

November 6, 1961

Notes on Martin Luther King matter:

On October 5, the question of inviting Martin Luther King as a participant in the 1961-62 Seminars in Religion program was raised in a meeting of the University Christian Association's Executive Committee. This group apparently was enthusiastic about inviting Mr. King, but recognizing some of the problems involved, referred the matter to the University Committee on Christian Work for its advice and an expression of ~~opinion on~~ the wisdom of the invitation.

On October 9, the University Committee on Christian Work considered the matter, discussed the problems involved, and voted 7-2 (one member was absent) in favor of recommending to the University's Board of Trustees that the student organization be allowed to invite Mr. King. The committee felt that the matter was of sufficient importance to be called to the attention of the Board, a practice not usually followed in extending invitations to persons to speak at Washington and Lee.

On October 13-14, the Board of Trustees met at Washington and Lee where it considered a memorandum to President Cole from Professor Griffith, outlining the committee's deliberations on the matter and the thinking behind its recommendation for approval by the Board. After discussion, the Board voted not to approve the committee recommendation.

On October 18, a letter from President Cole to Professor Griffith informed the committee of the Board's action.

In subsequent weeks, the pages of the Ring-tum Phi have been devoted to numerous criticisms of the Board's action. The Student Bar Association passed a resolution criticizing the action, and the Student Executive Committee sent letters to members of the Board of Trustees, expressing its dissatisfaction with the action. Generally, the issue drawn has not been whether Martin Luther King should be invited or not, but whether the Board's action constitutes an intrusion on the academic freedom and right of inquiry presumed to exist on this campus.

On November 6, a resolution drawn by members of the faculty requesting the Board to reverse itself is expected to be introduced at the regular November faculty meeting.

My recommendation: That you remind the faculty that the issue is appropriately drawn between the faculty and the Trustees, and that in the best interests of the University should receive as little public notice as possible. I think it might be helpful if you inform the faculty of at least part of the Faculty Committee's memo's contents, in order that they know the Board was aware that unfavorable reactions might result as an outgrowth of their refusal. It might be well if you offered your opinion as to the success of a request for a reversal of the Board's decision.

F. Parsons