the faithful Christian life is not about stewardship of what God owns, but about obedience to God and seeking God’s blessing on each of our attempts at charity and justice.⁴⁶⁷ Thus Johnson rightly says, “Jesus’ fidelity to his mission is usually called obedience rather than stewardship, and the emphasis on his teachings would seem to imply a corollary about the obedience of disciples.”⁴⁶⁸ Obedience to God declares that it is indeed God, not mammon, who is our master. It also bears witness to God as our Father who gives good gifts.

⁴⁶⁶ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 32.

⁴⁶⁷ Johnson continues her diatribe against contemporary notions of stewardship by arguing that such a logic, contra that asserted by Chrysostom, maintains that “all needs can be reduced to a lack of money. All necessities can be bought.” Johnson, *Fear of Beggars*, 85. Thus, unlike the spiritual transaction in Chrysostom’s words, our relation to other people is reduced to pure economics in which all of our needs are confined to this body and this life. Humanity is thus reduced to mere matter, and therefore has no real value. Furthermore, she points out that when the idea of wealth as both something that is a gift from God and truly owned by God are conflated into the one idea of stewardship this creates a moral conundrum. She writes, this conflation contends that “only God is the true owner, yet wealth is a gift given to a person, who therefore has an uncontested right to dispose of it. The gift is given for the good of others and is to be used in accord with divine teaching. It is however, a gift, not a loan. Therefore, any threat to that ownership can be rebuffed by the insistence that it was given by God. Divine law is thus invoked to strengthen property claims, in the same sentence in which those claims are nominally undermined and hedged about with strident demands of generosity.” Johnson, 88. This moral confusion tends to lead to circumstances in which the former claim holds great power over the latter, and thus the rich can assert their divine right to whatever possessions they have so long as they do some good with their money along the way.

⁴⁶⁸ Johnson, 149.

Johnson's account of Peter Maurin, the one from whom she gleaned the idea of viator economics, mirrors much in this pericope. She argues that "he described a threefold program: Roundtable discussions for the clarification of thought; houses of hospitality, preferably overseen by the bishop, to be centers of works of mercy; and agronomic universities, farming communes where workers could find work as well as study and scholars could broaden themselves through labor."⁴⁶⁹ I see a similar idea here in that this work must be both personal and communal, as hospitality is when it is at its best, and it should be centered in the church. All the while there should be an ongoing discussion of what it is that Jesus would have us do. The anarchist Rustin that Wiley describes would certainly find such a program of interest. In fact, this program shares similarities with the Freedom Budget—like helping farmers and increasing access to education—and Rustin offered hospitality and was a sort of guru in roundtable discussions since he had learned about consensus decision making as a Quaker and perfected the clarification of ideas while working with folks like Muste and Randolph.

I have found Kelly Johnson's words that "the opposite of poverty is not plenty, but friendship" to be right on the money.⁴⁷⁰ She later continues,

A gift can only be given to a beggar if the gift invites the beggar into friendship. Friendship, including the power to accuse and argue frankly and to know ourselves accountable to each other and to relax in each other's homes, is an achievement under the best of circumstances and a marvel in an encounter of almsgiver and beggar. But a wandering preacher, betrayed and crucified, rose with healing in his hands. We have reason to wait in joyful hope.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Johnson, 189–90. See also, Johnson 192–93. Naturally, as a Catholic, Maurin's idea is that this work should be overseen by a bishop, but in other types of ecclesial structures the same basic idea could work out yet be overseen by appropriate leaders, preferably, from my perspective, a group of folks who have varied vested interests in the work.

⁴⁷⁰ Again, puns appropriate for academic papers, right?

⁴⁷¹ Johnson, 220.

We not only have reason to wait in that joyful hope but to share it through all varieties of friendships, and when we do that work, the work of making virtuous friends, we find the abundant life that Jesus offers his friends.

4.10 Shifting Toward a Just Society

Hopefully this has made the beginnings of a theological case regarding the problems of money as it relates to wealth inequity and poverty. Now I hope to offer a solution by suggesting three responses or shifts. First, we need to shift from focusing on having to focusing on being. Second, we need to nix the ethic of stewardship in exchange for an ethic of accompaniment.⁴⁷² Third, we must trade poverty for flourishing.

All of this points the fact that humans need to understand themselves first as *being* rather than as *having* or *doing*. For example, when referring to ourselves we tend to talk about what we do to make money, or apologizing that we do not currently do anything to make money, or by talking about what things we own. Instead, we should start talking about ourselves as friends, sisters and brothers, and children of God. In this way we can start to understand that Jesus provides us Sabbath in which we can simply be in God. This shift counters the meritocracy, usually reflected in the size of a bank account, of our modern world of global capitalism. It is a starting place for helping us realize that poor and rich are all in need of God and each other. It is a good starting place as we grow in our understanding of charity as friendship with God. Charity is another name for the Holy Spirit, so we participate with the Triune God in gift and reception when we act in gratitude as God's friends which forms us like the God who gives us good gifts,

⁴⁷² Johnson, Ellul, and Rustin are all wary about money/wealth capturing our imaginations and our logic, and instead want money to come second to relationships and facilitate life-giving exchanges for the common good.

including God's self, and charity often means being able to receive gifts graciously as well. Giving and receiving gifts in friendship like this at least imagines if not begins to create a world in which monetary meritocracy can fade away.

Rustin, from the time he was little, focused on the former, arguing for the value of human life and demonstrating that the fulfilling human life, the life of friendship and virtues like justice, pursues becoming for the purposes of being, that is, such a person works to become more virtuous rather than to accumulate more money and belongings. Rustin, it should be noted, was a collector of many items including furniture, artwork, walking canes, and more, but even these were all, in part, intended to be a delight to Rustin's friends. Furthermore, Rustin used his keen eye to purchase fine art and the rest at bargain prices, if for no other reason than that he never made very much money.

4.11 An Ethic of Accompaniment as Peripatetic Friendship

Second, we need to nix an ethic of stewardship so we can take up an ethic of accompaniment. Kelly Johnson argues that a contemporary stewardship ethic suggests that some people are of more fundamental worth than others, that they have been chosen to administrate God's financial affairs in the world. She says that this ethic sees "the rich as the normative ethical agent," and thus it strips most of the world of meaningful moral agency because such agency is tied to disposable income.⁴⁷³ Most of the billion plus people of India must be less worthy or responsible than the average American! This approach does not take into account the corrupt systems that cause some to have money while others do not. It is unlikely that God would

⁴⁷³ Johnson, *Fear of Beggars*, 84.

have white people rape the continent of Africa and steal its resources so that they could be stewards of God's wealth.⁴⁷⁴

Rustin clearly stood against this stewardship mentality that Johnson critiques, which is not to say he thought people should be irresponsible with their money, but rather that everyone should have access, the right even, to enough money that they could live a dignified life. For Rustin, it is evident in the Freedom Budget and elsewhere that he sought a society that would help quell a perverted notion of stewardship and replace it with one that recognizes the contributions that all people can make when they are not fighting through grinding poverty. Rustin addressed this in writing in a number of places, and his life affirms it as he organized and marched with people of a variety of socio-economic realities. For instance, in the planning for the March of Washington, Rustin (and others) made sure that systems were put in place that would enable poorer folks to participate in the march as well, especially because the march itself was, in part, about jobs, a theme which Rustin picked up more thoroughly in the Freedom Budget when he and his friends decided to argue for full employment along with guaranteed income for those who could not work.

Rustin's work to ensure that poor people could be at the March on Washington and then marching with them and countless others from all over the socio-economic spectrum was but one

⁴⁷⁴ Extraction and use of those materials is not necessarily the problem, though many forms of mining are environmentally devastating, but rather the twofold issue that most of the people in the closest proximity to the extraction sites are unable to afford the products that are the made from the natural resources, and the negative effects ranging from environmental degradation to war to genocide affect those same people. Further, the issue is really about domination that one group of people, namely wealthier, mostly western nations, has over the other. Also, the endless "need" to continue buying to newest or the (often perceived) best items causes a significant problem because it makes the demand more than the land can take. Thus, along with returning control of resources to locals, wealthier consumers should consider what we might go without so that less damage is done and important devices like pacemakers can be made with those extracted resources, and also hopefully made available to those who, in our current global economic setup, cannot afford such lifesaving technologies.

example of his own application of an ethic of accompaniment. Accompaniment is at the heart of peripatetic friendship because it is committing to another or others, saying in essence, “We shall go together.” One way this accompaniment happens is by marching together to fight the injustices of the day. Whether or not marching together makes an immediate impact on poor folks, marching together communicates to folks in poverty that there are those who care about both justice and accompaniment. I think of accompaniment here as what goes on both during and after a march just as much as the march itself. Rustin, for instance, typically had plans for continued action, of actual accompaniment in the day-to-day struggles and of legislative agendas based on his commitment to accompanying, walking with the poor toward a society that lives into its expressed values, values that were and are often kept out of reach of many folks in poverty. Yet it is the aspect of accompaniment that Rustin most loses sight of in his move from protest to politics.

However, Rustin, as the narrative in previous chapters attests, spent most of his life committed to an ethic of accompaniment. Liberation theologian Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez and his friend Paul Farmer, famous doctor to the poor, discuss what an ethic of accompaniment might entail. Two foundational aspects of their ethic of accompaniment are the “preferential option for the poor,” and listening. The former is a relatively common theme in Catholic social teaching, liberation theologies, and in other church traditions as well, so it should need little to no discussion now. Listening, however, is a skill, one where *techne* and *phronesis* are both required. Listening is a skill that takes time and practice to make sure one is both hearing and understanding another as well as responding appropriately. Doctor Farmer says, “Listening . . . is

both engagement and research.”⁴⁷⁵ In peripatetic friendship (exemplified by King and the others at the Meredith March), listening helps us understand others better and it simultaneously lets them know we care or at least have a level of respect for them.

Farmer, who co-founded Partners in Health “to bring the benefits of modern medical science to those most in need of them,” also connects accompaniment with overcoming the anguish of poverty and loneliness. He points to the second part of the organization’s mission, “to serve as an antidote to despair.”⁴⁷⁶ One can no doubt imagine the potential for despair during some of the civil rights protests and marches, but that anguish was assuaged by the peripatetic friends folks had during and after those actions. An ethic of accompaniment is largely an ethic of showing up, bringing yourself, your skills, and your willingness to sacrifice to the streets, to the table, and to any place where alienation and abjection try to stamp out God’s light of abundance-wealth.

Farmer, like Rustin, realized that well-being and flourishing require more than an improvement in one area of a person’s life. But in order to clearly see the other areas in need of care, folks who are positioned for and prone to stewardship need to be with poor and otherwise marginalized folks. For Farmer, that means he cannot simply try to treat diseases, but he must also get to know people where they live and work and share life with others. In doing this, he offers both encouragement and is able to better discern what is commonly called the social determinants of health. How do people’s living and working conditions affect their health? How

⁴⁷⁵ Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutierrez, *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Father Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 20.

⁴⁷⁶ Farmer and Gutierrez, 21.

does a lack of preventive care impact the health problems that could come up without such care?
What social structures are standing in the way of people receiving adequate healthcare?

Farmer, as a physician, has a slightly different focus than Rustin, but Rustin named many of those social determinants of health in the Freedom Budget where he insists on meaningful and well-paying jobs, decent housing, and access to quality healthcare for all people. Rustin and Farmer both learned these lessons because they had already adopted an ethic of accompaniment that grew into working to solve the issues that poor friends face, and this, in turn, tended to push them back to accompaniment again.⁴⁷⁷ Farmer summed up a key aspect of peripatetic friendship while reflecting on the difficulties he saw in Haiti. He said, “I tried not to turn away.”⁴⁷⁸ Peripatetic friendship requires going in the same direction, but in order to have an idea of which way that is, friends must first see the world as it is. Then they can envision what it could and should be.

Gutiérrez offers some similar insights to Rustin, namely that poverty is structural violence that, in part, must be overcome by friendship. One of the benefits that philosophers and theologians have named about friendship is its ability to ease suffering because burdens can be shared. This is an ethic of accompaniment at the heart of peripatetic friendship. Yet, it is not only the sharing of burdens this ethic offers. It also provides the solidarity and fidelity necessary to help suffering friends become flourishing friends. Gutiérrez argues that “the first premise in

⁴⁷⁷ One of the most compelling critiques I have about Rustin is that he largely left behind this ethic of accompaniment, though not entirely, and thus ended up often accompanying the rich and powerful and being influenced by them to work *for* the poor more so than *with* the poor as he had done previously. A proper ethic of accompaniment demands an embodiment of both the *for* and the *with*. Rustin lost much of his ability to speak truth to power because he was too close to power and too distant from the powerless.

⁴⁷⁸ Farmer and Gutierrez, 24.

theology is to speak about the absence of this question of the suffering of the innocent.”⁴⁷⁹ Folks could argue that this is not the first premise of theology, but it is hard to escape the fact that the suffering of the innocent One, Jesus, is central to Christian faith.⁴⁸⁰ Christians declare this every time they recite the early creeds. We literally say, “[Jesus] suffered under [the politician] Pontius Pilate.”

Further, Gutiérrez claims, “Liberation theology begins with the question: How do you say to the poor, ‘God loves you’? This is our call to witness as followers of Jesus, although the question is greater than our capacity to answer it.” God answers by joining humanity, particularly the poor, and accompanying them, even though doing so leads to a cross. Hence, Gutiérrez continues, “To be Christians, we must follow Jesus by walking with the poor.”⁴⁸¹ If he is correct, then the very essence of being Christian is adopting an ethic of accompaniment by which we join the poor in their sufferings and their work for liberation.

Jenni Weiss Block and Michael Griffin bring this discussion from the streets to the table. They write about an event in honor of the work of Gutiérrez and Farmer, these two extraordinary friends. The event came to its high point, a worship service. They write, “In that chapel, with Father Gustavo’s students as the choir and Dr. Farmer as the lector, all of us gathered knew that we were experiencing something very special. Here were two of the most accomplished men of our age, sharing with others the simple and profound acts of the Eucharist: exchanging gestures

⁴⁷⁹ Farmer and Gutierrez, 164.

⁴⁸⁰ Likewise, people could have and have had many debates about precisely what constitutes innocence when talking about mere humans, but in this case, I argue that Gutiérrez, along with Rustin, means “innocent” in the sense that the poor, generally speaking, have committed no particular crime that should make them suffer the indignities of poverty, especially when the New Testament so clearly condemns the rich, as such, while focusing on the uplift of the poor.

⁴⁸¹ Farmer and Gutierrez, 165.

of peace, listening to words of justice, drinking from the cup of salvation, and eating the bread of life. Indeed, sharing bread together—in Latin, *cum pane*—is the original meaning of the word accompaniment.”⁴⁸² We are reminded that Jesus is the friend who not only accompanies us but who graciously leads the way. This same Jesus invites us to accompany him at the table where he is both host and feast, so he literally becomes the accompaniment that we take into ourselves as sustenance for the journey.

Johnson offers another compelling reason to take up an ethic of accompaniment, by way of naming another problem with a stewardship ethic.⁴⁸³ The problem is that a stewardship ethic is morally confusing in that it claims that money is ultimately owned by God (an idea addressed above), and thus it ought to be shared generously among all people. Yet, that money is understood to have been given as a gift to some people and thus they now have rights to it and what to do with it. Such thinking ultimately strengthens claims to property rights and allows for some folks to continue accumulating resources while others are deprived. Such accumulation is seen as not only acceptable but as God’s blessing, so long as those who have the resources do a little bit of good with it along the way. Though it has been implied, it is worth naming that a stewardship ethics is ultimately paternalistic. Those who have more make serious determinations about the lives of those who have not. Finally, stewardship logic is the logic that makes possible chattel slavery. Slaves, or the money to buy them, are seen as a gift from God to be stewarded for

⁴⁸² Jennie Weiss Block and Michael Griffin, “Introduction,” in Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutierrez, *In The Company Of The Poor: Conversations With Dr. Paul Farmer And Father Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 14.

⁴⁸³ I am wary to write this, but it seems to me that Rustin’s life worked in reverse of what I am suggesting here. He spent most of his life decidedly embracing an ethic of accompaniment but in his later years he, only in part, adopted a stewardship mindset that undermined the political imagination he had when he was marching, experimenting, and giving testimony.

this purpose or that. Slave owners have absolute right over the lives of slaves, but are also seen as being responsible for them as their lack of resources indicates that they are not able to be responsible for themselves. This logic in its dubious divine defining of absolute use rights, property claims, and paternalism must be damned, and replaced with something more faithful to the gospel.

4.12 Exchanging Poverty for Flourishing

That “something” more faithful to the gospel is acquiring a mindset and lifestyle that prioritizes the flourishing of all people over poverty for any person. In order to highlight why this is crucial, Gutiérrez explains that “poverty ultimately means an early and unjust death. Poverty is not only a social issue. It is a human issue, and consequently a challenge to faith and thus a challenge to theology. I said earlier that we have several approaches to poverty but the most important approach comes from direct contact with the poor.”⁴⁸⁴ This quote reemphasizes the ethic of accompaniment, but it puts the problem of poverty in the starkest of terms, terms that require humanity to abolish poverty. For Rustin, one way to do this in America was to adopt “economic rights” to help remove some of the confusion that comes along with stewardship and helps clarify the actual problems faced by folks in poverty, one of which is the seeming or real lack of moral agency, at least when it comes to money, in a world that seems to think that moral agency is reserved for those with enough money to consider how they might or might not share it.⁴⁸⁵ So, third, is the exchange of poverty for flourishing. I remind readers that Gutiérrez asks,

⁴⁸⁴ Farmer and Gutierrez, 184.

⁴⁸⁵ Some might argue that in our current political climate such a proposal would be partisan, but Rustin worked hard to show that it was not necessarily partisan. The idea for Rustin et al. was to make it as non-partisan as possible, giving both parties things they wanted. If the Bill of Rights was nonpartisan, then it seems like this could be too, and I think the best way to get it done is through the kind of work folks like Rev. Barber and friends are

“How do we say to the poor, ‘God loves you’?” At least part of his response is that we need to exchange the paternalistic ethic of stewardship with an ethic of sisterly and brotherly accompaniment. However, accompaniment is only the beginning. It is the journey together toward a world without the suffering of poverty.

For the rich this should have particular appeal if we take seriously that God does indeed draw near to the brokenhearted and there is a preferential option for the poor, because in being with the poor we are graced with the opportunity to meet with God. For the poor, this means that they do indeed have moral agency and something to offer to the rich, plus they are not treated as charity projects but as friends as their physical needs are met. Gutiérrez, Farmer, Rustin, and others contend that this is a good first step on the road to abolishing poverty.

In a related vein, it helps us see how people are socialized differently depending on their socio-economic status so that we can address that reality. Gutierrez and Farmer argue that the poor are socialized for poverty, and the rich are socialized for plenty.⁴⁸⁶ What might a society look like that socialized people through friendships of virtue across socio-economic and other lines? Thus, we need each other as the poor need the physical goods and services of the rich, and the rich need to be reminded of their arrogance, apathy, gluttony, and greed. John Chrysostom offers a beautiful description of what this exchange looks like through spiritual eyes. He preached, “You are indebted to the poor for receiving your kindness. For if there were no poor, the greater part of your sins would not be removed. They are the healers of your wounds. . . . The physician, extending his hand . . . does not exercise the healing art more than the poor person,

doing now in The New Poor People’s Campaign, the closest modern likeness to Rustin’s antiracism and anti-poverty efforts.

⁴⁸⁶ See Farmer and Gutierrez, 16.

who stretches out a hand to receive your alms, and thus becomes a cure for your ills.”⁴⁸⁷ This sounds like the sort of exchange that happens within a friendship, or at least as an invitation to friendship.

We need to be socialized together neither in poverty nor plenty, but in God’s abundance-wealth. We must journey together as pilgrims on the same path, especially as we walk through the valley of the shadow of mammon. For much of Rustin’s own life he was walking through this valley either because of his own situation or because he was joining others in the journey and in the marches that made up portions of that journey.

4.13 Meaningful Jobs and The Changing Economy

Another issue about which Rustin was concerned, as he stated in the Freedom Budget and elsewhere, is the loss of jobs, particularly entry-level and manufacturing jobs, to new technologies. While there is a debate about the degree to which jobs will be replaced by technology, this was a concern that Rustin shared with Gutierrez and Farmer who argue that not only do automation and other technologies take away certain kinds of jobs, the progression was and is happening at such a rate that societies have a hard time adjusting. The poor and working class are affected the most because technological innovations move faster than theological and ethical reflections can be offered, thus there is the need for a permanent set of protections that

⁴⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, “Homily 14 on 1 Timothy” in *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, ed. Amy G. Oden (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 105. See also, “In Time of Famine,” 81–83, and “Against Those Who Lend at Interest,” 88–99, in Basil, *On Social Justice*. While Basil does indeed humanize the poor, sometimes the actual role of the poor is neglected. Although he rightly focuses on the proper use of wealth, namely the love of neighbor and the common good, I wonder if his emphasis on the wealthy might in fact rob the poor of some of their agency. He does tell the poor not to be discouraged and to give to those who are even poorer, along with warning them about borrowing, but his words might encourage too much passivity for the poor as they struggle through their plight.

will help ensure the well-being, and even flourishing, of folks struggling through poverty as they navigate an ever-changing employment landscape.

Regarding employment, two issues must be raised. First, as David Graeber argues, there are what he calls “bullshit jobs” that a society should discard, like fast food jobs or a lot of middle management and administration jobs.⁴⁸⁸ Second, there are many important jobs that are performed by a particular class of working poor folks who are often abused. Should there be a class of people relegated to either type of job? Rustin would largely agree with the first point, although he would prefer “bullshit jobs” that paid a living wage to no job at all. He suggested in the bullet points summary of the Freedom Budget that an economic bill of rights must include specifically the words “meaningful job,” so it seems like Rustin has a similar concern. On the second point, which is a potential problem for universal basic income, namely around the question of how to make sure those meaningful but very difficult jobs get done if folks are not forced to do them because of poverty. One suggestion might be that young people, those who might be in the range of military draft age, could be conscripted to do this work as a service to the common good, but Rustin clearly seemed to reject conscription because he did not believe the state had that sort of power over people. A better suggestion is that such jobs should be incentivized through programs similar to Americorps or Peace Corps, in which people are paid for the work, but also gain valuable skills and have something on their resume to help them get admitted to college or find employment. Although this is not in the Freedom Budget, it is a sensible addition to help keep out “bullshit jobs” while incentivizing meaningful work for the common good.

⁴⁸⁸ David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

Farmer and Gutierrez argue that the progression of technology that increases both the resource/money gap and the geographical gap between rich and poor continues to gain momentum. The poor lose out on jobs and the rich save on the bottom line while they tuck themselves up more securely, that is, in seclusion from the poor. It is like a Fibonacci sequence on a conch shell in which as the shell spirals outward the gap grows exponentially, and soon we might be at a point, or we might be there now, in which only a miracle can close the gap. The golden ratio represented by the Fibonacci sequence is beautiful in nature, but in relationships within humanity it just means that some have more and more gold so that they can get themselves even further away from those who might want, or need, some of it.

Wealth inequity is primarily a problem because we all live in a world in which poverty exists. Gutierrez states emphatically that “poverty is evil!” It should not be romanticized, but rather, as Rustin and King would agree, it must be abolished. Flourishing is the result of the merger of solidarity and charity. This is a picture of heaven in which there is no poverty and the only currency is love and friendship, and that in abundance. It is not enough to simply eradicate poverty though, that will not itself be flourishing. Rather, flourishing is when we share both our goods/resources and our very lives with one another. Gutierrez rightly argues, “Poverty, ultimately, means an early and unjust death.”⁴⁸⁹ That being the case poverty must be slain so that flourishing can rise in our new shared lives together.

One way to do that, which will be covered in more depth later in the chapter, and that is a Universal Basic Income, an idea not dissimilar from the combination of full employment for those who are willing and able to work along with a basic guaranteed income to those who

⁴⁸⁹ Farmer and Gutierrez, *In the Company of the Poor*, 184.

cannot work that Rustin and his coauthors put forward in the Freedom Budget. However, for now, it is worth noting how Rustin's life was an example of abundance-wealth because he lived out these shifts above in his own life along the lives of many others, primarily among those who Rustin counted as friends. I have coined (pun intended) the term "abundance-wealth" to refer to the true wealth that is the eternal gift of God rather than the deceitful and temporal wealth of Mammon. Ellul says, "Mammon is a liar. This is another part of his iniquity, for he is opposed to true wealth, or rather truthful wealth, wealth which is in the truth. . . . We see Mammon's work in half-tones: it is a counterfeit of God's work, with belief, hope, justification and love."⁴⁹⁰ Thus, all money is counterfeit, though it is put to best use and presents the least danger to individuals and society when it is spread around, especially when folks understand it as something less than God's ideal way of working in the world. But, abundance-wealth is the true flourishing we find in friendships with God and others, which is the truest of all forms of liberation. Johnson rightly states, as has been mentioned already, that "the opposite of poverty is not plenty, but friendship." Such a realization leads her to espouse a viator economics that is based on "local, relational, and continual negotiations" about how a community shares in economic life together. It might involve a universal basic income today and something else tomorrow, but we figure it out together as friends or those seeking to be friends. If poverty equals death, and the opposite of poverty is friendship, then life is abundance-wealth found in friendship with God and all God's friends (which again is notably tied together with liberation). Johnson recognizes that "in this age we might not get to happily ever after, but at least we can join together to muster 'Maranatha!'" Rustin and Farmer and Gutierrez are in basic agreement, but Rustin further argued against such

⁴⁹⁰ Ellul, *Money and Power*, 95.

wealth inequity, not to mention racial and other types of prejudiced oppression, not only with his words, but with his body, at least until he made the shift “From Protest to Politics.”⁴⁹¹

4.14 Universal Basic Income and the Promise of Friendship

Rustin’s commitments point to at least one possible step American society can take to promote both friendship-making and prevent poverty, universal basic income (UBI). While Rustin does not argue for UBI in the Freedom Budget Rustin precisely, two other pieces of the Freedom Budget would have the same basic effect for all intents and purposes on the moral fabric of American society, and hopefully would expand into other countries as well.⁴⁹²

Universal basic income responds to all three suggested societal shifts in a way that could help people not only have their physical needs met but also be moral agents in ways that were impossible before, or at least to have their moral agency recognized by middle class and rich folks. King and Rustin suggested a UBI many decades ago and it is currently on the radar of some economists now, and several nations, states, and even smaller communities are experimenting with UBI.

Admittedly, while UBI is not quite as personal of an action as I prefer, it does allow for people to *be* a bit more since it takes the focus, at least on the lower end of the socio-economic

⁴⁹¹ In 1965, with “From Protest to Politics” Rustin largely left his peripatetic friendships behind, to both his own detriment and the detriment of the movement, acting as if marching and civil disobedience, angelic troublemaking as it were, were not political but voting was. His critical mistake here was forgetting about the morality-shaping and friendship-building of the marches, not to mention their ability to inspire people to other political action, even including voting. This was a critical error on Rustin’s part that both seems to flow out of his changing friendships and resulting in many of his radical friends to lose faith in Rustin’s strategic, and perhaps moral, compass.

⁴⁹² See, for example, Sigal Samuel, “Everywhere Basic Income Has Been Tried, In One Map” in Vox, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/2/19/21112570/universal-basic-income-ubi-map>.

scale, off of working to earn. It likewise means that people might be less inclined to describe themselves by what they do to earn money and instead by who they are in relation to God and others. It also assumes the moral agency of all people, that they can make decisions about money rather than having those decisions made by a paternalistic caretaker. Such an income would also mean that poor folks would not strive to simply live, at least as much, and rich folks of goodwill would not feel so responsible about making decisions about how to steward money and make decisions about other people's lives. And, finally, it would go a long way toward abolishing poverty. It might also let people focus a bit more on flourishing together rather than on being the haves and have nots. It is no silver bullet to be sure, but it is one concrete action that could flow from the theological responses above.

At this juncture, it is worth revisiting the Freedom Budget in order to clarify that neither Rustin, nor I, are interested in some of the more libertarian versions of UBI in which the basic income will take place of other social safety nets. Rustin, in the Freedom Budget, clarifies that along with full employment at an adequate minimum wage and basic income, that access to quality healthcare should be available to all in some sort of socialized medicine setup. The Budget also demanded adequate housing for all, and in fact wanted to add to and improve the current programs in social security and other welfare programs. Thus, in short, UBI should not be a replacement for other social services, but it should be an addition to the expansion and improvement of various government benefits and a strong social safety net.

Theologically, UBI, hopefully led by the church, could answer or mitigate Johnson's correct claim that the normative moral agent is those with disposable income. Some folks have felt like less than full moral agents while those whose wealth gave them a sense of moral agency also gave them the opportunity to use their giving as judgments about other people, thus with

each charitable “gift,” they are literally making decisions about who should and should not flourish. The increased giving capacity of the poor could reorder how society thinks about charity by changing the paradigm from one group of givers and one group of receivers to being a society where we are more open to giving and receiving not only others’ goods and services but one another’s personhood, and thus new, more equitable friendships could form. Essentially, it lets the act of charity be more available to more people, while also reducing the giving of charity to the poorest in society so that all people might be able to better assess together what communities need for all of their members to flourish not only by having basic needs met like food, water, shelter, clothing, and healthcare, but also by empowering folks in poverty to participate in decisions about what charitable causes should receive their money, along with perhaps their volunteer time and even potential leadership when the obstacles created by poverty are largely removed.

4.15 Church as Alternative Economic Community: Toward a Christian Response

While Rustin centered the federal government in the Freedom Budget, the issues raised in this project also bear reflecting upon in local churches as well as whole denominations. McClendon’s argument for biography as theology says that one of the purposes of that endeavor is to provide a tool for reflection in current Christian communities. I have suggested that UBI is an appropriate measure in response to wealth inequity, but the church’s economic imagination could and should run wild because our Lord was always creative with money, whether he was pulling coins out of a fish’s mouth or calling for the people to think about who they are in relationship to God and money.

Kelly Johnson follows Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day to argue that the church’s economics should be “viator economics,” that is, an economics of those “who follow the path” of

“Christian pilgrimage.”⁴⁹³ For Johnson, Maurin, and Day, Christian economics is a journey; it requires walking together in both literal and metaphorical senses. She notes that, at least on this side of the Parousia, this work is never done, and thus we must keep journeying together learning to find solutions in our peripatetic school, the school of disciples of Christ and their other friends. Like Rustin’s politics, a certain ambivalence toward economic philosophies and systems is necessary for Christians to have the imagination to address wealth inequities as appropriate for each time and place. D. Stephen Long has suggested, for example, a maximum moral income, an idea that would have church communities share in a discipline regarding wealth and income.⁴⁹⁴ It could be that a portion of the money that anyone earns over the established maximum moral income of a congregation or denomination goes into a fund that functions like a UBI, seeing to it that every member of that faith community had sufficient resources while helping remove some of the temptations of wealth and the power of mammon for those with higher earning power. Further, if a church is exploring something like a possible maximum moral income and church member UBI, it would likely benefit church members’ moral vision if they participated together in marches for minimum wage or for workers’ rights or any other type of nonviolent civil disobedience or protest so that they might discover the power of peripatetic friendship and be schooled in the realities of poverty and wealth inequity. Perhaps many of our churches have relatively little interest, at least as demonstrated by their actions and inaction, in economic

⁴⁹³ See Johnson, *Fear of Beggars*, 181.

⁴⁹⁴ D. Stephen Long, “Redeeming the Curse of Work through Charity: A Maximum Moral Income,” *Catalyst* (blog), May 8, 2017, <https://www.catalystresources.org/redeeming-the-curse-of-work-through-charity-a-maximum-moral-income/>.

justice, even within their own church communities, precisely because they are not participating in marches, walking and learning together.

A maximum moral income is only one possibility. It is not my intention here to offer an exhaustive list but rather to exhort followers of Christ to participate in peripatetic friendship building for the sake of expanding their political and economic imagination. Churches could work these issues out through local barter economies, commit to living simply, start social enterprises, and so on.⁴⁹⁵ However, for many or most Christians, they need to walk with others unlike themselves in order to have their vision expanded. In Chrysostom's claim earlier that without relationship with the poor the greater part of our sins would not be forgiven, he recognizes that we need the poor to open our eyes to our sins of greed, arrogance, apathy, gluttony, and the like so that we may repent. John Wesley argued along similar lines when he preached that "one great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor, is, because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers."⁴⁹⁶ The choice on behalf of the rich to join in marches and protests might not come naturally, but a church community could encourage such action so that the rich might join the poor in solidarity rather than merely trying to be benefactors via stewardship.

⁴⁹⁵ These ideas are described a bit more in a series of blog posts called "Economics of Church and Seminary" that I wrote for the "Slow Church" blog several years ago as a result of my own student loan debt from seminary. In that series I focus on how seminary education ought to take place in local churches and the wider community. Justin Bronson Barringer, "Relationally-Based Community Development and Social Enterprise," *Slow Church* (blog), September 18, 2014, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/slowchurch/2014/09/18/relationally-based-community-development-economics-of-church-and-seminary-3/>.

⁴⁹⁶ John Wesley, "Sermon 98—On Visiting the Sick," Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-98-on-visiting-the-sick/>.

The point here is to suggest that peripatetic friendships might serve as a model and an incentive for the church to rework its social, political, and economic commitments. What I have offered are two types of suggestions: 1) a state-mandated universal basic income, and 2) a church-centered moral commitment to economic equity. Both options are live, and they need not be contrary efforts. The church should take seriously the mission of Rustin and friends to abolish poverty, and the church should be discerning about how to do that. The discernment that the church needs in this case is the kind that forms in peripatetic friendships.

My own ambivalence to the state pushes me toward church-centered solutions, but my own lack of political and economic imagination sometimes pulls me back toward state-centered solutions. Following Rustin's example, to an extent, has helped me open up to the possibility that the church might effect change in some kind of cooperation with the state for the sake of becoming a more just society. Yet the state is not to usurp the role of the Christian community by doing a better job addressing poverty, especially in the midst of wealth inequity. Admittedly, in following Rustin's lead toward the use of the state, I expose my stunted economic imagination, but the point here is not to create a detailed plan for nation-states or for churches to follow, but rather to suggest what ought to be at the moral heart of any such plan and to remind us that we need to walk together, to march together, because walking with a virtuous friend, walking together in solidarity, is always better than walking in another person's shoes alone.

4.16 Conclusion: From Politics to Protest

Wiley rightly describes the importance of peripatetic friendship in his conclusion about Rustin. He writes,

Realizing and being faithful to Bayard Rustin's sociopolitical vision will probably be possible only if social justice theorists, organizers, and activists invert his thesis and move from politics to protest. As it is, extrajudicial means have almost always been

necessary in order to radically transform social structures and redistribute power. And the time that has elapsed since Rustin wrote his famous essay has only confirmed the fact that social justice comes only after struggle. To that end, if we are to be and become the kinds of persons that act in ways that lead to a world that better accords with our visions, we will probably have to adopt Rustin's attitude toward political authority. That is, the practical viability of realizing the needed social action will likely hinge on the degree to which we are able to embody the anarchist's spirit or attitude, which is precisely why we must remember the visions, sacrifices, and heritage of angelic troublemakers.⁴⁹⁷

The church is to be such a community of angelic troublemakers who prioritize friendship with God for the sake of the world.

For many of the ancient Greek philosophers, as exemplified in this essay by Aristotle, friendship was necessary for one to live the good life. The Christians who took up that proposal added to it that *friendship with God* was the good life now and forever, that friendship demands and necessarily entails justice and liberation of the oppressed. As Aristotle walked with his students, forming friendships and learning together, so did the civil rights activists march with one another as students of friendship and justice. Now, as theologians continue to argue that God is friend of the oppressed, we forge ahead to provide some intellectual footing for the ongoing campaign of forming friendships of liberation with God and each other. Can we learn in peripatetic friendships that, as Maurin says, "The basis for a Christian economy is genuine charity and voluntary poverty"? Rustin's life as it has been recounted here ought to give the church hope that it can indeed embrace radical economic arrangements that place the value of another's flourishing over the value of profit or property, yet that hope will likely remain unfulfilled in this life if we refuse to walk together learning what it means to be sacrificially just.

⁴⁹⁷ Wiley, "Dilemma," 154. Rustin's change in friends, his deeper involvement in partisan politics, and his jettisoning of the peripatetic aspect of most of his friendships had a deleterious effect on his prudential decision making. They did not necessarily adjust his moral compass, but rather cause his basic convictions to work out in ways that were often in opposition to prior stances. He did not have the friends who help him shape his fundamental moral convictions in wise ways. Rustin did extremely well as an underdog, but struggled, as many do, when he was on top of the pile.

The challenge this dissertation offers is for readers to evaluate their friendships and ask if they are peripatetic, walking together toward virtues like justice. And, if they are not, then it might be time to seek out friends through churches or other organizations that are doing good work, or start doing good work and invite others to join in hopes of deep friendships forming and in turn informing the ethics of a community that will not settle for a society that is less than just, less than peaceable, less than equitable, or lacking virtues of courage and truth-telling, wisdom and prudence. “We walk with each other, we walk hand in hand, and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”⁴⁹⁸ Amen.

⁴⁹⁸ Peter Scholtes, “By Our Love” (F.E.L. Records, 1968).

CONCLUSION

The neglect of Bayard Rustin by many in the religious community during and after his lifetime is tragic. Religious scholars of all kinds should be interested in his remarkable life, and theologians and ethicists in particular ought to be drawn to him as a source for their work. Hirschfelder argues that the relative silence about Rustin's legacy, until fairly recently at least, is a continued act of oppression. I tend to agree with that assessment, and I have thus made a case that Rustin's story needs to be recovered and analyzed particularly within the tradition of Christian theology and ethics, and more narrowly in Black theology and liberation theology. Hirschfelder points out that it is strange that a gay, Black, pacifist, formerly communist turned democratic socialist, and conscientious objector, all during the social upheaval and turmoil of the twentieth century, "nevertheless received more public recognition during that time than after his death, when allegedly discrimination of people like him, of blacks or homosexuals for instance, had decreased significantly."⁴⁹⁹ This project has discussed some of the reasons for Rustin's disappearance from public and scholarly discourse after his death, and Hirschfelder rightly brings our attention to the fact that the titles of the few books and films about Rustin emphasize the fact that he has been viewed as an outsider at best and forgotten at worst. Thankfully, Rustin scholarship is taking a turn, and his role in shaping American public life is being recognized by the likes of the Obamas and other major public figures. However, no book-length project has yet

⁴⁹⁹ Hirschfelder, *Oppression as Process*, 23.

been produced on Rustin's contributions to theology and ethics. This dissertation has argued that Rustin's life provides significant theological and ethical insight that can be analyzed and applied to help contemporary Christian communities reflect on their commitments and practices, in this case, related to friendship and economic justice. However, there are literally thousands of pages of documentation by and about Rustin that has yet to be explored and published. For now, any scholar of Rustin should address the fact that one of the twentieth century's most influential people has been left mostly unexplored, and further, Christian theologians and ethicists should be curious about this phenomenon as they consider what an oppressed and largely forgotten voice can and should add to our ongoing discourse about the God who chose to enter the world as a marginalized person and who continues to use those at the margins to speak truth to those in power.

However, recovering his voice is itself not precisely the reason I have written on Rustin. Rather, I chose him because I believe his life and its residual effects provide a meaningful way to contribute to helping my own friends who are struggling at the margins. Perhaps this has been a selfish endeavor to the extent that I wanted to know how I could be a better friend, one who joins my marginalized neighbors in the struggle for their dignity. All the while I have felt conflicted about spending so much time reading and writing rather than marching, protesting, and walking with those tossed to the side by this damned world that groans and waits for its redemption to come in full.

Recently, one of my friends, Lindsey Krinks, wrote a book called *Praying with Our Feet*, that shares stories of her ongoing ministry with folks living on the streets and in shelters. She reminds me that writing is not a fruitless venture because stories move us, especially stories of

friends who come together to work and walk for good as their marching itself becomes prayer.⁵⁰⁰

This project, too, is my attempt at an extended prayer that I have largely been unable to pray otherwise. It is a prayer to be more faithful in joining my poor and marginalized friends in their collective and ongoing prayer that is the march toward a more just church and society.

Likewise, this project is an invitation. First, it is an invitation to others to look to Rustin for all the reasons I have stated. And second, it is an invitation to join in the legacy of Rustin by joining with friends to participate in marches, protests, organizing, and other charity and justice work. Just as folks ranging from Golda Meir and Jawaharlal Nehru to John Lewis and of course Martin Luther King, Jr. looked to Rustin for guidance, so, too, today folks like Barak Obama and Barney Frank have acknowledged his significant contributions, the former even posthumously awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Yet, he continues to be neglected by those whose work might benefit most from his insights: theologians, ethicists, and scholars of religion. As I will point to future constructive projects that will require visiting Rustin's life and friendships over and over again, I invite others to do likewise so together we may be reminded of the need for "angelic troublemakers" in this world, those who pursue virtues like justice and charity, through friendship that they might achieve what some call impossible.

My Friend Bayard: Looking Back at a Life that Demands We Look Forward

Reading and writing about Bayard Rustin and about his friendships has helped me find another friend whose voice is trustworthy, who has trod a path that I can follow, and it has strengthened my belief in God's promise that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Now,

⁵⁰⁰ Krinks, *Praying with Our Feet* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021).

however, I imagine that cloud to be made of the dust stirred up by marching feet as throngs of people take to the streets to pray and act and discern together for a world that finds God's abundance-wealth in friendship more appealing than mammon's injustice perpetuating lies.

My friend Bayard achieved more good for others than most of us can hope to do in our lifetimes, but I think Wiley is right to say that Rustin's days of influence have not yet reached their zenith. He learned lessons from his grandmother Julia and friends like Muste and Randolph that he passed on the King who then broadcast many of those lessons to a world often hostile to them because they demand something from all who hear them.

Rustin's Quaker faith taught him an epistemology based on revelation, experiments, and testimony, helping countless others embrace the logic of the nonviolent Jesus, friend of sinners and bringer of justice. Rustin is not typically considered a theologian, perhaps because we academic types have too narrowly defined the vocation of theology as something to be relegated to professional study, yet he offers theological insights galore if folks just take the time to look and listen. Further, if theology is to be lived, then our faith must have practices that interrogate our best theological thinking and offer us opportunity to experiment with our beliefs. Biography as theology as a method should also push us to ask how our lives might be evaluated by future generations of believers as they ask what it means to have the character of Christ in each new time and place.

Revisiting Chapters

Bayard Rustin may never be counted as a saint in any official canon, but his life was so compelling that it demands attention because it is at once informative and inspirational. In the introduction I argued that Rustin's life has theological and ethical significance because he was an exemplar of friendship, charity, and justice. I followed James McClendon's lead in asking what a

saintly life might teach us about the character of Jesus and how it can help Christian communities reflect on their own beliefs and practices. I then suggested that Rustin's life is part of a longer story, that of the God who walks with us in friendship, before I looked at the idea of my concept of peripatetic friendship in both the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions as a way of situating Rustin and friends.

Chapter one sketched out Rustin's intellectual, theological, and moral formation especially in relationship to questions about friendship, wealth inequity, and justice. That chapter established the importance of understanding Rustin through his faith commitments and his friendships, and how those morphed over time, which in turn influenced his moral outlook and political vision. In chapter two, I delved into two of Rustin's most formative and historically important friendships to address questions about friendship's durability and the exhortative possibilities of peripatetic friendships in particular. His friendship with A. J. Muste was clearly among Rustin's most meaningful for decades before it ended. It died slowly, and even as it was fading away, the two managed to work together to produce some excellent published work as well as a number of other efforts against injustice. Yet eventually Rustin felt too betrayed by Muste because Muste not only forced Rustin out of the FOR but also protested Rustin's hiring at WRL, and Muste attempted to leverage Rustin into "conversion therapy," even offering to pay for it. They eventually went their separate ways to the point that Muste was barely mentioned in Rustin's final set of in-depth interviews before his death. This friendship was instructive in multiple ways, but perhaps one of the most important ways is that it calls into question ideas that true friendships must last until death and suggests that friendships can be deeply formative and full of mutual care and affection even if they come to an end. Even good humans are still human, and those with power often end up lording that power over others, even those once considered

friends. This, however, does not necessarily diminish the personal importance of those friendships to the friends themselves nor to the surrounding society.

A. Philip Randolph's friendship with Rustin, unlike that with Muste, endured the test of time all the way up to Randolph's death. The two worked together for roughly three decades. Their friendship addressed questions regarding friendships between people of different or no faith commitments. It suggested that Randolph could indeed disciple Rustin to the extent that Randolph walked with Rustin toward virtue. In that section, I also suggested that grace is vital for understanding friendships from a Christian perspective. Both of these friendships helped Rustin learn to combine a variety of justice activities into one larger struggle that involved racism, war, and wealth inequity, a lesson which he passed along to King.

The third chapter asked whether King's friendship with Rustin was one of mere utility for King, and suggested that while King did use Rustin in that way, there was more to that friendship than King's utilizing of Rustin's talents while often dismissing Rustin himself. It further argues that even if King was merely using Rustin, which oversimplifies the reality, Rustin's ideas and insights that he taught King were expressed at the March on Washington but also on the Meredith March as King acted as an ambassador for Rustin's commitments. It also pointed to the way that the Meredith March in particular was formative for Black theology, particularly Black liberation theology, because of the debates that marchers had about the future of the civil rights movement and the place of the Black church in that work.

The final chapter drew these threads together, or least some lessons learned from them, and weaved them together with theological and moral questions about mammon, money, financial wealth, and what I called the abundance-wealth found in friendships, especially friendships anchored in God's own abundance-wealth. I argued that this Rustinian friendship

theology in response to wealth inequity provides an appropriate framework for addressing economic injustice through the practice of friendship, especially peripatetic friendships. This theology, based largely on Rustin's own life and writings, I suggest, is rightly situated in the tradition of Black liberation theology, and in fact provides what might be referred to as a proto-liberation theology. I even reluctantly hinted at some ways that including Rustin in those discussions, especially with peripatetic friendship in mind, could help nuance and propagate Black liberation theology while also drawing more attention to the economic injustices that have been disproportionately doled out to African-Americans and other people of color.

In that final chapter, I also put forth the idea that universal basic income is one proper outworking of a Rustinian theology in response to wealth inequity because it makes a way for more friendships to form, both in the struggle to meet this goal, and inasmuch as it frees up poor folks from merely being the recipients of charitable giving and help others see that marginalized folks can and do have moral agency. Another ideal outworking of this theology takes place in the church. It demands of Christians that they more carefully consider who their friends are and are not, and how that influences their financial decisions. The church can be a radically egalitarian community but it must first become the church made up, in part, of the poor, rather than seeing them as mere recipients of whatever we may choose to give them. It also requires that the church be a community of mutuality in which the distinction between giver and receiver becomes blurred as friendships form when folks come together and share not only what they have but their very selves with others in the solicitude of friendships.

The Future of this Study

A further theological and ethical study of the topics of this dissertation is warranted on at least two fronts.⁵⁰¹ First, I intend to study a wider, more well-rounded variety of Rustin's friendships in order to test the claims regarding Rustin and friendship in the current study. That project would undertake an exploration and evaluation of his friendships with several people who are mentioned in these pages like George Houser, James Farmer, Pauli Murray, Rachelle Horowitz, Tom Kahn, David Dellinger, and others to add shades and hues to the picture painted here about Rustin's life of friendship. Those friendships open up new questions not examined here, such as the dynamics of Rustin's friendships with women, particularly around issues of patriarchy in the movements in which Rustin was deeply involved, and the realities of gay men's friendships, especially during the era when Rustin lived, as well as problems regarding not only the dissolution of friendships but also regarding hostility when some friendships end. Each new friendship explored will provide new information that scholars and Christian communities can use to reflect on the meaning and purpose of friendships as well as the practices that sustain friendship and the ways the deformation of those practices can rip friendships apart.

Second, if I am correct in my assertion that the marches of the civil rights movement served as peripatetic schools, then it is proper to study more of those marches with that in mind to delve into the pedagogical details of those marches and how they have influenced contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter and The New Poor People's Campaign. I intend to especially zero in on the way these marches shaped Black theology and ethics as well

⁵⁰¹ Sarah Azaransky is already undertaking one aspect that otherwise I would describe more here. She is currently writing a spiritual biography of Rustin that looks more closely at Rustin's journey as a Quaker disciple of Christ. Rustin's faith commitments are woefully understudied, and it is necessary to do more of that work in order to better understand his life and the lives and movements he influenced. I had planned on taking on that task until I heard about Azaransky's forthcoming book. Depending on the specific direction her study takes, I will consider revisiting the question of Rustin's Christian faith, especially as it relates to his moral reasoning and action.

as Christian ethics of protest and broader charity and justice work. The project at hand is merely the start of a new aspect of the discussion about Bayard Rustin's life and faith, the ethics of friendship, and the didactic element of protest marches and nonviolent civil disobedience. My sincere hope is that this project is but one voice in the chorus of those singing and believing that we can indeed be set free at last from every oppressive power.

Angelic Troublemaking: A Concluding Thought on Marching with Jesus and Bayard

The good life, the virtuous life, is made up of meaningful friendships. The meaning of those friendships is only enhanced when they are aimed at being more faithful to the work of charity and justice. When friends march, learn, and grow together they can become a subversive force bearing witness to God's forthcoming fullness of redemption for all creation. Marching in pursuit of virtue declares that a new world is possible and that it is coming. It is a new world in which the logics and systems of the old world no longer have purchase, and those logics are undermined every time people take to the streets together demanding a world without poverty in which we are all responsible for one another and in which exchange becomes about gift and generosity rather than exploitation and greed. In the effort to participate in the creation of this new world and to point to the Spirit who makes it possible, we can and should put our bodies out there even when it means marching to Golgotha, crosses weighing on our backs. This is the way that Jesus used his body, dying for and with his sinner friends, in order that the logics of oppression are no longer workable. May we do likewise. It is appropriate to leave brother Bayard with the last words from one of his more famous statements. "We need in every community a

group of angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable. The only weapon we have is our bodies and we need to tuck them in places so wheels don't turn."⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² Rustin, quoted in Wiley, "Dilemma," 152.

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