

On October 5 a question of inviting The Reverend Martin Luther King to participate in the 1961-1962 Seminars in Religion was raised in a meeting of the University Christian Association's Executive Committee. This group was desirous of inviting Dr. King but referred the matter to the University Committee on Christian Work for its advice.

On October 9 the University Committee on Christian Work considered the matter and after discussing the problems involved voted in favor of approving the students' request. The Committee felt, however, that the matter was of sufficient importance to be called to the attention of the Trustees.

On October 11 the Chairman of the University Committee on Christian Work informed me of their deliberations and I requested that a memorandum be prepared outlining the views of the Committee. This was provided on October 12.

On October 13-14 the Board of Trustees met at Washington and Lee. At the appropriate time I presented to the Trustees the memorandum outlining the Committee's deliberations on the matter and the thinking behind its recommendation. I believe it is appropriate for me to read this memorandum to you here, which I do with the approval of the Chairman of the Committee:

"Memorandum to Dr. Cole:

Regarding the proposal of the Executive Committee of the University Christian Association to invite the Rev. Martin Luther King to Washington and Lee to participate in the Seminars in Religion Program.

The Executive Committee of the University Christian Association has planned three Seminars in Religion for the session, 1961-62: one for November, another for February, and another for April. The Seminars will replace the traditional University Religious Conference and are designed to enable students and faculty to inquire into the relation between

Christianity and some of the major issues of our time. The purpose of the February Seminar would be to develop the relation between Christian theology and race relations. The Executive Committee proposes to invite the Rev. Martin Luther King to lead the Seminar in February. The other speakers for the session will be a Christian and a Jew.

Because of the problems created by the student's proposal to invite Mr. King, the Faculty Committee on Christian Work was asked to give its opinion on the wisdom of extending the invitation. The Faculty Committee considered the issues at some length:

1. How could we justify inviting Martin Luther King? Because he is an important theologian who has had a significant impact on our society. He is a rational spokesman for an important idea.
2. Why should this University invite him? The seminars are replacing the Religious Conference, and they are designed to deal with some of the important issues of the time. It is a function of a University to present the issues of our time to its students. Mr. King is a leading spokesman on an issue that people must face.
3. The Committee considered the danger of a disturbance on the campus that might occur because of Mr. King's presence. It felt that our students are very gracious in receiving guests. Senator Goldwater and Mr. Norman Thomas, with their divergent views, were both warmly and respectfully welcomed. The Committee also weighed the impact on the students of a decision to deny them the right to invite Mr. King, a controversial figure.
4. Mr. King would be offered the same honorarium as other speakers in the series receive. Arrangements for his entertainment can be made that would not prove embarrassing to him. He would be asked to speak in the evening on two occasions open to the public. Special seminars and classroom appearances would be arranged during his stay in the same manner as in the case of other

guest lecturers in the series.

The Faculty Committee felt this proposal of the students is of sufficient importance to be called to the attention of the Board. The Committee voted 7-2 to recommend to the Board that the students be allowed to invite the Rev. Martin Luther King to the campus to lead the Seminar program in February. The only member of the Committee who was absent, when told of the discussion, said that he would have voted with the majority had he been present.

The two dissenting votes were based on the propositions: 1. That "we are not ready for it." 2. That we would incur the risk of encouraging the Washington and Lee public to think that we are acting in a sensational manner rather than really trying to probe calmly and in a scholarly fashion the relation between Christianity and race relations.

The Faculty Committee would suggest to the Board that if Mr. King comes to the campus he would expect to have non-segregated seating in the gymnasium. The Board might wish to take this into consideration. Washington and Lee has had non-segregated seating on occasions in the past.

October 12, 1961

/s/ Claybrook Griffith, Chairman  
Faculty Committee on Christian Work"

After discussion, the Trustees voted to decline the request of the Committee for their approval of the proposed invitation. Because of the necessity of my being away from the campus for Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges work, I was not able to write to the Chairman of the Committee on Christian Work until October 18 informing him of the Trustees action.

This I did in the following words:

"Dear Professor Griffith:

The Trustees, in session on October 13, considered the proposal of the Executive Committee of the University Christian Association that The Reverend Martin Luther King be invited to Washington and Lee to participate in the Seminars in Religion Program.

A memorandum prepared by you as Chairman of the Faculty Committee on Christian Work, recommending that the proposal be considered by the Trustees, was presented to them. Following a discussion of the matter, the Trustees decided to decline the request for their approval of the proposed invitation to The Reverend King.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Fred C. Cole"