

Some Big Ideas

Martin graduated from Morehouse College when he was 19 years old. He was still very young. But Daddy King thought he was old enough to become an assistant pastor at Ebenezer. Martin didn't agree. He felt he needed more education to become the kind of minister he wanted to be. So in the fall of 1948 he enrolled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Crozer brought real changes to Martin's life. For the first time he was away from

home. Away from all the people who loved him. And for the first time he was living in an integrated world. There were only six black students at Crozer—the other one hundred were white.

At first this made Martin nervous. He felt he had to be extra careful, extra neat, extra polite. But most of the students seemed eager to be friends. They seemed to be saying, Hey, we're interested in *you*, not the color of your skin. So soon Martin began to relax and become his natural outgoing self again.

He had some wonderful times with these new friends. But as usual he also took his studies seriously. Once he had said to his mother, "I'm going to get me some big words!" Now, at Crozer, he set out to get some big ideas. Some ideas to help him lead a truly good life.

He read the words of the man he was named for. Martin Luther was a sixteenth century religious leader who had brought about many changes in the church. He

said, "To go against your conscience—your sense of right and wrong—is neither safe nor right."

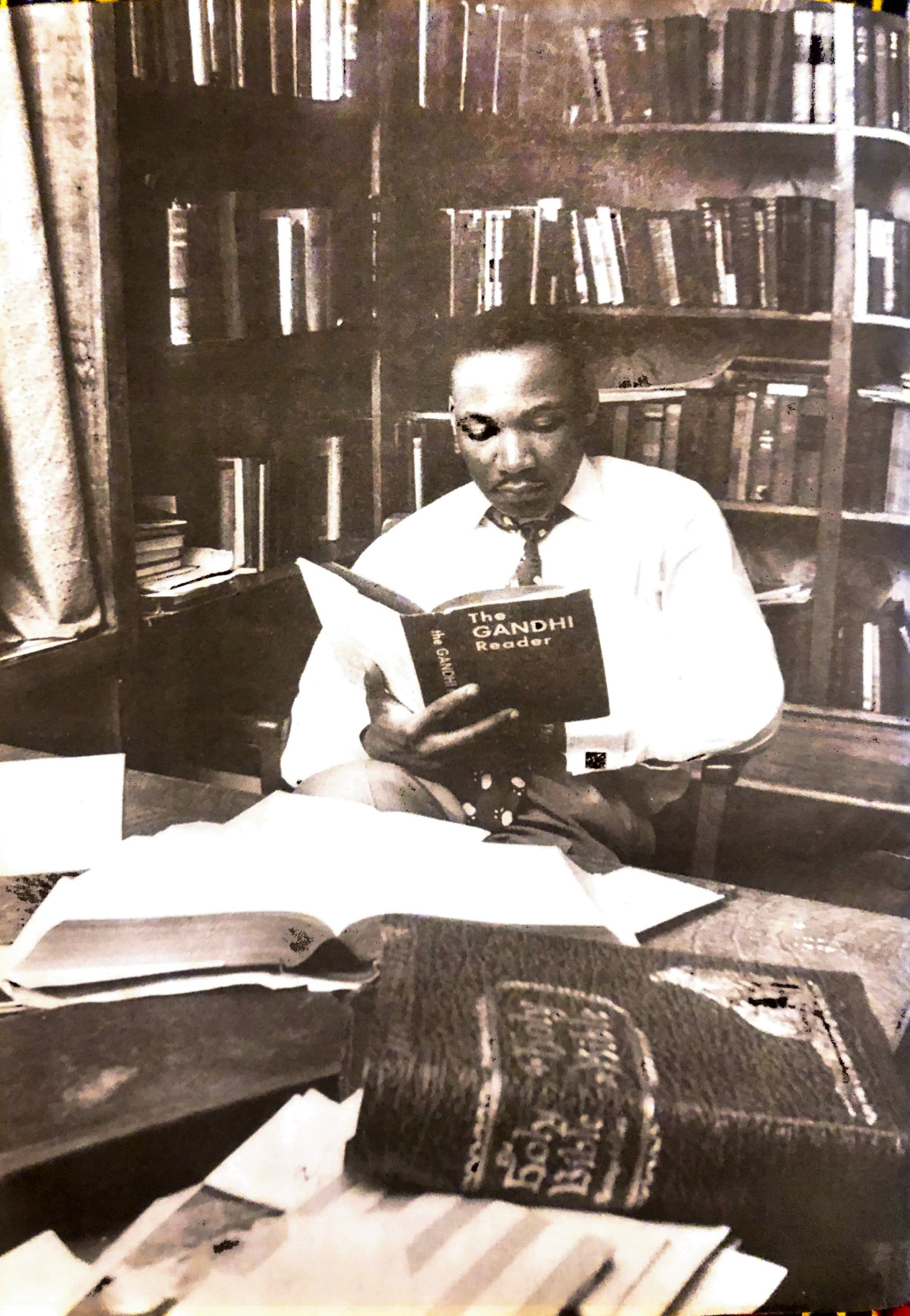
Then there was another religious leader, Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote, "Men in groups commit greater crimes and sins than they do as individuals."

Of course he studied the words of Jesus—"Love your enemies," and "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword."

And one of his childhood heroes, Frederick Douglass—"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

He was also impressed by a writer and philosopher who lived in New England a hundred years before. Henry David Thoreau believed that "If a law is unjust, men should refuse to cooperate with it. They should even be willing to go to jail for not obeying such a law." Thoreau called this civil disobedience.

Civil disobedience. The first time Martin read those words he whispered them aloud. He certainly did like the sound of them.



Then one day Martin heard a lecture by a teacher who had just come back from India. The people there had been ruled by England for many, many years. But in 1947 they were able to form a government of their own—because of a man named Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi had led this successful revolution of his people without firing a shot. For he, too, like Thoreau, believed in not obeying unjust laws. And being willing to go to jail. But he also believed in one more thing. Gandhi believed that no matter what you did to protest wrong—whether it was a strike or a boycott or a march or a demonstration—you must never use violence.

He called this *nonviolent resistance*, or *love-force*. “I want to touch your hearts,” Gandhi said to his enemies. “Only then will you change.”

Nonviolence . . . a revolution based on love, not hate. . . . These ideas stirred Mar-

Long after he left college, Martin continued to be inspired by India's nonviolent leader, Mahatma Gandhi.

tin deeply. But he had no idea that one day a revolution based on love and nonviolent resistance would change his life—and the lives of millions of others as well.

Right now Martin was busy becoming Crozer's top student. "We have just finished a period of examinations," one of his teachers wrote, "and the only man who was granted honors in them was King.... He seems to know where he wants to go and how to get there."

In the spring of 1951 Martin graduated from Crozer with a straight "A" average. Not only that, he was named the Seminary's most outstanding student. And he also won a prize of \$1,200. He decided to use this money to work toward the highest degree in education—a doctorate—at Boston University in Massachusetts.

That was a very happy time for Martin. Only one thing seemed missing. As usual he dated a lot of different girls. But none of them really captured his heart.

Then one day a friend introduced him to a young music student who was also studying in Boston. Her name was Coretta Scott.

Martin and Coretta found they had much in common. They were both from the South. They both loved music, books, and talking about ideas. Before the end of their first date Martin announced, "You have everything I ever wanted in a wife. There are only four things, and you have them all."

Coretta was stunned. "I don't see how you can say that," she said. "You don't even know me."

"Yes," Martin answered with complete certainty. "I can tell. The four things that I am looking for in a wife are character, intelligence, personality, and beauty. And you have them all."

Soon Martin did ask Coretta to marry him. She didn't say yes—not right away. She loved him. She knew that already. But she had a dream, too. She wanted to be a

professional singer. Also, she did not want to marry a minister and become a minister's wife. It sounded so dull to her.

One day she wrote about her worries in a letter to her sister Edythe. Her sister had met Martin, and wrote back, "Don't have silly doubts, Coretta. If you love him, go ahead and marry him. You won't have the career you dreamed of, but you'll have a career. You will not be marrying any ordinary minister."

Martin and Coretta are married by his father, Daddy King, on June 18, 1953.

