

INTRODUCTION

*Christians are always to begin with a bias in favor of a movement which protests against unfair treatment of the poor, but surely Christianity itself is such a protest. The Communist Manifesto might express a concern for the poor and the oppressed, but it expresses no greater concern than the manifesto of Jesus, which opens with the words, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, recovering the sight of the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."*¹

Martin Luther King, Jr.
"Can a Christian Be a Communist?"
30 September 1962

When Martin Luther King, Jr., preached "Can a Christian Be a Communist?" to the Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation in Atlanta during the fall of 1962, he returned to familiar homiletic themes that had been evident since the start of his ministry. King developed both the ideas and language for this sermon early in his preaching career. During the summers of 1952 and 1953, while a graduate student at Boston University, he prepared earlier versions of this sermon, titled "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," to preach at Ebenezer and insisted, as he would in his 1962 message, that Christians should respond to the threat of communism by strengthening their commitment to social justice.² Using similar phrasing and drawing on the Bible verse Luke 4:18–19 in his 1953 version as he did in 1962, King demonstrated his enduring commitment to the social duty of the Christian.³ Throughout his career he returned to this passage in Luke as a declaration of the driving force behind his ministry.⁴

1. Luke 4:18–19.

2. "'Communism's Challenge to Christianity,' King Jr's Topic, Ebenezer," *Atlanta Daily World*, 10 August 1952, and King, "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," 9 August 1953, pp. 146–150 in this volume.

3. In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus quotes and adapts Isaiah 61:1–2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."

4. In his 2 May 1954 acceptance speech at Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, King declared, "I have felt with Jesus that the spirit of [*the*] Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to

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King consistently embraced this message from his first years as his father's associate minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church, through his years of theological training, and during his tenure in the pulpits of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and Ebenezer. He similarly professed his identity as a social gospel minister in a paper written during his first term at Crozer Theological Seminary. "I must be concerned about unemployment, [*slums*], and economic insecurity," he averred. "I am a profound advocator of the social gospel."⁵ Throughout his life, he professed a commitment to be involved with the daily concerns of congregation members as well as with their souls. King regarded salvation as a social as well as an individual process.⁶

Although King's academic writings were extensively examined in Volumes I (1992) and II (1994) of *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, little was known about King's early homiletic expressions until the King Papers Project obtained a substantial body of such materials. In 1997 Mrs. Coretta Scott King granted the King Papers Project permission to examine papers kept in boxes in the basement of the home that became the King residence in 1965 and to identify items that were appropriate for the Project's mission. The most significant discovery resulting from this exploration was a private file of sermon materials King kept in his study. A battered cardboard box held over two hundred folders containing handwritten outlines, drafts, and prayers as well as academic papers, published articles, and correspondence.⁷ This volume interrupts the chronology of the *Papers* to present a

preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bruised" (King, Acceptance Address at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 2 May 1954, p. 167 in this volume). King's father had also relied on the same biblical passage when he defined "the true mission of the Church" at a gathering of Atlanta's Missionary Baptist Association in 1940. King, Sr. introduced this biblical passage by commenting, "The church is to touch every phase of the community life. Quite often we say the church has no place in politics, forgetting the words of the Lord." After reciting the passage, he continued, "God hasten the time when every minister will become a registered voter and a part of every movement for the betterment of our people. . . . We can not expect our people to register and become citizens until we as leaders set the standard" (Martin Luther King, Sr., "Moderator's Annual Address" [Cartersville, Ga.: *Minutes of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Session of the Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association*, 1940], p. 18). For more on King, Sr.'s view of the ministry and his early activism, see Introduction, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1: *Called to Serve, January 1929–June 1951*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 33–34.

5. King, "Preaching Ministry," 14 September–24 November 1948, p. 72 in this volume.

6. At the turn of the twentieth century, a significant number of American Protestants responded to the slums and poverty engendered by the massive wave of immigration, industrialization and urbanization by calling for social reform based in religious faith and action. These adherents to social-gospel Christianity maintained that Christian belief and doctrine was a genuine engine for the moral regeneration of American life and saw a social purpose in Christianity. They were intent upon "Christianizing the social order," as Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch put it, and seeking justice for the poor and disadvantaged (Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* [New York: Macmillan, 1912]). Proponents also envisioned a time of ever-increasing social progress. King's father and other African American ministers of this era took up the call for the social gospel on behalf of their own communities, publicly appealing for racial justice and for an end to Jim Crow laws and the practice of lynching (Introduction, in *Papers* 1:33–34).

7. This collection constitutes nearly half of all of King's homiletic materials currently catalogued by the King Papers Project and 129 of the 147 sermons and outlines dated prior to 1956. Although this volume focuses on those documents that illuminate his sermon preparation, King's sermon file contains

selection of documents from King's sermon file along with other previously unpublished materials that bear on his religious development before and during his rise to international acclaim.⁸ In retracing his student years, the volume explores the role of Crozer and Boston University in shaping his skills in the ministry. Finally, it offers greater understanding of the origin, drafting, and editing of King's most familiar collection of sermons, *Strength to Love*.

This volume illuminates aspects of King's preaching ministry that have received little scholarly attention. The selected documents offer insight into the process through which brief handwritten outlines and sketches, many of which were prepared for Crozer preaching classes, were refined and expanded into complete and distinctive sermons that King delivered to appreciative audiences at Dexter, Ebenezer, and elsewhere. King continually revised his favorite sermons to increase their rhetorical effectiveness as well as to incorporate new themes and contemporary references. The documents illustrate his characteristic ability to weave together biblical texts and ideas drawn from varied sources—the sermons of other ministers, the insights of philosophers, passages from literature and Christian hymns, contemporary news, and set pieces—into a coherent, persuasive presentation. King actively drew on the ideas of such renowned preachers as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Frederick M. Meek, George Buttrick, and Robert J. McCracken, recasting their messages to reflect the needs and concerns of the African American community as well as his own sentiments.⁹ Often he kept related homiletic material in the same folder in his sermon file. His folder titled "A Knock at Midnight" contained a mimeographed copy of D. T. Niles's August 1954 sermon "Evangelism," which was published later that year in the *Christian Century* as "Summons at Midnight." King drew heavily on Niles's prose for his own sermon "A Knock at Midnight."¹⁰ He stored five

more than homiletic materials. Many folders in the file contain a variety of materials. For example, one labeled "Creating the Abundant Life"/"A Moment of Difficult Decision" includes two thematically related sermons with these titles, a copy of Douglas Malloch's poem "Be the Best of Whatever You Are," notes on the attorney Clarence Darrow's life, and the sermon outline "The Sea of Life," which deals with topics similar to those discussed in the folder's other documents. Another folder titled "The Fellow Who Stayed at Home" holds J. Wallace Hamilton's sermon "That Fellow Who Stayed at Home" and King's sermon on that theme. For a detailed rendering of King's sermon file, see Sermon File Inventory, pp. 609–627 in this volume.

8. King referred to this file in a 26 October 1960 letter to Coretta Scott King written from Georgia State Prison at Reidsville. He asked his wife to bring him a number of "sermons from my file" (in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 5: *Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959–December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Kieran Taylor [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005], p. 532).

9. Robert J. McCracken succeeded Harry Emerson Fosdick as pastor of New York's Riverside Church in 1946 and served until 1967. Frederick M. Meek presided over Boston's Old South Church from 1946 until 1973. George Buttrick pastored Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church for twenty-eight years, beginning in 1927, and was best known for his 1928 book, *The Parables of Jesus*. For examples of King's sermons that were influenced by these ministers, see "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," 9 August 1953; "A Religion of Doing," 4 July 1954; "Opportunity, Fidelity, and Reward," January 1955; and "Our God Is Able," 1 January 1956, pp. 146–150, 170–174, and 243–246 in this volume, respectively. See also Chart 3, p. 38 in this volume.

10. For more on this sermon and its sources, see King, "A Knock at Midnight," 14 September 1958, pp. 347–350 in this volume.

Introduction sermons by Meek in a file labeled “Sermons by Other Ministers” and based his sermon “Our God Is Able” on two additional homilies by Meek that can be found in the folder that King titled “Our God Is Able.”¹¹ King also drew upon the books in his personal study for his sermons, annotating some of these volumes with notes for his homilies.¹²

This volume also includes transcriptions of tape recordings of King’s most famous sermons, such as “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” and “Paul’s Letter to American Christians.” The transcriptions, however, must be read in the context of King’s oral presentation style. King’s voice, initially low and measured, resounds in these audiotapes as he moves into the body of his sermon, elaborating his theme. His cadence becomes louder and more emphatic as the sermon progresses toward a conclusion. Some listeners responded to King’s message with shouts of encouragement, urging him to “Preach!” and endorsing his line of thought with a “Yes!” or an “Oh, Lord!” King often responded to his audience. These transcriptions of recorded sermons and audience responses convey King at the height of his oratorical power, bring the outlines and sermon notes to life, and provide a basis of comparison between his sermon drafts and delivered sermons.

Collectively these documents shed considerable light on the theology and preaching preparation of one of America’s most noted orators. The publication of this material reveals that, though King’s ministerial skills benefited from his upbringing in a religious household, he worked diligently to develop his craft and forge a religious message the world could understand and appreciate. Using the sermon file, King’s recorded sermons, and his 1963 volume of published sermons, *Strength to Love*, as benchmarks, one can trace King’s progress from a novice to his status as a preacher with a global audience. As an associate minister at Ebenezer and as pastor at Dexter, King took up the call of the social gospel and applied it to the concrete realities of his own congregations. King’s religious ideas, when linked to the precept of nonviolent resistance, would provide a powerful impetus for the burgeoning civil rights struggles of the 1950s.

These sermon materials reveal that King’s concern for poverty, human rights, and social justice is clearly present in his earliest handwritten sermons. Even his early seminary student writings conveyed a message of faith, hope, and love for the dispossessed. During his first years of preaching in the late forties and early fifties, King was drawn to such issues as atomic-age anxiety, family disintegration, capitalism, the Cold War, and racism. His early sermons at Dexter were sprinkled not only with discussions of race relations but also with references to the hallmarks of the African American experience during the 1950s: the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Emmett Till lynching, Autherine Lucy’s attempt to integrate the University of Alabama, and the desegregation of public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. King’s social gospel message remained grounded in a faith in humanity and a belief in the power, protection, and promise of God but he rejected the

11. For more on this sermon and its sources, see King, “Our God Is Able,” 1 January 1956, pp. 243–246 in this volume.

12. For a catalog of books kept in King’s study that were relevant to his sermon preparation, see King’s Personal Library: Selected Works, pp. 629–655 in this volume.

boundless optimism and unquestioning confidence in human progress that the term originally implied. He saw himself as an heir not only to social gospel proponents such as Harry Emerson Fosdick but also to an African American preaching tradition that demanded racial equality and acknowledged that the struggle for racial justice was a necessary part of the nation's social salvation. By the time he assembled the manuscript for *Strength to Love*, King could draw upon his theological training and years of experience as a pastor and civil rights leader to fulfill his mission of bringing “the Christian message to bear on the social evils that cloud our day.”¹³



When he arrived at Crozer in 1948, King had already started his apprenticeship as a preacher. Overcoming adolescent religious skepticism and lingering doubts about his calling during the summer of 1947, King responded to his irrepressible “desire to serve God and humanity” and “to accept the challenge to enter the ministry.”¹⁴ In October 1947, King delivered his trial sermon at Ebenezer; the following February he was licensed to preach and ordained as a minister, serving as the church's associate pastor during his holiday breaks and vacations from Crozer and Boston University.¹⁵ In the summers, King took over his father's duties and pulpit while King, Sr., “got away for some much needed rest.”¹⁶

The younger King remembered differing “a great deal” with his father over theological matters during his undergraduate years at Morehouse College, particularly as he broke free of “the shackles of fundamentalism.” He would, however, come to acknowledge his father's “noble example” as an important factor in his decision to enter the ministry.¹⁷ A primary aspect of King, Sr.'s example was his dedication to the social gospel, a term he used freely. “My ministry has never been otherworldly—solely oriented toward life after death,” he explained in a 1973 autobiography. “It has been equally concerned with the here and the now, with improving man's lot in this life. I have therefore stressed the social gospel.”¹⁸ King's father acknowledged the social gospel as a sometimes unpopular way of preaching, and chided the minister who “preached what his congregation wanted to hear—not what they needed to hear.”¹⁹

King, Jr.'s mentors at Morehouse, especially president Benjamin E. Mays and reli-

13. King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. ix.

14. King, *My Call to the Ministry*, 7 August 1959, p. 368 in this volume.

15. Lillian D. Watkins, Certification of Minister's License for Martin Luther King, Jr., 4 February 1948, in *Papers* 1:150. In an unpublished autobiography, King, Sr., said of his son's trial sermon, “M.L. gave an excellent account of himself in his initial sermon. He preached like a veteran—like a man with years of experience behind him” (King, Sr., “A Black Rebel: The Autobiography of M. L. King, Sr. As Told to Edward A. Jones” [unpublished manuscript, 1973], p. 107). For more on King's early years as a preacher, see Introduction, in *Papers* 1:37–46).

16. King, Sr., “A Black Rebel,” p. 108.

17. King, “Autobiography of Religious Development,” 12 September–22 November 1950, in *Papers* 1:363.

18. King, Sr., “A Black Rebel,” p. 23.

19. King, Sr., “A Black Rebel,” p. 64.

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gion professor George D. Kelsey, also became appealing role models as erudite advocates of liberal theology.²⁰ The influence of Mays and Kelsey at Morehouse doubtless encouraged King's belief that formal theological training was important. His early development as a minister was also shaped by his lifelong exposure to the preaching craft at Ebenezer and other nearby churches. King acknowledged, however, that in addition to needing personal experience, a good preacher must exhibit a strong intellect. King would insist during his first year at Crozer that "the minister must be both sincere and intelligent. [Too] often do our ministers possess the former but not the latter. This, I think, is a serious problem facing the ministry."²¹

Having rejected fundamentalism while at Morehouse, King arrived at Crozer ready "to fall in line with the liberal tradition there" while still affirming "the noble moral and ethical ideals that I grew up under."²² In an early Crozer paper, he resolutely expressed his belief that liberal theology "is the best, or at least the most logical system of theology in existence" and lauded critical biblical scholarship—"the real theologian must be as open-minded, as unbiased, and as disinterested as the scientist." He was skeptical about biblical literalism, conceding "that the whale did not swallow Jonah, . . . or that Jesus never met John the Baptist." But King maintained that skepticism was not enough: "After the Bible has been stripped [of] all of its mythological and non-historical content, the liberal theological must be able to answer the question—what then?"²³

King's own experiences, his reading of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and his desire to address the meaning of Jesus' teachings in the context of twentieth-century life shaped his view of liberal theology. He questioned the liberal belief in inherent human goodness and its neglect of sin as a factor in human nature and noted his skepticism in several papers that he wrote during his years at Crozer and at Boston.²⁴ His questioning of liberal theology resulted in his nuanced under-

20. Although King's later writings often minimized the influence of his time at Morehouse, Mays played a significant role in shaping King's early canon of sermonic themes. While King was a student, chapel was compulsory, and Mays spoke at the Tuesday chapel almost every week. Mays later acknowledged that the themes of his weekly Tuesday morning chapel sermons often corresponded with those of his weekly columns published in the nationally syndicated and widely read *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American weekly newspaper. A comparison of Mays's columns with King's early sermons provides firm evidence that Mays had a major impact on the language and themes that became staples of King's preaching and thought. Each week, Mays addressed social issues such as voting rights, the myth of black inferiority, the necessity of sacrifice for social change, the social responsibilities of the church, the nature of evil in American society, and a profound optimism for justice. For an example of Mays's influence, see "The Mastery of Fear" / "Mastering Our Fears," 21 July 1957, pp. 317–321 in this volume.

21. King, "Preaching Ministry," 14 September–24 November 1948, pp. 69–72 in this volume. In his sermon file, King kept a copy of a speech by Kelsey titled "The Present Crisis in Negro Ministerial Education" (19 January 1948). In it, Kelsey expressed grave concerns regarding the level of scholarly preparation of most African American ministers.

22. King, "Autobiography of Religious Development," 12 September–22 November 1950, in *Papers* 1:363.

23. King, "The Weaknesses of Liberal Theology" I, 1948, pp. 78, 80 in this volume. For more on King's early adherence to liberal theology, see *Papers* 1:46–51.

24. For an early example of his thinking on sin, see King, "Mastering Our Evil Selves" / "Mastering Ourselves," 5 June 1949, pp. 96–97 in this volume.

standing of the social gospel that was influenced by Niebuhr's neo-orthodox thinking. King wrote, "The modern Christian must see man as a guilty sinner who must ask forgiveness and be converted."²⁵ He viewed Niebuhr's notion of original sin as "symbolic or mythological categories to explain the universality of sin" and "the necessary corrective of a kind of liberalism that too easily capitulated to modern culture."²⁶ However, King's formative experiences with the South's "vicious race problem" not only convinced him of the reality of sin; they made him question "the essential goodness of man." King recalled that he "had grown up abhorring not only segregation but also the oppressive and barbarous acts that grew out of it. . . . I had seen police brutality with my own eyes, and watched Negroes receive the most tragic injustice in the courts. All of these things had done something to my growing personality."²⁷

Despite these experiences, King retained an "ever present desire to be optimistic about human nature." The act of repentance, King averred, was "an essential part of the Christian life" and made possible a "fellowship with God." Encouraged by the "noble possibilities in human nature," he found himself searching for the middle ground between social gospel optimism and neo-orthodox skepticism. King recalled going through a "transitional stage" while at Crozer, describing himself as "a victim of eclecticism" and attempting "to synthesize the best in liberal theology with the best in neo-orthodox theology and come to some understanding of man."²⁸

In his 1949 sermon "Mastering Our Evil Selves" / "Mastering Ourselves" King rejected the neo-orthodox notion of a human "make-up that was predominantly evil."²⁹ Similarly, in "Splinters and Planks," he noted, "Sin is a well of water that each of us has drawn from" but he also denied that an individual's nature was irrevocably evil; one had a choice to either succumb to the temptation of sin or strive for goodness.³⁰ He maintained that the struggle between good and evil could be resolved and that through a conscious attempt to do this, "we actually master ourselves." Eventually, he declared, "we will somehow rise above evil thoughts. We will no longer possess two personalities but only one."³¹

Although King preached at his father's church before entering Crozer, he wel-

25. King, "How Modern Christians Should Think of Man," 29 November 1949–15 February 1950, in *Papers* 1:278. For more on King's thinking on Reinhold Niebuhr, see Introduction, in *Papers* 1:55.

26. King, "The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," April 1953–June 1954, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 2: *Rediscovering Precious Value, July 1951–November 1955*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, Peter Holloran (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 274, 278; see also King, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," 9 May 1952, in *Papers* 2:141–151.

27. King, "How Modern Christians Should Think of Men," 29 November–15 February 1950, in *Papers* 1:274. King, "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 1 September 1958, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King*, vol. 4: *Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, Kieran Taylor (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 473.

28. King, "How Modern Christians Should Think of Man," 29 November 1949–15 February 1950, in *Papers* 1:278, 274.

29. King, "Mastering Our Evil Selves" / "Mastering Ourselves," 5 June 1949, p. 95 in this volume.

30. King, "Splinters and Planks," 24 July 1949, pp. 97–99 in this volume.

31. King, "Mastering Our Evil Selves" / "Mastering Ourselves," 5 June 1949, pp. 96, 97 in this volume.

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came the opportunity to augment his already considerable oratorical skills with the theological sophistication he could acquire in his classes. As King wrote in his early papers on preaching, he knew that he “must somehow take profound theological and philosophical views and place them in a concrete framework” to become an effective preacher.³² In essays for his preaching courses at Crozer, he derided ministers who left the people “lost in the fog of theological abstractions,” arguing that instead, “I must forever make the complex, the simple.”³³

The ability to be an effective minister did not come readily to King, however, as indicated in the assessment of one of his ministerial evaluators who found in his pastoral approach “a smugness that refuses to adapt itself to the demands of ministering effectively to the average Negro congregation.”³⁴ King, nevertheless, impressed most of his Crozer mentors, who gave him generally high grades and strong recommendations. George Washington Davis saw him becoming “an excellent minister or teacher,” while Morton Scott Enslin predicted King would “probably become a big strong man among his people.” Enslin recognized King’s skill for retaining and refashioning information that could prove useful in the pulpit, writing, “All is grist that comes to his mill.”³⁵

King’s time at Crozer proved to be the wellspring of concepts and practices that would become central to his preaching life. Unlike the essays he wrote to address theological debates, his homiletic writings—most of which were outlines or fragmentary drafts—reveal his struggle to deal with the practical concerns he would face as a clergyman while developing a solid intellectual foundation for his preaching. Many of these fragmentary drafts did not become complete sermons but they allowed him to experiment with homiletic themes and explore the meanings of biblical texts. The raw material for his future sermons, the sermon sketches and outlines that he may have prepared for preaching classes at Crozer, rely mainly on theological subjects and questions such as human immortality and death; repentance and forgiveness; and salvation, prayer and faith in human life. These writings reveal King’s desire to communicate his biblical understanding and theological concerns in plain language.³⁶

Central to King’s approach to preaching was the concept of a knowable God. King retreated from any notion that God was, as theologian Karl Barth put forward,

32. King, “Preaching Ministry,” 14 September–24 November 1948, p. 72 in this volume.

33. King, “Karl Barth,” 14 September 1948–15 February 1950, and “Preaching Ministry,” 14 September–24 November 1948, pp. 103 and 72 in this volume, respectively. King wrote both of these essays for Robert Keighton, from whom he took ten classes on preaching. He kept Keighton’s 1956 work *The Man Who Would Preach* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) in his personal library and annotated the book, writing in a page margin, “Preaching is not merely saying something, but having something to say.”

34. William E. Gardner, Crozer Theological Seminary Field Work Department: Rating Sheet for Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Papers* 1:381. Gardner, a friend of the King family, was pastor of the First Baptist Church in East Elmhurst, Queens, in New York City.

35. Davis, Crozer Theological Seminary Placement Committee: Confidential Evaluation of Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Papers* 1:334; Enslin, Crozer Theological Seminary Placement Committee: Confidential Evaluation of Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Papers* 1:354. For more on Davis’s and Enslin’s influence on King at Crozer, see *Papers* 1:48–49.

36. For examples of these drafts, see the section on Undated Homiletic Material, pp. 559–600 in this volume.

“wholly other.’ God is not a process projected somewhere [*in*] the lofty blue. God is not a divine hermit hiding himself in a cosmic cave.”³⁷ While admitting that “we never find all of God,” King scorned Barth’s and the crisis theologians’ “disdain for the very use of the word experience in a religious context” and contended that “the very idea of God is an outgrowth of experience.”³⁸ To King, God was a readily perceivable entity, comprehensible and immanent. He preached that the knowable God maintained a personal interest in each human soul and was most discernable through biblical stories of Jesus’ life. In a 1952 Christmas sermon King addressed “the Christlikeness of God” and asserted that Jesus “brought God nearer to earth.”³⁹ He also affirmed that “God has set us a plan for the building of the soul, the life of Christ as it is revealed in the New Testament.”⁴⁰ Ultimately, King stated, one could not escape God: “Fleeing into darkness or forgetting God is no escape from him.”⁴¹

According to King, Jesus’ example in the Bible provided Christians with a personal life path. He challenged his parishioners to examine themselves before condemning the sins of others and urged personal contrition for one’s transgressions. In one of his earliest known complete sermons, King explained, “When we would criticise others for their shortcomings and insist that they be turned out of church, we hear Jesus saying, ‘he who is without sin cast the first stone.’”⁴² In a sermon sketch, he observed, “God always reserves for man the possibility of repentance” and characterized atonement as “a change of conduct as well as of heart.” He then counseled forgiveness of others’ sins: “Forgiveness does not take away the fact of sin. But it restores the offender to communion with us, which he had forfeited through his offense.”⁴³ Forgiveness is necessary as it “is a process of life and the Christian weapon of social redemption. . . . the Christian weapon against social evil.”⁴⁴

In line with that notion of redemption, King concluded that Christian forgiveness “is the solution of the race problem.” He urged his listeners to “go out with the spirit of forgiveness, heal the hurts, right the wrongs and change society.”⁴⁵ King believed that this kind of “moral progress” was not only humanly possible but socially necessary for human survival.⁴⁶ For whites, he prescribed empathy, advising, “If the white man was closer to the Negro he would know more about the Negro and understand him better.”⁴⁷ In an early outline inspired by the writings of Thomas Aquinas, King remarked that differences among people were a creation of God

37. King, “Mastering Our Evil Selves” / “Mastering Ourselves,” 5 June 1949, p. 97 in this volume.

38. King, “The Place of Reason and Experience in Finding God,” 13 September–23 November 1949, in *Papers* 1:231, 233, 234. For more on King’s view of the importance of religious experience, see Introduction, in *Papers* 1:52.

39. King, “After Christmas, What?” 28 December 1952, p. 129 in this volume.

40. King, “Sermon Conclusions,” 30 November 1948–16 February 1949, p. 85 in this volume; see also “O That I Knew Where I Might Find Him!” 1948–1954, pp. 591–598 in this volume.

41. King, “God the Inescapable,” 1948–1954, p. 574 in this volume.

42. King, “Facing Life’s Inescapables,” 3 March 1949, p. 90 in this volume.

43. King, “Sermon Sketches II,” 30 November 1948–16 February 1949, pp. 82, 83 in this volume.

44. King, “The Meaning of Forgiveness,” 1948–1954, pp. 580–581 in this volume.

45. King, “The Meaning of Forgiveness,” 1948–1954, p. 581 in this volume.

46. King, “Civilization’s Great Need,” 1949, p. 86 in this volume.

47. King, “I Sat Where They Sat,” 1948–1954, p. 581 in this volume.

Introduction “because God brought things into being in order that his goodness might be represented by his creatures. And because his goodness could not be represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures.” He maintained that God intended that people “Black, red, yellow, white” were meant to co-exist, and concluded, “Our biological differences are but [varying] expressions of the richness and complexity of the divine nature.”⁴⁸

Seeking to reconcile modern social science with theology, King often used psychology and sociology to buttress the assertions in his sermons. In an early conclusion to “Life Is What You Make It,” King noted, “Modern psychology affirms that vital religious faith is unequaled in its resources to make life worth living.”⁴⁹ He referred to psychologist Carl Rogers’s “permissive environment” when articulating the need for all Christians to put themselves in others’ shoes, avowing that “unless you sit where others sit you cannot really know them or understand them.”⁵⁰ King also endorsed the gift of reason and intelligence, maintaining that while conscientiousness was honorable, if it was not accompanied “by intelligence it can become the most ruinous force in human nature.”⁵¹ While he characterized scientific innovations as “tangible and amazing victories” and viewed the status of contemporary education as “astounding,” King also distrusted advances that were used without regard to their impact on human life. He emphasized that science “alone will not save us at this moment. With the most amazing means of production in history we have unemployment. With the most amazing world contacts on record we make world wars.” He concluded that “unless we can reestablish the moral and spiritual ends of living in personal character and social justice, our civilization will ruin itself with the misuse of its own instruments.”⁵² Without the reinforcement of Christian values, King believed, the sciences could as easily be forces of destruction as advancement.

In the post–World War II era, when many questioned God’s existence and the purpose of faith in the wake of fascism and the atomic age, King maintained his confidence in God’s ability to guide human life and history and in Christianity’s force as a vehicle for social change. He detailed this vision of Christianity as a moral force in an early essay, “The Philosophy of Life Undergirding Christianity and the Christian Ministry.” In his estimation, “Christianity is a value philosophy,” one which judged the worth of human life and quality of earthly existence to be its greatest concern. Rather than disdain daily existence, King expressed his belief that the

48. King, “The Distinctions in God’s Creation,” 1948–1954, p. 579 in this volume. King drew on the writings of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (Anton C. Pegis, ed., *Introductions to St. Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Modern Library, 1948], pp. 259, 261). King referred to this volume in “The Distinctions in God’s Creation.”

49. King, Sermon Conclusions, 30 November 1948–16 February 1949, p. 86 in this volume. For other examples of this practice, see King, “A Way Out,” 22 May 1949; “Mastering Our Evil Selves” / “Mastering Ourselves,” 5 June 1949; and “First Things First,” 2 August 1953, pp. 90–94, 94–97 and 143–146 in this volume, respectively.

50. King, “I Sat Where They Sat,” 1948–1954, p. 581 in this volume.

51. King, Sincerity Is Not Enough, 3 June 1951, p. 119 in this volume.

52. King, “Civilization’s Great Need,” 1949, pp. 86, 87 in this volume; see also King, “Science and Religion,” September 1948–May 1951, pp. 108–109 in this volume.

world “is a place in which God is fitting men and women for the Kingdom of God.” Similarly, he felt that “Christianity at its highest and best has always insisted that persons are intrinsically valuable. And so it is the job of the Christian to love every man because God [*loves*] love.”⁵³

In the fall of 1951, King began his graduate studies in systematic theology at Boston University. Like his other academic writings as a doctoral student, King’s dissertation was flawed by extensive use of unattributed sources, but it nonetheless expressed his maturing theological beliefs.⁵⁴ In his dissertation King rejected the theological abstractions of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman in favor of a knowable and personal God more worthy of worship: “In God there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart; this God both evokes and answers prayers.”⁵⁵ King’s own optimism was not rooted in human acts but in his belief that “God and the universe are on the side of right.”⁵⁶

This skepticism regarding human acts extended to the economic milieu. King expressed disdain for capitalism in a letter written to Coretta Scott in the course of their courtship. Lonely during their separation in the summer of 1952, King first expressed his longing for Scott before thanking her for a copy of Edward Bellamy’s socialist utopian novel, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*.⁵⁷ After reflecting on the book’s merits and weaknesses, King agreed with Bellamy that capitalism “has outlived its usefulness. It has brought about a system that takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes.” He concluded the letter with his assessment

53. King, “The Philosophy of Life Undergirding Christianity and the Christian Ministry,” September 1948–May 1951, pp. 110, 111 in this volume; see also King, “God’s Love,” 5 September 1954, pp. 179–181 in this volume.

54. For King’s dissertation in its entirety, see “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman,” 15 April 1955, in *Papers* 2:339–544. For information on King’s use of unattributed sources in student papers and a more detailed evaluation of King’s dissertation, see Introduction, in *Papers* 2:6, 25–26.

55. King, “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman,” 15 April 1955, in *Papers* 2:512. After being introduced to personalist theology at Crozer, King pursued his interest in this philosophical school with Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf during his graduate studies at Boston University. King’s professors reinforced his belief in a God that could be perceived through personal events such as conversion and known as a concrete entity, one capable of intervening directly in human life and history. In his dissertation, King argued that denying that God had a distinct and knowable personality was “a rejection of rationality, goodness and love of God in the full sense of the words.” To think this was to render God into “an unconscious process devoid of any true purpose.” King, on the other hand, believed in a “‘living’ God,” one that was both immanent in the universe and possessed a personality: “The religious man has always recognized two fundamental religious values. One is fellowship with God, the other is trust in his goodness. Both of these imply the personality of God. . . . There may be interactions between impersonal beings, but not fellowship” (King, “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman,” 15 April 1955, in *Papers* 2:506, 534, 512).

56. King, Index of Sermon Topics, 20 February–4 May 1951, p. 116 in this volume.

57. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (New York: Modern Library, 1951). Scott inscribed the book, writing, “I should be interested to know your reactions to Bellamy’s predictions about our society. [¶] In some ways it is rather encouraging to see how our social order has changed since Bellamy’s time. There is still hope for the future . . . Lest we become too impatient” (Scott, Inscription to Martin Luther King, Jr., 7 April 1952).

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that “our economic system is going through a radical change, and certainly this change is needed. I would certainly welcome the day to come when there will be a nationalization of industry.” He vowed to “hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color. This is the gospel that I will preach to the world.”⁵⁸

While home from Boston in the summer of 1953 King explored the idea of worship as a counter to the intrusions of modern secular life in a sermon series at Ebenezer that may have been broadcast on Atlanta radio station WERD. He began by explaining that humanity’s need to worship was instinctual and as natural “as the rising of the sun is to the cosmic order.” King preached about the danger of turning one’s natural “worship drive into false channels” and revering “false gods.” The misdirected force of spiritual zeal had consequences that were national and international in scope. King warned his listeners of the dangers in viewing science and human effort as the source of salvation without recognizing that “the god of science which we so devoutly worshipped has brought about the possibility of universal annihilation.”⁵⁹ He dedicated the second sermon in his series on false gods to an examination of the god of nationalism and castigated the purveyors of an unbridled chauvinism that led to wars and potential nuclear destruction. He also suggested that such impulses were also the source of white supremacy and “imperialistic greed.” King called upon his listeners to join other “believers of the christian principle” and consider themselves as part of a larger world community: “If we are to avoid the drudgery of war; if we are to avoid being plunged across the abyss of atomic destruction, we must transcend the narrow confines of nationalism. Nationalism must give way to internationalism.”⁶⁰ King’s last sermon on false gods explored what was to his mind the most prevalent form of this sin: the worship of money and material goods. King charged, “This is the danger forever threatening our capitalistic economy which places so much emphasis on the profit motive,” and he condemned the elevation of the dollar “to the status of a god. It becomes a power that corrupts and an instrument of exploitation.”⁶¹ In each case, King asked his listeners to return to the worship of the one God, focus their attention on national and world affairs, and regard social issues as part of their spiritual existence.

Racism appeared as a false god in King’s thematic series. In “False God of Nationalism,” King wondered, “Will we continue to serve the false god of racial prejudice or will we serve the God who made of one blood all men to dwell upon the face of the earth.”⁶² In his early attempts to grapple with prejudice, he recalled, “I had also learned that the inseparable twin of racial injustice is economic injustice. I saw how the systems of segregation ended up in the exploitation of the Negro as well as the poor whites.”⁶³ King broadened his accusation of race prejudice, in his

58. King to Scott, 18 July 1952, pp. 123–126 in this volume.

59. King, “The False God of Science,” 5 July 1953, pp. 130–132 in this volume.

60. King, “The False God of Nationalism,” 12 July 1953, pp. 132–133 in this volume.

61. King, “The False God of Money,” 19 July 1953, pp. 134, 135 in this volume; see also “Will Capitalism Survive?” 14 September 1948–15 February 1950, pp. 104–105 in this volume.

62. King, “The False God of Nationalism,” 12 July 1953, p. 133 in this volume.

63. King, “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” 13 April 1960, in *Papers* 5:421–422.

1953 version of "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," to include the Christian church. "Segregation and discrimination could not exist in America today without the sanction of the Church," he maintained. "I am [*ashamed*] and appalled at the fact that Eleven O'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in Christian America. How tardy we have been. The Church has [*too*] often been an institution serving to crystalize the patterns of the status quo."⁶⁴

Even early in his career, King used Jesus' teachings to espouse the use of love as a means of resolving conflict on personal, national and international levels. He counseled his listeners that Jesus' "new and revolutionary" call to "love even your enemies" was "the solution of the world's problem." King characterized Jesus' words as those of a "practical realist" that were "an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization." Acknowledging that this tactic seemed unfeasible, King directed his congregants to evaluate themselves and their adversaries in life. Warning that "there might be causes on your end," conversely, King offered, "Always be willing to see the good points in your enemy." Finally, King proposed, love your enemies "because love has within [*it*] a redemptive power."⁶⁵ King's rejection of the goal of utterly defeating and humiliating one's opponent based in Christ's precepts had a telling effect on his pursuit of justice in future years.

King's early sermons and writings exhibited his desire to present the ideas inspired by his theological training and his own meditations on his faith in ways relevant and meaningful to his congregants. He readily drew on the notion of a knowable God to communicate the power and vision of his own Christological beliefs, and to preach the gospel of justice in a way that revealed his concern for his congregants' social and economic realities as well as their spiritual welfare. These abilities would later hold him in good stead as he met the challenge of his first pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.



Following his marriage to Coretta Scott in 1953 and subsequent completion of the required course work for his doctorate at Boston University, King began to explore various career paths. While he entertained offers from academic institutions, he was also interested in serving as pastor of a community church. Among those King considered was Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, a historic congregation near the Alabama State Capitol building with a membership that could boast of many of the city's black professionals including several faculty members from Alabama State College. The highly educated young pastor believed that he and the congregation could work well together.⁶⁶

64. King, "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," 9 August 1953, p. 149 in this volume; see also King, "Is the Church the Hope of the World," 14 September–15 February 1950, pp. 105–106 in this volume. To King, race prejudice was a form of human sin. He observed that "the average white southerner . . . goes to church every Sunday. He worships the same God we worship . . . Yet at the same time He will spend thousands of dollars in an attempt to keep the Negro segregated and discriminated" (King, "Mastering Our Evil Selves" / "Mastering Ourselves," 5 June 1949, p. 96 in this volume).

65. King, "Loving Your Enemies," 31 August 1952, pp. 127–128 in this volume.

66. For a description of King's job opportunities, his interest in Dexter, and the history of the church, see Introduction, in *Papers* 2:28–30.

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Invited to preach in January 1954 as a candidate to fill the congregation's pastoral vacancy, King elected to deliver one of his time-tested sermons, "The Dimensions of a Complete Life."⁶⁷ Based loosely on a sermon by Phillips Brooks, the scope of King's message expanded beyond personal and domestic affairs to consider issues of global concern, noting the negative effects of self-interested nations. While he recalled feeling some pressure to alter "Dimensions" in order to impress the congregation, in the end he reminded himself, "Keep Martin Luther King in the background and God in the foreground and everything will be all right."⁶⁸ In the sermon, King urged his listeners to maximize their personal abilities, move beyond their own lives by fostering genuine concern for others, and pursue a fulfilling relationship with God.⁶⁹

After receiving the call to be the church's new pastor, King returned to Dexter early in April to preach "Going Forward by Going Backward."⁷⁰ The sermon included a harsh critique of society's pursuit of knowledge and materialism without also cultivating the timeless moral principles and a devotion to God that would truly make of the world a "brotherhood." Still, King sounded a chord of hope because of his conviction that the "universe hinges on moral foundations." He affirmed:

There is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle in saying, "No lie can live forever." There is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." There is something which justifies James Russell Lowell in saying, "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future."⁷¹

The Dexter congregation would often hear this set piece advocating faith in the ultimate triumph of justice and righteousness.

Soon after his April visit, King wrote Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and agreed

67. Coretta Scott King claims "Three Dimensions" was the first sermon she heard King preach (Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* [New York: Holt, 1969], p. 59). King had also delivered a sermon with this title in September 1953 while serving as associate pastor at Ebenezer ("King Jr. to End Summer Series of Sermons; Ebenezer," *Atlanta Daily World*, 5 September 1953).

68. In his recollections of his first sermon at Dexter, King adds, "The congregation was receptive, and I left with the feeling that God had used me well, and that here was a fine church with challenging possibilities" (King, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958], p. 17).

69. King, "The Dimensions of a Complete Life," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 24 January 1954, pp. 150–156 in this volume.

70. King, "Going Forward by Going Backward," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 4 April 1954, pp. 159–163 in this volume; see also Robert D. Nesbitt and Thomas H. Randall to King, 7 March 1954, in *Papers* 2:256.

71. King, "Going Forward by Going Backward," 4 April 1954, p. 162 in this volume; Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837), Bryant, "The Battlefield" (1839), and Lowell, "The Present Crisis" (1844). These three passages became commonplace in King's oratory. In a February 1960 letter from Dexter parishioners Cynthia and Julius Alexander, the couple remembered King's recitation of Lowell's 1844 poem as they recalled that "many months ago you said we must be prepared to face some real dark days ere freedom comes, . . . Yet if I may quote you 'Beyond the dim unknown God keeps watch over His own'" (Cynthia and Julius Alexander to King, 14 February–21 February 1960, in *Papers* 5:375). For King's use of this stanza of Lowell's poem, see "Discerning the Signs of History," 26 June 1955, p. 219 in this volume.

to become its pastor.⁷² He returned to Montgomery on 2 May 1954 to give the sermon "Accepting Responsibility for Your Actions." In this third sermon at Dexter he challenged congregation members not to allow the circumstances of heredity or environment to determine their lives, but instead to focus on individual accountability as an effective response to crises and setbacks in life. King suggested Marian Anderson and Roland Hayes as African American role models who had achieved in spite of, and as a result of their reactions to, hindrances and injustice. However, King tempered his emphasis on individual responsibility and put his new congregation on notice regarding the type of leadership he would provide by stating, "I happen to be a firm believer in what is called the 'social gospel.'" While King's written text did not flesh out his definition of the term, he emphasized the necessity of pursuing "social reform."⁷³ King's fundamental commitment to advocating social justice remained constant.⁷⁴

After that morning's service, King formally accepted the church's call with an afternoon address before his new congregation. He told them, "I come to the pastorate of Dexter at a most crucial hour of our world's history." He also humbly noted that he was neither a "great preacher" nor a "profound scholar" and came with "nothing so special to offer." Despite his self-effacement, King exhorted the congregation to "give our generation an answer. Dexter, like all other churches, must somehow lead men and women of a decadent generation to the high mountain of peace and salvation."⁷⁵

Within two weeks of King's acceptance, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its first decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruling school segregation unconstitutional.⁷⁶ During the hopeful summer after the court's unanimous decision, King commuted between Boston and Montgomery a few times a month as he completed work on his dissertation. During this time, King continually urged his new congregation to take courageous stands for justice while bemoaning the cowardice and hypocrisy of whites regarding issues of race. In his May 1954 sermon "Mental and Spiritual Slavery," King reflected on Pilate's acquiescence to the crowd's demand that Jesus be crucified while condemning the reluctance of many Christians to be true to their consciences when it came to issues of race.⁷⁷ Although King was aware that his congregation included many who felt daily pressure to conform to white southern mores in order to maintain their jobs and insure their safety and that of their families, he did not hesitate to question the morality of this sub-

72. King, To Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 14 April 1954, in *Papers* 2:260.

73. For an earlier version of this 2 May 1954 sermon, see King, "Accepting Responsibility for Your Actions," 26 July 1953, pp. 139–142 in this volume.

74. King did occasionally get involved in efforts to challenge injustice prior to his arrival at Dexter. For instance, in 1950 he and three friends charged a New Jersey bar owner with violating the state's civil rights laws. The case was eventually dropped ("Statement on Behalf of Ernest Nichols, *State of New Jersey vs. Ernest Nichols*, by W. Thomas McGann," 20 July 1950, in *Papers* 1:327–329).

75. King, Acceptance Address at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 2 May 1954, p. 166 in this volume.

76. *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

77. King, "Mental and Spiritual Slavery," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, May 1954, pp. 167–170 in this volume.

Chart 1. COMPARISON OF TEXT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SERMON
"TRANSFORMED NONCONFORMIST," 1954-1963

Biblical source text

Romans 12:2—"And be not conformed to this world:
but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Romans 12:2

The source of our strength and our love is God. We are not called to be reformers, but to be transformed nonconformists—to be men who live differently. Paul's word here is the Greek word from which we get our English derivative "metamorphosis." Paul is saying that God will radically and thoroughly change us. Jesus' word for it was to be "born again," and Paul's testimony was that when he opened his life to God in Christ "all things became new."
—James E. Will, *Sermon: "Men Who Live Differently," July 1951*

Mark 15:5—"And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released
Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus to be crucified."

Now at a point we must all be conformist. (We are tied to an extent to the folkways and mores) There is no virtue in being a nonconformist just to be a non conformist. Some people are non conformist just to get attention and to be different. This type of non-conformity I am not speaking of. I am speaking of a non conformity which is based on high and noble purposes. . . . [Quote Paul] We Christians are not called upon to be the conformist, but the non-conformist.

—King, *Sermon: "Mental and Spiritual Slavery," May 1954*

Romans 12:2

So Paul gives us a [formula] for constructive nonconformity which is found in the second half of the text. In order to discern the true will of God and become constructive nonconformist we must accept a new mental outlook. We must be transformed. Jesus' phrase for this experience was the new birth. And so only when we have been born again can we be true nonconformist. We are called upon to be transformed nonconformist. This is our eternal challenge as christians.

—King, *Sermon: "Transformed Nonconformist," November 1954*

Romans 12:2

So Paul gives us the [formula] for constructive nonconformity in the second half of the text. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." In other words nonconformity can only be creative ~~when~~ when it is controlled and directed by a transformed life. In order to be a constructive nonconformist we must accept a new mental outlook. We must so open our lives to God in Christ that he makes us new creatures. Jesus' phrase for this experience was the new birth. So only when we have been born again can we be true nonconformists. We are called upon not merely to be nonconformist, but to be transformed nonconformists.

—King, *Sermon: "Transformed Nonconformist," July 1962-March 1963*

mission to convention.⁷⁸ King may have felt more comfortable presenting this ethical problem because he knew that his predecessor at Dexter, Vernon Johns, had consistently challenged the congregation to display greater courage in confronting racism.⁷⁹

King lacked some of Johns's abrasiveness but he did not intend to allow the members of his new congregation to comfortably conform to the immorality of apartheid. He warned that "most people today are in Pilate's shoes i.e. conformist. Most people would take stands on their ideas but they are afraid of being non-conformist." King made an example of "the [*minister*] choosing between truth and . . . being popular with the [*brethren*]," and concluded, "The great progressive moves of history have been ruined by the [*perpetuity*] of 'Pilateness.'" For a congregation filled with African American teachers and professors whose jobs were in the hands of white government officials, nonconformity could come at a great cost. King let his parishioners know early on that he expected them to make sacrifices on behalf of the "great progressive moves of history."⁸⁰

"Mental and Spiritual Slavery" also demonstrates King's usage of other ministers' sermons for themes, phrases, and organization. James Will's homily "Men Who Live Differently," published in 1951, provided King with the sermon's key argument—that nonconformity for a moral purpose may be the truly Christian path. Although King did not follow Will's organization, he did re-title this sermon "Transformed Nonconformist," a subheading found in Will's sermon. It became one of his most enduring homilies.⁸¹

As he became more comfortable with his new congregation, and buoyed by the recent Supreme Court *Brown* decision, King continued to advocate for the necessity of the social gospel during his first summer as Dexter's pastor. He boldly reminded his audience of the twin scourges of conformity and hypocrisy that obstruct the way to justice, noting that the same whites "who lynch Negroes worship Christ," and that the "strongest advocates of segregation in America also worship Christ."⁸² On 11 July 1954 he again called on Dexter members to accept the Christian imperative to work for social change: "We can talk all we want to about saving souls from hell and

78. Several Alabama State College faculty members attended Dexter, including Jo Ann Robinson, James E. Pierce, Mary Fair Burks, Norman Walton, and president H. Councill Trenholm. Robinson said that Dexter "had always been made up of many of the elite—the professionals and intellectuals—of Montgomery's black communities. Most of the church members were well educated, with good jobs and high positions because of their college and university training" (Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, David J. Garrow, ed. [Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987], p. 67). While some of Dexter's members may have been careful not to upset those in power, Robinson lobbied for social change throughout her tenure. In 1954, she penned a letter to Montgomery Mayor W. A. Gayle suggesting a bus boycott would be possible if conditions on the local buses did not improve (Jo Ann Robinson to W. A. Gayle, 21 May 1954).

79. Johns's boldness and stubbornness eventually convinced the board to accept his resignation in late 1952. For a description of King's impression of Johns, see Introduction, in *Papers* 2:29–30 and note 2, King to Thurman, 31 October 1955, in *Papers* 2:584.

80. King, "Mental and Spiritual Slavery," May 1954, pp. 169, 170 in this volume.

81. For more on the influences on this sermon, see Chart 1.

82. King, "A Religion of Doing," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 4 July 1954, p. 173 in this volume.

Introduction preaching the pure and simple gospel, but unless we preach the social gospel our evangelistic gospel will be meaningless.”⁸³

Despite his growing ease with his new position, King remained sensitive to Dexter’s exclusive reputation. While he accepted the congregation’s staid responses to his preaching, King later admitted that he had been “anxious to change the impression in the community that Dexter was a sort of silk-stocking church.”⁸⁴ King was convinced that true worship would transcend class distinctions, as he believed all were at a level place before God. In a sermon titled “Worship,” King expressed a vision to inspire his congregation:

Worship at its best is a social experience where people of all [*levels*] of life come together and communicate with a common father. Here the employer and the employee, the rich and the poor, the white collar worker and the common laborer all come [*together*] in a vast unity. Here we come to see that although we have different callings in life we are all the children of a common father, who is the father of both the rich and the poor.⁸⁵

Some Dexter members have recounted strong impressions of King’s preaching. Thelma Rice recognized the high quality of both the content and presentation of his sermons: “I was impressed with the command that he had over what he wanted to say and the way he said it, with [*conviction*].”⁸⁶ Another parishioner, Mrs. O. B. Underwood, also called young King “an outstanding preacher.” She was impressed with King’s delivery: “His voice was soothing; he could gain your attention almost immediately; you didn’t wander when he was speaking; you listened when he was speaking, whether it was a mass meeting or a church service or a social gathering, feeling extremely elated.” Underwood remembered resistance to his messages as well: “Many people didn’t like his way of delivering Sunday morning messages. But most of the younger people and certainly most of his friends were very much in accord with his thoughts.” She admired his directness: “The way he was able to deliver a message, it always hit, and it probably hit too hard. We used to laugh about many of the messages because you could sit in the back of the church and point out certain people that you knew said, ‘looks like this message was aimed at that particular person.’”⁸⁷

83. King, “What Is Man?” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 11 July 1954, p. 176 in this volume.

84. King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 25.

85. King, “Worship,” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 7 August 1955, p. 225 in this volume. In his annual report, King informed the congregation that new members would no longer be “voted in the church from the floor” but seen by the head of the Deacon Board, the church clerk, and the New Members Committee. They would then be “listed in the Church Bulletin on the Sunday after they join, and they will be officially welcomed into the church on the First Sunday night with the right hand of fellowship” (King, “Annual Report, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” 1 October 1954–31 October 1955, in *Papers* 2:582, 583).

86. Thelma Rice, interview by Norman Lumpkin, 22 August 1973, in *Statewide Oral History Project*, Vol. 3, interview #052, Special Collections, Alabama State University Library, Montgomery, Alabama.

87. Mrs. O. B. Underwood, interview by Norman Lumpkin, 17 August 1973, in *Statewide Oral History Project*, Vol. 4, interview #054.

While King continued to preach moral nonconformity to his parishioners, many of his sermons and speeches over the next year contained a note of optimism regarding desegregation and greater racial justice.⁸⁸ Just a few days after Martin and Coretta King permanently made their home in Dexter's parsonage, King attended the National Baptist Convention in St. Louis, where he delivered an address before its Woman's Convention Auxiliary. His words indicate an increasing confidence in the inevitability of racial progress, desegregation, and social change: "Ultimately history brings into being the new order to blot out the tragic reign of the old order." King stressed that "the tide has turned" and "segregation is passing away."⁸⁹

Not content to merely confront the moral comfort of his parishioners, King began to focus on mobilizing his new congregation to take advantage of the singular opportunity to challenge segregation presented by the *Brown* decision. In his sermon "Creating the Abundant Life," King advised his parishioners, "First if we are to create the abundant life we must give ourselves to some great purpose and some great cause that transcends ourselves."⁹⁰ Soon after relocating to Montgomery, King presented a plan for the future: "Since the gospel of Jesus is a social gospel as well as a personal gospel seeking to save the whole man, a Social and Political Action Committee shall be established for the purpose of keeping the congregation intelligently informed concerning the social, political, and economic situation," he announced. "This committee shall keep before the congregation the importance of the N.A.A.C.P."⁹¹

King's skill as a preacher rapidly became known throughout the community, and his reputation garnered him speaking opportunities outside his home church.⁹² At the 23 January 1955 meeting of the Birmingham National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), King spoke on "A Realistic Approach to Progress in Race Relations," and charged his audience to take action: "You must do more than pray and read the Bible" to eliminate segregation and discrimination.⁹³ He delivered the baccalaureate sermon at Alabama State College's graduation on 15 May 1955. His talk to the graduating students and their families described three mountains that had to be surmounted: "rugged individualism and national isolationism, the mountain of [*mediocrity*] in our various fields of endeavor, [*and*] the

88. This volume contains almost 20 extant sermons preached in the year before the beginning of the bus boycott at the end of 1955, more than any other period in King's early preaching career. It illuminates a period of King's preaching ministry that was previously arcane.

89. King, "The Vision of a World Made New," 9 September 1954, pp. 183, 184 in this volume.

90. King, "Creating an Abundant Life," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 26 September 1954, p. 189 in this volume.

91. King, "Recommendations to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church for the Fiscal Year 1954-1955," 5 September 1954, in *Papers* 2:290.

92. King's father remarked on his son's growing reputation: "Alexander called me yesterday just to tell me about how you swept them at Friendship Sunday. Every way I turned people are [*congratulating*] me for you. You see young man you are becoming very popular. As I told you you must be much in prayer. Persons like yourself are the ones the devil turns all of his forces a loose to destroy" (King, Sr. to King, Jr., 2 December 1954, in *Papers* 2:320).

93. "Apathy Among Church Leaders Hit in Talk by Rev. M. L. King," 25 January 1955, in *Papers* 2:330, 331.

Introduction mountain of hate and bitterness."⁹⁴ He was then invited to address the Montgomery NAACP chapter in June. In his speech, titled "The Peril of Superficial Optimism in the Area of Race Relations," King acknowledged the amazing progress in the area of race relations that had been made in recent years but warned against the potential onset of complacency:

The danger facing the American Negro is that because of these astounding advances he will become complacent and feel that the overall problem is solved. And with the further assertion that that which is not solved will move inevitably toward solution. We might fall victims to the cult of inevitable progress. We must be realistic realizing that the problem might creep back into the window at any time. So long as one spark of prejudice lies latent in the heart of any white American, there is a possibility for it to develop into a flame of [*intolerance*] at the unpredictable moments.⁹⁵

Yet even while rejecting shallow, naive optimism, King believed that there was reason for hope. A few weeks later, in an early version of "Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," he proclaimed, "Segregation is drowning today in the rushing waters of historical necessity."⁹⁶ Although King did not dismiss the persistence of racism, he encouraged his congregation to overcome the temptation "to look upon all white persons as evil." He observed that when an African American "looks beyond his circumstances and sees the whole of the situation, he discovers that some of the most implacable and vehement advocates of racial equality are consecrated white persons."⁹⁷ As evidence of this goodwill, King cited the founding white members of the NAACP.

Events during the coming months would temper King's optimism regarding white people, especially those in the South. The murder of young Emmett Till on 28 August 1955 was a brutal reminder of the vital and horrific reality of racism. The September acquittal of his murderers by an all-white Mississippi jury revealed the pervasive sanctioning of racist brutality. After bemoaning the hypocrisy of imperialist nations who have claimed to worship Christ while crushing "Africa and Asia with the iron feet of oppression," King commented in his sermon "Pride Versus Humility," "That jury in Mississippi, which a few days ago in the Emmett Till case, freed two white men from what might be considered one of the most brutal and inhuman crimes of the twentieth century, worships Christ."⁹⁸

94. King, "Other Mountains," Baccalaureate Sermon at Alabama State College, 15 May 1955, p. 214 in this volume; for a similar talk see "Keep Moving from This Mountain," Address at Spelman College on 10 April 1960, in *Papers* 5:409-419.

95. King, "The Peril of Superficial Optimism in the Area of Race Relations," 19 June 1955, p. 215 in this volume.

96. King, "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 24 July 1955.

97. King, "Looking Beyond Your Circumstances," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 18 September 1955, p. 227 in this volume.

98. King, "Pride Versus Humility: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 25 September 1955, p. 232 in this volume.

As 1955 drew to a close, and in the wake of the Till verdict, King made charges in his sermons directed at the heart of the oppressive conditions faced by the black community. In an October 1955 sermon on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he pointed out that structural injustices become so ingrained that they are not seen as wrong or unjust. King warned that the “inequalities of circumstance” can only be overcome with great effort and sacrifice.⁹⁹ His concern for structural change was also prominent in a sermon titled “The One-Sided Approach of the Good Samaritan” that he delivered less than two weeks before the arrest of Rosa Parks. King questioned the long-term effectiveness of the Good Samaritan’s actions: “He was concerned [*merely*] with temporary [*relief*], not with thorough reconstruction. He sought to [*soothe*] the effects of evil, without going back to uproot the causes.” He concluded by calling his congregation to couple the compassion of the Good Samaritan with a willingness “to tear down unjust conditions and build anew instead of just patching things up.”¹⁰⁰

King’s sermons as a pastor in the segregated South combined messages of hope with a stiff dose of social realism. While he was increasingly cognizant of the intransigence of white supremacy, he continued to encourage his congregation to embrace a gospel of social action and social change. Although he was shaken by the hypocrisy of white Christians evidenced by the Emmett Till case, King reminded himself and his congregation that there was still cause for optimism and hope.



On the first day of December 1955, police arrested Rosa Parks for violating local segregation laws. Early the next morning community activist E. D. Nixon called King and requested his support for a plan for a one-day boycott of the city’s buses. Jo Ann Robinson, president of the Women’s Political Council, had been threatening a boycott for nearly two years, as frustrations over the treatment of African Americans on Montgomery city buses multiplied. With Parks’s arrest, Robinson saw an opportunity to make her dream a reality. Working past midnight on Friday, 2 December, she made thousands of copies of an announcement calling for a boycott of city buses for the following Monday.¹⁰¹

When Nixon called King that morning to announce the boycott, King agreed to join the planning, and the first meeting was set for Dexter that evening. Though the meeting was contentious, dozens of pastors in Montgomery agreed to communicate the boycott plans to their congregations that Sunday.¹⁰² King’s scheduled sermon title on that morning was “Why Does God Hide Himself?” King’s sermon notes reveal a theme in his preaching over the coming year: the pervasiveness of evil and

99. King, “The Impassable Gulf (The Parable of Dives and Lazarus),” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 2 October 1955, p. 237 in this volume.

100. King, “The One-Sided Approach of the Good Samaritan,” 20 November 1955, p. 240 in this volume.

101. For a more detailed description of the beginnings of the boycott, see Introduction, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3: *Birth of a New Age, December 1955–December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Peter Holloran, Dana L. H. Powell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1–9.

102. Introduction, in *Papers* 3:3–4.

injustice. Bemoaning the ubiquity of evil throughout the globe, King proclaimed, “We have seen imperialistic nations trampling over other nations with the iron feet of oppression.” Unfortunately, while atrocities continued, “the awful silence of heaven remained unbroken.”¹⁰³ With the commencement of the bus boycott, King continued to wrestle with the “silence” of God in the midst of daily struggle.

During his Sunday message, King encouraged his congregation to not ride the city buses but he had no idea he would soon be thrust into the spotlight as spokesperson of the movement. On Monday afternoon, 5 December, leaders of Montgomery’s black community elected King president of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). That evening, at a mass meeting following the successful one-day boycott, King delivered a call to love and action in his rousing Holt Street address. In the speech, King incorporated a phrase he had used the day before in his sermon at Dexter, announcing to thunderous applause, “And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.”¹⁰⁴ Within months, King became one of the most sought-after preachers in the nation. He refined a canon of sermons and speeches that he delivered over and over again to congregations, universities, and community organizations throughout the United States. While the number of his sermons at Dexter decreased as his fame increased, he continued to preach regularly for his home congregation.

By the dawn of 1956, any hope of a quick end to the boycott seemed to fade. Four weeks into the protest, and with no end in sight, King delivered a sermon titled “Our God Is Able” at Dexter. As would be true often during the coming year, King acknowledged the difficulty of the struggle, and yet clung to an ultimate hope in the power of God: “Much of my [*ministry*] has been given to fighting against social evil. There are times that I get despondent, and wonder if it is worth it. But then something says to me deep down within God is able.” King implored his congregation to remain stalwart: “So this morning I say to you we must continue to struggle against evil, but [*don’t worry*], God is able. [*Don’t*] worry about segregation. It will die because God is [*against*] it.”¹⁰⁵ As King’s personal involvement in the struggle deepened and intensified, he forged a resilient and hope-filled faith in God in the face of the brutal realities of racism.

In “Our God Is Able,” King broached the issue of theodicy, wondering why evil exists if God is truly good. King returned this to very question in his 15 January sermon, which asked, “Why do we believe in a good God in the midst of glaring evil?”¹⁰⁶ As vicious phone calls increased and threatening mail piled up, evil was no longer an idea; its presence was a glaring reality that had to be addressed.

As King’s leadership and involvement grew, his strategic thinking about how to make the social gospel a reality began to take shape. His 22 January 1956 sermon, titled “Redirecting Our Missionary Zeal,” called for a vigilant movement to

103. King, “Why Does God Hide Himself?” 4 December 1955, p. 242 in this volume.

104. King, MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, 5 December 1955, in *Papers* 3:72.

105. King, “Our God Is Able,” 1 January 1956, p. 246 in this volume.

106. King, “How Believe in a Good God in the Midst of Glaring Evil,” 15 January 1956, p. 248 in this volume.

redeem the souls of Southern whites: "Along with our work on the foreign field we must begin to do missionary work right here. Each of us must do this. And we must begin with the white man." Of course King was well aware that many white Southerners considered themselves devout Christians. Lest his congregation dismiss the call to be missionaries to Christian whites, he reminded them that the men who brutally murdered Emmett Till were churchgoers. While "the white man considers himself the supreme missionary," in reality, King pointed out, their "hands are full of blood." Rather than descending into hatred, he called on his congregation to be missionaries to whites by loving them and sitting down and preaching to them.¹⁰⁷ Less than two months into the boycott, King's dream for the South was not only the end of segregation but also a call for a redeemed community.

During a restless and frightening time late that month, King experienced a realization of the depth of evil as well as a renewal of this faith. Harried by late-night phone threats and an arrest after picking up passengers at a car pool station for bus boycotters, King confessed that "there were moments when I wanted to give up." Later, in a 27 January 1957 sermon, he particularly recalled "a sleepless morning in January 1956" after a particularly nasty phone call. He sat anxiously nursing a cup of coffee in his kitchen and praying for guidance when "almost out of nowhere I heard a voice that morning saying to me: 'Preach the Gospel, stand up for the truth, stand up for righteousness.'" King continued, "Since that morning I can stand up without fear. So I'm not afraid of anybody this morning."¹⁰⁸ He would need that fortitude in the near future.

On 30 January 1956, while King was wrapping up a mass meeting, a bomb went off on the porch of his house. Although his wife, Coretta, and their new baby were home at the time, nobody was hurt. Upon hearing the news, King rushed home and calmed the angry crowd that had gathered by citing a biblical injunction against violence.¹⁰⁹ The following Sunday, King delivered a sermon titled "It's Hard to Be a Christian." Frustrated by the Protestant church's conformity to culture, King lamented that "we have substituted a cushion for a cross" and "we have a high blood [*pressure*] of creeds and an anemia of deeds."¹¹⁰ Citing the excesses of both "the shouting church" and "the dignified church," he claimed that many congregations were "regimenting men not regenerating them." In defining the true nature of Christianity, King noted it "is hard because it demands a dangerous and costly altruism." This "costly altruism" was missing in the lives of moderate whites who had chosen to remain silent during the struggle: "There are many white people who are for justice and fair play but they are afraid to speak."¹¹¹ With the bomb-

107. King, "Redirecting Our Missionary Zeal," 22 January 1956, p. 250 in this volume.

108. "King Says Vision Told Him to Lead Integration Forces" 28 January 1957, in *Papers* 4:114. King also wrote of this evening in his account of the Montgomery bus boycott (King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 134–135).

109. Joe Azbell, "Blast Rocks Residence of Bus Boycott Leader," 31 January 1956, in *Papers* 3:114–115.

110. King, "It's Hard to Be a Christian," 5 February 1956, p. 251 in this volume.

111. In his sermon "It's Hard to Be a Christian," King noted, "Give example of preachers" (5 February 1956, p. 252 in this volume).

ing of his home in the collective conscious of the congregation, King implored them to remember that “taking up the cross” demanded “putting our whole being in the struggle against evil, whatever the cost.”¹¹²

Even as the bus boycott continued, other events revealed that the civil rights struggle was expanding its focus. In February 1956, the courts ordered the University of Alabama to admit its first African American student, Autherine Lucy. Some students and white community members responded to the news with threats and, when she was finally admitted, with violence. As he preached on 26 February 1956, King cited both the Till murder and the growing crisis at the University of Alabama: “We have looked to [*Mississippi*] and seen supposedly Christian and civilized men brutally [*murdering*] the precious life of a little child. We have looked to Alabama and seen a ruthless mob take the precious law of the land and crush it.” Again in this sermon, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, King continued to maintain faith in both man and God: “If men are willing to submit their wills to God’s will and to cooperate with him in his divine purpose, we will be able to turn the world upside down, outside in, and right side up.”¹¹³

With the black citizens of Montgomery staunchly refusing to return to the buses, city officials decided to further test their endurance, arresting nearly one hundred participants in the protest, including King, for violating Alabama’s anti-boycott law. The morning before King’s 19 March trial for this arrest, he responded to the continued pressure from the city by preaching “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious.” He noted, following riots by segregationists, University of Alabama officials had asked Autherine Lucy to leave the university for, as King sardonically put it, “her own safety and the safety of the university.”¹¹⁴ He cited an editorial in the *Tuscaloosa News* following Lucy’s expulsion, which proclaimed “Yes, there’s peace on the University campus this morning. But what a price has been paid for it!”¹¹⁵ King built on this sentiment, charging: “It was peace that had been purchased at the price of capitulating to the forces of darkness. This is the type of peace that all men of goodwill hate. It is the type of peace that stinks in the nostrils of the almighty God.” King derided the forces pursuing “obnoxious peace” in Montgomery: “I had a long talk the other day with a man about this bus situation. He discussed the peace being destroyed in the community, the destroying of good race relations.” King conceded “that if the Negro [*accepts*] his place, accepts exploitation, and injustice, there will be peace,” but insisted he was not interested in peace for the sake of peace. “If peace means accepting second class [*citizenship*],

112. King, “It’s Hard to Be a Christian,” 5 February 1956, p. 252 in this volume. During this dark time, King received a boost in a letter from fellow minister and Crozer classmate Marcus Garvey Wood. Wood advised King to be like the prophet Isaiah and “walk the streets barefooted until the waters of hate roll back to the ocean of eternity” (Cf. Isaiah 20:1–3). He continued, “I know you are preaching like mad now. You have thrown Crozer aside and you have found the real God and you can tell the world now that he is a God who moves in a mysterious way. That he will be your battle ax in the time of war and preserve you from your enemy.” Wood concluded, “Kind regards to Mrs. King. Together you all are writing history” (Wood to King, 16 February 1956, in *Papers* 3:130).

113. King, “Faith in Man” I and II, 26 February 1956, pp. 253–255 in this volume.

114. King, “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious,” 18 March 1956, p. 258 in this volume.

115. “What a Price for Peace,” *Tuscaloosa News*, 7 February 1956.

I [*don't*] want it. If peace means keeping my mouth shut in the midst of injustice and evil, I [*don't*] want it."¹¹⁶

In the fall of 1956, as weariness set in among many boycott participants, King encouraged his congregation by preaching "Living Under the Tensions of Modern Life." He invoked their ancestors' struggle: "I'm glad the slaves were the greatest psychologists that America'd ever known, for they learned something that we must always learn. And they said it in their broken language, 'I'm so glad that trouble don't last always.'" Imparting hope and faith in God and in the ultimate triumph of good over evil, he assured his harried parishioners:

All that they are saying are merely the last-minute breathing spots of a system that will inevitably die. For justice rules this world, love and goodwill, and it will triumph. They begin to wonder all over the nation, how is it that we can keep walking in Montgomery? How is it that we can keep burning out our rubber? How is it that we can keep living under the tension? And we can cry out to the nation, "We can do it because we know that as we walk God walks with us."¹¹⁷

Within a few months, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on Montgomery's buses was unconstitutional. Over the course of the previous twelve months, the trajectory of King's life and ministry had been radically redirected. Within the crucible of a community in struggle, King forged a foundation of personal faith and refined his religious conviction. By the fall of 1956, King was no stranger to the "tensions of modern life," and as he stared evil in the face daily, he became a preacher of passionate conviction that could stir a nation.

As the demands on his time during and after the boycott continued to increase, King tried to preach as often as possible to his home congregation while also expanding his ministry beyond Montgomery. Delivering frequent sermons to diverse audiences, he rarely had time to prepare written texts. Responding to a request from *Pulpit Digest* for a sermon on race relations, King noted that he mainly preached from "a rather detailed outline."¹¹⁸ King's busy schedule resulted in part

116. King, "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," 18 March 1956, pp. 258, 259 in this volume.

117. King, "Living Under the Tensions of Modern Life," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, September 1956, p. 269 in this volume.

118. King to Samuel McCrea Cavert, 27 November 1959, p. 381 in this volume. Coretta King later emphasized the contrast between his preparation for preaching before the boycott as opposed to after the boycott had begun: "Perhaps the most important part of Martin's busy schedule was the fifteen hours a week he spent, in those early days, preparing his sermons. He would start Tuesday and work off and on until Saturday night, first writing his sermon out completely, then memorizing it. On Sunday morning, he would stand up in the pulpit and preach without a manuscript. The congregation always marveled that he could speak, apparently extemporaneously, for thirty-five or forty minutes. [¶] Later on, when the tremendous pressure of his leadership of the bus boycott gave him no time to write his sermons out, they really were extemporaneous. He would get ideas and discuss them with me. He would say, 'I've been thinking of such and such a thing for next Sunday.' . . . Then he would prepare an outline of his three or four main topics and would preach from that. It was very good training for him; in his later years he almost always preached from an outline" (Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 103). Art Carter also reported that King "preaches without manuscript" in his *Baltimore Afro-American* article written during the Montgomery bus boycott ("Rev. King Is 'King' in Montg'ry," 12 May 1956).

Introduction from his role as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a group founded in early 1957. The nascent organization needed a steady stream of donations to fund their administrative staff, voter registration efforts, and other initiatives designed to challenge segregation. Due to his national renown as spokesperson during the boycott, King was SCLC's most effective ambassador and fundraiser, and he traveled throughout the nation and the world during the remainder of his life.

Increasingly, King saw significant connections between the movement for freedom in the United States and the worldwide struggle against western imperialism. In 1957, King received an invitation from Gold Coast, Africa, to the country's independence ceremonies. Global race relations and the decline of colonialism were on his mind while traveling to the newly renamed Ghana. In notes probably written at that time, King questioned the position of the segregated United States in this international move toward independence: "With her [*injustice*], her segregation and discrimination America is not fit to be the leading power of the world."¹¹⁹ Upon his return to Montgomery, King preached a 7 April sermon reflecting on the struggle for freedom in nations around the world.¹²⁰

Soon after his return from Africa, King used a Palm Sunday sermon on Jesus' struggle and resolve in the garden of Gethsemane to remind his congregation that despite the backlash following bus desegregation they could rely on God: "You can stand up amid despair. You can stand up amid persecution. You can stand up amid disappointment. You can stand up even amid death. But you don't worry because you know God is with you." King added, "Not my will, but Thy will be done. And when you can cry that, you stand up amid life with an exuberant joy. And you know that God walks with you."¹²¹ For King and his congregation, the firm belief in God's presence gave them the courage to continue the struggle to live out the social gospel even in times of great duress.

The next week, on Easter Sunday, King shared some of his heartfelt questions regarding the persistence and power of evil in the world:

I begin to despair every now and then. And wonder why it is that the forces of evil seem to reign supreme and the forces of goodness seem to be trampled over. Every now and then I feel like asking God, "Why is it that over so many centuries the forces of injustice have triumphed over the Negro and he has been forced to live under oppression and slavery and exploitation? Why is it God? Why is it simply because some of your children ask to be treated as first-class human beings they are trampled over, have their homes bombed, their children are pushed from their classrooms and sometimes little children are thrown into the deep waters of Mississippi?"¹²²

119. King, *God's Judgment on Western Civilization*, March 1957.

120. King, "The Birth of a New Nation," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, in *Papers* 4:155–167.

121. King, *Garden of Gethsemane*, Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 14 April 1957, p. 282 in this volume.

122. King, *Questions That Easter Answers*, Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 21 April 1957, p. 289 in this volume.

Despite the challenges of life in the segregated South, King's faith remained steadfast. He declared that Easter "answers the profound question that we confront in Montgomery. And if we can just stand with it, if we can just live with Good Friday, things will be all right. For I know that Easter is coming and I can see it coming now. As I look over the world, as I look at America, I can see Easter coming in race relations. I can see it coming on every hand. I see it coming in Montgomery."¹²³

King used this Easter service to address global issues as well. Concerned about the arms proliferation that accompanied the Cold War, King proclaimed: "I wish this morning that you would go tell Russia, go tell America, go tell the nations of the world that atomic bombs cannot solve the problems of the universe. Go back and tell them that hydrogen bombs cannot solve the problems of the world, but it is only through love and devotion to the justice of the universe that we can solve these problems."¹²⁴ Even though faced with the continuing exigency of the local struggle, King did not abandon his emergent global awareness. The interconnectedness of peace and justice throughout the world remained an overriding theme of King's preaching.

King's personal resources were being stretched thin by his increasingly demanding commitments to SCLC. His prophetic scope and faith in the transformative power of nonviolence was expanding beyond Montgomery city limits and American borders, yet he remained aware of the needs and worries of his individual parishioners. He addressed their lives and struggles through the teachings of Jesus and helped put their bitter experiences in the context of a global push and imperative for justice. During the summer of 1957, King delivered a series of sermons at Dexter, titled "Problems of Personality Integration." The messages in this series served to challenge damaging self-perceptions held by many African Americans as a result of the legacy of racism. King began the series with "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex," in which he asserted that black Americans "feel inferior because we have lived so long amid the tragic midnight of injustice and oppression." In the face of these challenging realities, King called his congregation to look to God's love as a firm basis for true dignity and self-respect.¹²⁵ In the second sermon of the series, King drew on homilies of Fosdick, McCracken, and Mays to preach "The Mastery of Fear." He proposed that "the Negro fears the White man and the White man the [Negro]," and highlighted the destructive nature of fear domestically and throughout the globe: "The basic cause of war is fear. Of course there are other causes—economic, political, racial—but they all spring from and are shot through with fear." As antidotes to the power of fear, King suggested leading a moral life, guided by "goodwill and love," and "possessing adequate interior Resources," and faith in God which gives one "the awareness [*that*] he is a child of God."¹²⁶

123. King, Questions That Easter Answers, 21 April 1957, p. 289 in this volume.

124. King, Questions That Easter Answers, 21 April 1957, p. 292 in this volume.

125. King, "Conquering Self-Centeredness," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 11 August 1957, in *Papers* 4:248; King, "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 14 July 1957, p. 315 in this volume.

126. King, The Mastery of Fear, 21 July 1957, pp. 319, 320, 321 in this volume. For more on King's development of this sermon, see Chart 2. For a third sermon in this series, see "Conquering Self-Centeredness," 11 August 1957, in *Papers* 4:248–259.

Chart 2. COMPARISON OF TEXT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SERMON
 “MASTERY OF FEAR” / “MASTERING OUR FEARS,” 1957–1963

Biblical source text

1 John 4:18— “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth, is not made perfect in love.”

Fear of the dark, fear of water, fear of closed places, fear of open places, fear of altitude, fear of death, fear of hell, fear of cats, fear of Friday the thirteenth, fear of walking under a ladder—anybody who knows that hinterland and slum district of the mind knows how tragic it is. . . . and at last many face what the psychiatrists call phobophobia, the fear of fear, being afraid of being afraid.

—Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Sermon: “The Conquest of Fear,”* 1933

Emerson even said that “He has not learned the lesson of life who does not every day surmount a fear.”

One of the chief services of ministers and psychiatrists is to be listening-posts, where crammed bosoms, long burdened with surreptitious fears, can unload themselves.

It was a psychiatrist, Dr. Sadler, who, having said in one place, “Ridicule is the master cure for fear and anxiety,” struck a deeper note when he said in another, “The only known cure for fear is *faith*.”

—Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Essay: “Dealing with Fear and Anxiety,”* 1943

Fear is the greatest enemy of mankind. It is the foundation of many wars. Fear is the basis of the tension that seems to exist between the United States and Russia. It is at the root of the hatred and ill will that exist between members of different races.

—Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Article: “Two Fears,”* 20 July 1946

King’s public ministry in the United States gave him the opportunity to address a wider audience and to demonstrate clearly his own ecumenism. In December 1957 King spoke at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in St. Louis. In his speech, titled “The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations,” King relied upon his experiences in Montgomery to universalize his message to his largely white audience:

Those of us who struggle against racial injustice must come to see that the basic tension is not between the races. As I like to say to the people of Montgomery, Alabama, “The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is at bottom between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.”¹²⁷

28 127. King, *The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations*, Address Delivered at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches, 4 December 1957, p. 324 in this volume. The previous

Chart 2. (continued)

The first is that we make a practice of looking fairly and squarely at our fears.

—Robert J. McCracken, Sermon: “What to Do with Our Fears?” 1951

Of primary importance in dealing with fear is making a practice of looking fairly and [squarely] at the object of our dread. Emerson “He has not [learned] the lesson of life who does not [everyday] surmount a fear.”

One of the chief services of ministers and psychiatrists is to be listening-posts, where crammed bosoms, long [burdened] with surreptitious fears, can unload themselves.

Fear of dark, of water, of closed places, of high place, of cats, of Friday, of walking [under] a ladder, fear of [responsibility]; of old age and death

Dr Sadler said “Ridicule is the master cure of fear and [anxiety]. . . .”

The cure of fear is Faith

Russia fears America and America Russia

The Negro fears the White man and the White man the [Negro?]

—King, Sermon: “The Mastery of Fear”/“Mastering Our Fears,” 21 July 1957

II Timothy 1:7—“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

Fear is one of the major causes of war. We usually think that war comes from hate, but a close scrutiny of responses will reveal a different sequence of events—first fear, then hate, then war, then deeper hatred. If a nightmarish nuclear war engulfs our world—God forbid—it will not be because Russia and America first hated each other, but because they first feared each other.

—King, Sermon: “The Mastery of Fear or Antidotes for Fear,” March 1963

A few weeks later, speaking at Beth Emet the Free Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, King denounced the tendency of liberals to not take a stand: “What we find too often in the North is a sort of quasi-liberalism which is based on the philosophy of looking sympathetically at all sides, and it becomes so involved in seeing all sides that it doesn’t get committed to either side.” Instead, King called for a “positive, genuine liberalism” that would result in committed action to insure all people have “justice and freedom.”¹²⁸

day, speaking at a public event sponsored by the National Council of Church’s Division of Christian Life and Work, King challenged white Christians to “take a definite stand in the name of Jesus Christ” (The Oneness of Man in American Intergroup Relations, Address delivered at the National Council of Church’s Division of Christian Life and Work visitors program, 3 December 1957).

128. King, A Great Time to Be Alive, Address delivered at Beth Emet the Free Synagogue, 13 January 1958. In a letter written concerning King’s visit to Evanston, Aviva Polish, wife of the synagogue’s rabbi David Polish, noted, “Despite the fact, that as I recall, this was Dr. King’s first visit to Evanston, very few

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In June 1958, King criticized advocates of another liberal pitfall, gradualism, while addressing a group representing the newly formed United Presbyterian Church. In this sermon, again before a largely white Northern audience, King challenged, "If moderation means slowing up in the move for justice and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of a deadening status quo, then moderation is a tragic vice which all men of goodwill must condemn."¹²⁹ King's complete commitment to transformative social change demanded the action and involvement of all people of goodwill.

King continued to believe the church had the responsibility to be a powerful beacon for peace and justice. King frequently bemoaned the self-help qualities of many churches and ministers, while the world longed for something more substantive.¹³⁰ In a sermon titled "A Knock at Midnight," he chided the church's failure: "Hundreds and [thousands] of men and women in quest for the bread of social justice [are] going to the church only to be disappointed."¹³¹ Once again, King viewed the number of conservative, comfort-oriented church members as one of the greatest impediments to true social change.

King's audience grew wider still with the publication of *Stride Toward Freedom*, King's account of the Montgomery bus boycott and his own spiritual journey during that challenging time. In conjunction with its release, King traveled to New York to sign copies of the book at a Harlem bookstore. While there, Izola Curry, a mentally disturbed black woman, stabbed King. The near-fatal wound caused King to be hospitalized for several days. During his weeks of recuperation, King had the opportunity to send inscribed copies of *Stride* to several friends and acquaintances, including Harry Emerson Fosdick, to whom King wrote, "If I were called upon to select the greatest preacher of this century, I would choose your name."¹³²

Because of King's injury, he was forced to delay a planned visit to India. Finally, in early 1959 King had the opportunity to travel to India where he met with many of Gandhi's followers, including prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. King had often cited the influence of Gandhi's life and commitment to nonviolence on his public ministry and on the burgeoning civil rights movement, giving this visit particular significance.¹³³ On the return trip from India, King spent several days in the Middle East traveling to Bethlehem, Jericho, and Jerusalem and seeing many of the major sites associated with the life and ministry of Jesus. Upon his return to Montgomery,

members of the Afro-American community attended" (Aviva F. Polish to King Papers Project Staff, 10 October 1996).

129. King, Paul's Letter to American Christians, Sermon Delivered to the Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations, United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 3 June 1958, p. 343 in this volume.

130. In particular, King complained of the religious approach given in minister Norman Vincent Peale's 1956 *The Power of Positive Thinking* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall), which King labeled "escape religion," one which promised readers that they could avoid "trouble in life, any trials and tribulations." For an example of this, see The Rewards of Worship, Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 28 April 1957, p. 299 in this volume.

131. King, "A Knock at Midnight," 14 September 1958, p. 350 in this volume.

132. King, Inscription to Harry Emerson Fosdick, November 1958. For other references to King's stabbing, see Messages Following the Stabbing, pp. 603–608 in this volume.

133. For more on King's trip to India, see Introduction, in *Papers* 5:4–11.

King preached at Dexter the sermon *A Walk Through the Holy Land*. Espousing the value of broadening one's life experience, he mused, "I think if more of our white brothers in the South had traveled a little more, many of our problems would be solved today." More than anything else, however, the sermon reveals how powerful and moving King found the places associated with the crucifixion of Jesus. Noting that Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry the cross to Golgotha, King stated, "I think one day God will remember that it was a black man . . . who picked up that cross for him, and who took that cross on up to Calvary." He also recalled his emotions as he stood at the traditional site of the crucifixion: "There was a captivating quality there, there was something that overwhelmed me, and before I knew it I was on my knees praying at that point. And before I knew it I was weeping. This was a great world-shaking, transfiguring experience." King punctuated his sermon by emphasizing the significance of the Easter story: "The important thing is that that Resurrection did occur. [*The*] important thing is that that grave was empty."¹³⁴ For a pastor who consistently proclaimed a message of hope in the face of overwhelming challenges, the story of Jesus' victory over death remained central.¹³⁵

After a busy spring and summer filled with speaking engagements and his reelection as vice president of the National Sunday School and Baptist Training Union, King delivered "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" at Dexter. Preached during the late summer of 1959, this sermon reveals King's pointed approach toward the resistance of white Southerners and the flaws in their rationalization of segregation: "The soft minded always fears change. The most pain of all pain for them is the pain of a new idea. They get a security in the status-quo." If the people of Dexter were to continue to pursue the social gospel, they must realize the nature of their foes and the consequences of their soft-mindedness: "Racial [*prejudice*] grows out of fears, which are [*groundless*] . . . There is little hope for us in our personal or collective lives until we become tough minded [*enough*] to rise [*above*] the shackles of half-truth and legends. The shape of the world today does not permit us the luxury of [*soft-mindedness*]."¹³⁶

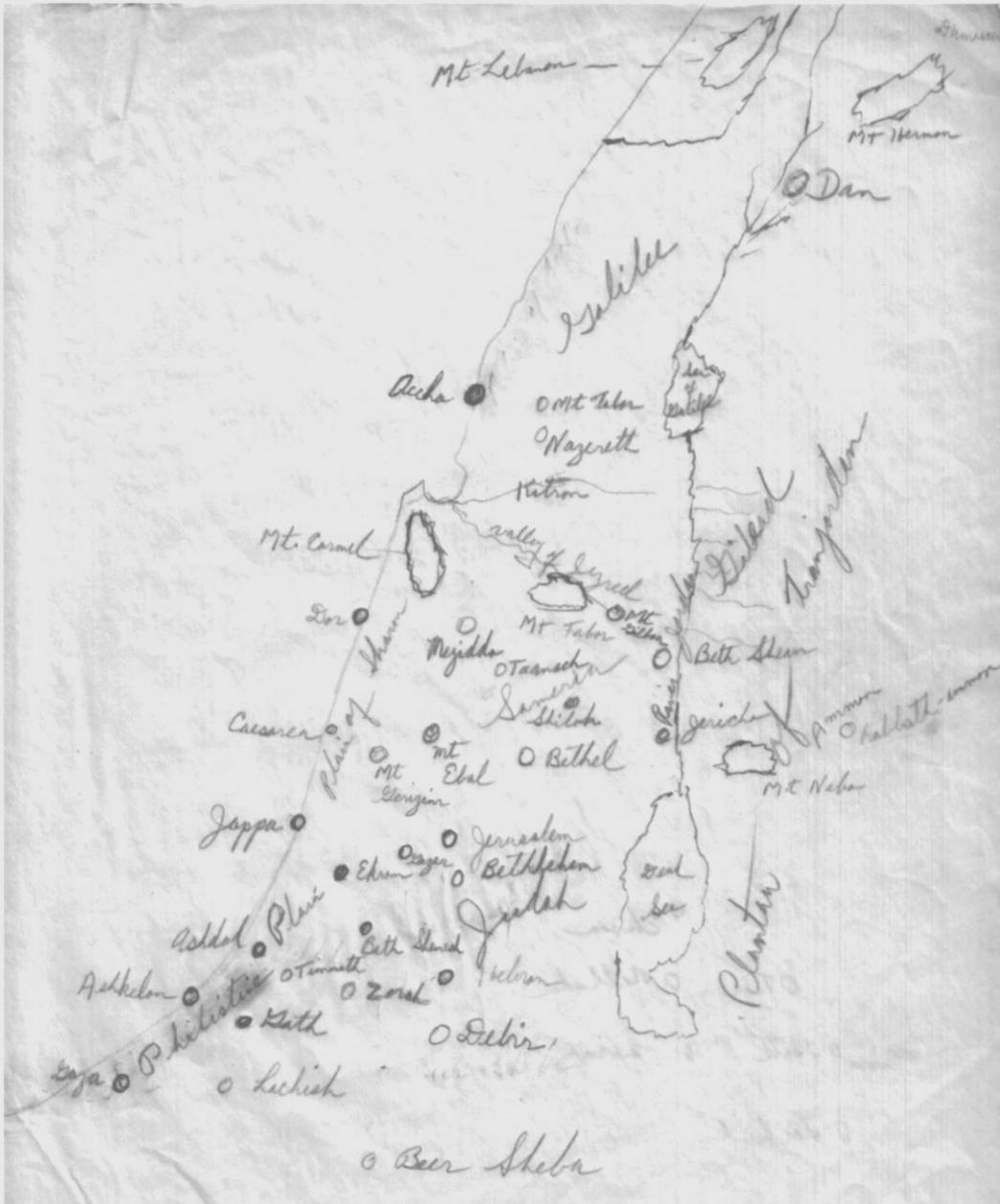
King also challenged the temptation of conformity and silence during threatening times. He sternly asserted: "We as Negroes must [*combine*] tough mindedness and tender heartedness if we are to attain the goal of freedom and equality. There are those soft minded individuals among us who feel that the only way to deal with oppression is to adjust [*to*] it. They acquiesce to the fate of segregation. They have been oppressed so long that they have become conditioned to oppression. . . . But this isn't thy way. It is only for soft minded cowards."¹³⁷

134. King, *A Walk Through the Holy Land*, Easter Sunday Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 29 March 1959, in *Papers* 5:165, 169, 172.

135. King often preached that Easter was a season of eternal hope founded on human tragedy (King, "Living Under the Tensions of Modern Life," September 1956; Questions That Easter Answers, 21 April 1957; "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," 4 December 1957; Loving Your Enemies, Sermon Delivered at the Detroit Council of Churches' Noon Lenten Service, 7 March 1961, pp. 262-270, 283-293, 322-328, and 421-429 in this volume, respectively).

136. King, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," 30 August 1959, pp. 374, 375 in this volume.

137. King, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," 30 August 1959, p. 376 in this volume.



King drew this map of the Holy Land for Crozer Theological Seminary professor James B. Prichard's class Introduction to the Old Testament, a course he took during his first term at Crozer during the fall of 1948.

By 1959, his overcrowded schedule was adversely affecting both King and SCLC. At an SCLC administrative meeting in April 1959 that focused on the organization's financial woes and lack of solid planning, Lawrence Reddick, SCLC historian and King's companion on the India trip, noted that he and acting director Ella Baker had pressed King to cut back on speaking events that pulled him away from fundraising for SCLC. King's petulant response, recalled Reddick, was that an artist should not "be denied his means of expression. That he liked to preach and felt that he should do it." Reddick had already spoken with King on this subject during their India trip, advising him that he must abandon the ministry "and all other means of assured income," and give himself "fulltime to Crusading." However, Reddick averred, "I know that he will never do this."¹³⁸

King turned to a solution that promised one form of relief from his relentless schedule conflicts. On 16 November, Ebenezer Baptist Church held a business meeting called by its Trustee Board and Board of Deacons to consider a recommendation that King be called to serve as its co-pastor with Martin Luther King, Sr. The full congregation voted unanimously in favor of this appointment.¹³⁹ Almost two weeks later, King announced his resignation from Dexter and his return to Atlanta and to Ebenezer. In his resignation statement, he described his pastorate of Dexter as "a great and creative spiritual venture." He admitted, however, that having been "catapulted into the leadership of the Montgomery movement" and as "a multiplicity of new responsibilities poured in upon me in almost staggering torrents" in the wake of the boycott, he had been rendered unable to attend to his pastoral duties. Having been "pulled into the mainstream by the rolling tide of historical necessity" he could not balance his pastoral and secular roles, futilely "attempting to be four or five men in one."¹⁴⁰ In the end, King felt his pastorate suffered the most neglect and stated that "I have not been able to do all that I had hoped to do at Dexter." He remembered "a program that I put on paper," and regretted that due to the demands of the bus boycott and the movement, "much of that program is still on paper."¹⁴¹

138. Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, Notes on Southern Christian Leadership Conference Administrative Committee Meetings on 2 April and 3 April 1959, April 1959 in *Papers* 5:178, 179.

139. Ebenezer Church Clerk P. O. Watson, the Board of Deacon's Acting Chair Robert J. Collier, Board of Trustees Chair J. H. Reese, and Pastor M. L. King, Sr. notified King of the call by mail the following day (Ebenezer Baptist Church to King, 17 November 1959, in *Papers* 5:323-324).

140. Draft, Resignation from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 29 November 1959, in *Papers* 5:328, 329.

141. King, Address Delivered during "A Salute to Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther King" at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 31 January 1960, in *Papers* 5:352. King spoke too modestly of the outcome of his first set of annual recommendations for Dexter. During his first year at the church, many of his proposals came to fruition. The congregation initiated birthday clubs that competed to raise funds for Dexter; implemented many of King's structural improvements including new carpeting, a new public address system, and a new communion table; commenced a summer vacation Bible School; activated a Social and Political Action Committee that registered voters and generated support for the NAACP; and hired a full-time secretary. However, King had set his sights quite high. He concluded his vision of a new Dexter, saying, "With . . . the determination to keep God in the forefront, Dexter will rise to such heights as will stagger the imagination of generations yet unborn, and which even God himself will smile upon" (King, "Recommendations to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church for the Fiscal Year 1954-1955," 5 September 1954, in *Papers* 2:293-294).

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King's return to Atlanta and his new role as co-pastor of Ebenezer with his father marked a shift in his responsibilities as a minister. In one sense, because this pastorate reduced his church responsibilities by dividing them with his father, it completed the transition to his assumption of SCLC's leadership. It also allowed him to retain his position and identity as a pastor, something that King felt was at the center of his sense of self and that provided him with a wellspring for his political activities.¹⁴²

At the end of January 1960, King bid farewell to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and returned to Atlanta where he could focus more of his energies and attention on the growing work of SCLC. In some ways, King left Montgomery very much the same as when he arrived six years earlier. His theology and commitments had changed very little. He continued to be suspicious of the excesses of capitalism, to call for greater international cooperation and an end to colonialism, and to hope for an end to segregation and racism and the establishment of a beloved community in America. In other ways, however, King was a transformed person. He considered evil a continual presence, something he and his fellow workers faced day in and day out. Its passing was not inevitable, but would require tireless struggle and sacrifice. He knew full well the resolve of those in power to maintain the status quo, and was prepared to suffer and even die to resist this evil. Now King's ministry was about leading a community to trust in the power, justice, and righteousness of God even while evil seemed to triumph. When King left Montgomery, he knew "It's Hard to Be a Christian." He also knew that "Our God Is Able," and that as his people walk on, "God walks with us." He was now far more than an advocate for social gospel Christianity. With a profound faith in God, King left Dexter as a committed activist and part of the broader community who live the social gospel each day.¹⁴³



On 7 February, King formally began his tenure at Ebenezer. Emphasizing that he had come to Atlanta "to serve the people of Ebenezer" as well as to "give time and assistance to the Negro's southwide struggle," King told his new congregation, "I do not consider myself an agitator. I do not consider myself a dangerous rabble rouser. I consider myself a minister of Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁴ He vowed to preach a "social gospel" as part of his duties at Ebenezer. Newspaper accounts recorded a crowd that "lined

142. According to preaching schedules for July 1962 until August 1963, King and his father planned to alternate times at the pulpit for most of the year, and to spell each other off in July and August, giving each pastor a month of vacation (King, Preaching schedule, 1 July 1962–28 July 1963; King, Preaching schedule for Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1 July 1962–25 August 1963).

143. For more on King's last sermon at Dexter, see "Dexter Honors Dr. And Mrs. King!!" 3 February 1960, in *Papers* 5:364–365. This sermon may have been "God in History: Four Proverbs," a sermon King composed after his stabbing (1959–1968, pp. 599–600 in this volume). For more on Dexter's farewell event for the Kings, see King, Address Delivered during "A Salute to Dr. And Mrs. Martin Luther King" at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 31 January 1960, in *Papers* 5:351–357.

144. Paul Delaney, "'Follow Way of Love,' Dr. King Asks People," *Atlanta Daily World*, 9 February 1960. King's denial that he planned to be a "rabble rouser" was probably in reaction to Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver's accusation that King's purpose in returning to Georgia was to cross "our state lines with the avowed intention of breaking laws" ("Ga. Governor Warns Dr. King He'll Be Watched," *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 December 1959). For more on King's return and his first Sunday at Ebenezer, see Introduction, in *Papers* 5:22–23.

the walls and stood in the rear of the main floor and balcony” to hear King preach “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” the same sermon he had delivered to secure his position at Dexter. Still more participants sat in the basement and listened to the two-and-a-half-hour long service over loudspeakers.¹⁴⁵

Despite the burden of an Alabama indictment in mid-February charging him with filing fraudulent state tax returns, King resumed his role as a minister of national stature.¹⁴⁶ He traveled continuously through the late winter and spring of 1960 to preach from coast to coast, relying on tried-and-true sermons such as “Going Forward by Going Backward,” its predecessor, “Rediscovering Lost Values,” “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” and “Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” to supply him with familiar themes and stories for these out-of-town engagements.¹⁴⁷

In the midst of his legal preparations for the tax fraud case and preaching on the road, King reflected on his own “personal sufferings” in a 27 April 1960 *Christian Century* article, observing, “There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, and others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation.” In the end, King may have been reflecting on his 1958 stabbing when he maintained that his travails, like the Apostle Paul’s, caused him to “proudly say, ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,’” and to reinforce his faith in “the reality of a personal God.”¹⁴⁸

King’s thoughts also returned to one of the demands that he had found hard to fulfill in Montgomery, a book of sermons promised early in 1957 to the publisher Harper & Brothers. Melvin Arnold, head of Harper’s Religious Books Department, had welcomed King’s “proposed collection of sermons; we hope that they will have a heavy emphasis on permanent religious values, rather than on topical events.”¹⁴⁹

145. “Dr. King Asks Love Returned for Hate,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 February 1960 and Delaney, “‘Follow Way of Love,’” 9 February 1960.

146. The Montgomery County Grand Jury indicted King on two counts of felony perjury for allegedly making false statements on his 1956 and 1958 tax returns (King, Interview on Arrest following Indictment by Grand Jury of Montgomery County, 17 February 1960, in *Papers* 5:370–372).

147. For example, King delivered versions of “Paul’s Letter to American Christians” at Howard University on 24 April 1960 (Maude L. Ballou to Daniel G. Hill, 20 April 1960). He preached “Going Forward By Going Backward” at the Chicago Sunday Evening Club on 21 February 1960 (*The A.M.E. Church Review* 77 [April–June 1960]: 62–67). King gave “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” (28 February 1960, pp. 395–405 in this volume), on 13 March 1960 at Princeton University Chapel (Richard Stockton Conger to King, 15 March 1960), and on 30 April 1960 at Andrew Rankin Chapel at Howard University (Edward Peeks, “Rev. King Views Sitdowns in Life’s Three Dimensions,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 7 May 1960).

148. King, “Suffering and Faith,” 27 April 1960, in *Papers* 5:443, 444.

149. Arnold to King, 5 February 1957. For more on Melvin Arnold, see Arnold to King, 5 May 1958, in *Papers* 4:404. King had been encouraged to consider “a volume of your sermons” by William Robert Miller, who had heard him preach “Death of Evil Upon the Seashore” at St. John the Divine on 17 May 1956. He advised King, “Some of the best and most widely read works of men like Paul Tillich and Harry Emerson Fosdick came before the public in that way, and I am sure that a number of leading publishers—Harper, Scribners, Macmillan, or the religious book houses—might consider you a good bet financially” (Miller to King, 18 May 1956, in *Papers* 3:262).

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Despite his best intentions and Arnold's repeated urging for a manuscript, King still had not produced the promised sermon book by the fall of 1959.¹⁵⁰

Harper's director of religious publishing, Eugene Exman, continued to press King for a manuscript in early 1960, but King's indictment on tax fraud and his active support of the burgeoning sit-in movement delayed any attempts to put much effort into writing.¹⁵¹ Ever hopeful, Exman contacted King in the spring of 1961, wishing to hear that he was "making good progress" on the sermon volume, and offering him "an advance on royalty [to] help you and your wife to get away for a little while from the tumult."¹⁵²

While the circumstances were far from ideal, King was able to start working on the sermons during a fortnight in the Albany, Georgia, jail in July 1962. Having been arrested for holding a prayer vigil outside the Albany city hall, King and Ralph Abernathy shared a jail cell for fifteen days. Although by King's account the jail was "dirty, filthy and ill-equipped" and "the worse I have ever seen," he was able to spend a fair amount of uninterrupted time "reading and writing on my book on Negro sermons."¹⁵³ King claimed in his preface to *Strength to Love* that he prepared the drafts for "Loving Your Enemies," "Love in Action," and "Shattered Dreams" while in jail. The first set was mailed out in the early fall and included several sermons that had become King standards: "Paul's Letter to American Christians," "What Is Man?" and "Loving Your Enemies."¹⁵⁴ The voices of other preachers were still evident in the drafts King submitted to the press. In his draft of "Our God Is Able," a sermon he had delivered in 1956 and again in the early sixties, King continued to draw on the words and themes of Frederick Meek.¹⁵⁵

150. Responding to a 2 September 1959 letter from Arnold, King apologized, "My schedule has been so heavy for the last few months that I have not had a chance to follow through" (King to Arnold, 29 September 1959). Arnold's 5 October 1959 reply suggested that King should "turn down some speaking engagements on the grounds that you have an obligation to reach an ever larger audience with a book of printed sermons!"

151. Before King visited Scarsdale, New York, in the spring to preach during a Lenten service at that city's Community Baptist Church, Exman made plans to meet there with King to discuss "your book of sermons" (Exman to King, 28 January 1960). Eugene Exman worked for Harper & Brothers, and then Harper & Row Publishers, as manager of the religious books department (1928–1944), as the department's director (1944–1955), and as its vice-president (1955–1965). Arnold wrote King to congratulate him on his victory in the tax fraud case, calling it "the latest installment in the cliff-hanger drama, the Perils of Martin." He continued, "We continue to hope that you will be able to get a breathing spell that will permit you to turn out your book of sermons. Your audience is waiting for it" (Arnold to King, 2 June 1960).

152. Exman to King, 5 May 1961. King refused several other writing offers that fall, but a 1 April 1962 deadline also fell by the wayside (McDonald to H. Claude Shostal, 13 November 1961; McDonald to John Hicks, 27 December 1961; McDonald to King, 20 February 1962). Referring to the ongoing desegregation campaign in Albany, Georgia that spring, King wrote to Exman, "So many things have come up in the Civil Rights struggle recently that I have had to give virtually all of my time to the movement. Frankly, I cannot see a let-up for the next few months" (King to Exman, 9 March 1962).

153. King, "Rev. M. L. King's Diary In Jail," *Jet Magazine*, 23 August 1962.

154. King, *Strength to Love*, p. ix. He first approached his work on the sermons for publication by laboriously writing out each sermon in longhand. The handwritten drafts were typed, probably by his secretary Dora McDonald. After King corrected these typescripts, McDonald mailed these initial drafts to Arnold.

155. For more on this influence, see Chart 3.

In his 5 October 1962 letter commenting on these sermons, Arnold not only had words of encouragement but enclosed a commentator's report. As he had noted in an early letter to King that "books of sermons have rather special requirements," Arnold apparently decided that, with sermonic material, King might respond more easily to criticism from a fellow minister. He brought in Charles Wallis, a minister and English professor at Keuka College and editor of *Pulpit Preaching*, to review King's manuscripts.¹⁵⁶

Wallis saw *Strength to Love* as a "word profile" of King that would provide for those who saw him as merely an distant icon or "disturber of the peace" with the words of the minister who addressed his congregation with messages of "warmth, immediate application, and poetic verve." In particular, Wallis observed that King's writing "makes clear a pattern of Christian behavior" that the "scraps and pieces" of the publicly available knowledge of his life and beliefs had only suggested.¹⁵⁷

However, in his critiques of the individual sermons, Wallis also cautioned King on some characteristics of his language that Wallis believed did not translate well into print, such as his repetition of thoughts and sentences and his expression of controversial ideas. He also urged King to compose a sermon that spoke specifically to white Christians. Overall, however, Wallis judged the manuscripts to be "excellent" and "will be good for Dr. King and all he represents."¹⁵⁸ Spurred on by this support, King followed through on his initial momentum and was able to spend parts of November and December working furiously on the book in order to meet a late December deadline. By late November, King and Arnold agreed on a title for the volume: *The Strength to Love*.¹⁵⁹

By early March, Harper & Row representative Frank Elliott sent King the page proofs for the volume with an accompanying letter advising King that editorial changes were still in progress. Elliot remarked, "I do hope you understand that we want nothing to go into print without your approval, and that our few changes in manuscript were made partly to avoid repetition from one chapter to another, partly to prevent critics from misquoting you out of context, and partly for purposes

156. Arnold to King, 5 February 1957. Arnold participated in the preparation of the manuscript of King's *Stride Toward Freedom*, his account of the Montgomery bus boycott. During the revision of *Stride's* manuscript, Arnold explained his revisions of King's comments on communism. In advising King, Arnold cited his experiences as an editor of controversial books at Beacon Press. Arnold wrote, "I learned what the enemies of freedom and of liberalism can do. Therefore, I made—and am now making—every effort to see that not even a single sentence can be lifted out of context and quoted against the book and the author" (Arnold to King, 5 May 1958, in *Papers* 4:404).

157. Charles L. Wallis, Editorial notes on *Strength to Love*, 3 October 1962.

158. Wallis, Editorial notes on *Strength to Love*, 3 October 1962. King followed most of Wallis's proposals, but did not write a sermon addressed strictly to white Christians.

159. Arnold proposed two alternate titles, "The Strength to Love" and "The Cost of Love," in a 26 November 1962 telegram to King. Three days later, Arnold requested King's contractual terms for the sermon book *The Strength to Love* (Arnold to King, 29 November 1962). Dora McDonald began sending out drafts of the sermons to Arnold in October 1962 (McDonald to Arnold, 15 October 1962 and 23 October 1962). King turned in the final drafts for sixteen sermons on 26 December 1962 and wrote that he aimed to complete his work "in a few days" (King to Arnold, 26 December 1962).

Chart 3. COMPARISON OF TEXT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SERMON
"OUR GOD IS ABLE," 1956-1963

Biblical source text

Jude 1:24—"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling."

Jude 1:24

Meanwhile "Our God is able" is a conviction stressed and exulted in, over and over and over in the New Testament.

Believe me, it is not a weak God, it is not an incompetent God with Whom we have to deal.

Today, or soon, look up at the Sun. It is 93,000,000 miles *out there*. In six months from now you and I and our old Earth will be on the other side, the far side of the Sun—93,000,000 miles beyond it. And in a year from now we will have swung completely around the Sun and back to where we are now.

—*Frederick M. Meek, Sermon: "Our God Is Able," 4 January 1953*

All the great religions have so pictured life in terms of conflict. Hinduism called it a conflict between reality and illusion; Zoroastrianism a conflict between light and darkness; Platonism a conflict between spirit and matter; traditional Judaism and Christianity a conflict between God and Satan.

—*Harry Emerson Fosdick, Sermon: "How Believe in a Good God in a World Like This?" 1951*

Romans 8:31—"If God be for us, who can be against us?"

I Corinthians 15:28—" . . . that God may be all in all."

Victor Hugo is describing the Battle of Waterloo. And Hugo concludes his description with these words: "Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? I answer 'No.' Because of Wellington? 'No.' Because of Blucher? 'No.' —because of God. Waterloo is not a battle; it is a change in the front of the universe."

—*Frederick M. Meek, Sermon: "Perhaps Your God Is Not Big Enough," 11 October 1953*

Jude 1:24

There is no better way to begin this year than with the conviction that there is a God of Power Who is able to do [*exceedingly abundant things*] in our lives and in the life of the universe. . . . The conviction that "Our God is able" is stressed and exulted in, over and over again in [*both*] the New and Old Testaments. This conviction stands at the [*center*] of our

Chart 3 (continued)

Christian faith. Theologically, it is expressed in the doctrine of the omnipotence of God. The God that we worship is not a weak God, He is not an incompetent God and consequently he is able to beat back gigantic mountains of opposition and to bring low prodigious hill tops of evil.

There is the sun. It often looks near. But it is 93,000,000 miles from the earth. In six months we will be on the other side of that sun, 93,000,000 miles beyond it. And in a year from now we will have swung completely around it and back to where we are now. We notice the vastness of the cosmic [*order*] . . . we must cry out, "Our God is able."

Give Victor Hugo's description of Waterloo. He asks "Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? I answer no. Because of Wellington? No. But because of God. Waterloo is not a battle; it is a change in the front of the universe." Waterloo is the symbol of the eternal doom of every Napoleon

There is a tension or a struggle at the core of the universe. All the great religions have discovered this conflict: Hinduism (illusion & reality); Zoroastrianism (light and darkness); Platonism (spirit and matter) traditional Judaism & Christianity (God & Satan).

—King, *Sermon: "Our God Is Able," 1 January 1956*

Jude 1:24

At the center of the Christian faith is the conviction that there is a God of Power in the universe who is able to do exceedingly abundant things in nature and history. This conviction is stressed over and over again in the Old and New Testaments. Theologically, it is expressed in the doctrine of the omnipotence of God. The God that we worship is not a weak and incompetent God.

Look at that sun again. It may look rather near. But it is 93,000,000 miles from the earth. In six months from now we will be on the other side of the [*sun*]—93,000,000 miles beyond it—and in a year from now we will have swung completely around it and back to where we are right now.

Go back to another century. Victor Hugo is describing the Battle of Waterloo in Les Misérables. He concludes his graphic account with these pointed words: "Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? I answer 'No.' Because of Wellington? 'No.' Because of Blücher? 'No.'—because of God. Waterloo is not a battle; it is a change in the front of the universe." In a real sense, Waterloo is a symbol of the doom of every Napoleon.

—King, *Sermon: "Our God Is Able," July 1962–March 1963*

Introduction of clarity and construction.”¹⁶⁰ The book made its formal appearance in early June.¹⁶¹

King had worried that the force of his spoken words would not make the transition to the printed page. “I have been rather reluctant to have a volume of sermons printed,” he admitted in the preface for *Strength to Love*. “My misgivings have grown out of the fact that a sermon is not an essay to be read but a discourse to be heard. It should be a convincing appeal to a listening congregation.” Even as the book went to press, he conceded, “I have not altogether overcome my misgivings.”¹⁶²

Reviewers offered mixed comments on *Strength to Love*. The critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* characterized the published sermons as “eloquent” and continued, “It is good to find a clergyman whose concept of Deity is so solidly based on Bible teaching, a God of spiritual power and love.” While activist Staughton Lynd praised the book as “a spiritual handbook for Christians seeking to overcome hate” that “reaches out beyond the Negro’s struggle to the other great social ills of war and economic exploitation,” yet he found King’s prose “often encumbered by clichés.”¹⁶³ Despite the fact that the book had been released with much fanfare in both the mainstream and religious press and was selected as a featured book of the Religious Book Club, its sale figures two months after its publication were less than had been hoped.¹⁶⁴

As the first major volume of sermons by an African American preacher widely available to a white audience, *Strength to Love* had much to contribute. The book consisted of a range of King’s sermons, some developed early in his career and some that were crafted in his last years at Dexter and his first years back at Ebenezer’s pulpit, and all familiar to audiences and congregations across the nation. They brought to the forefront King’s essential identity as a preacher at a time when most people mainly knew him as a civil rights leader.

Readers who had heard King preach may have been disappointed by what they encountered within the pages of *Strength to Love*. While Harper officials Wallis, Arnold, and Exman agreed with King’s broad view of race relations and may have privately cheered his methods and his language calling for the attainment of social justice, in their editing of King’s sermons, they reworked his sentences with the purpose of toning down what they saw as the militant character of his speech. They removed phrases that they feared might offend readers such as King’s disapproval of colonialism, capitalism, and hallmarks of Western civilization such as the

160. Frank Elliott to King, 1 March 1963.

161. Exman to King, 28 May 1963.

162. King, *Strength to Love*, p. ix.

163. Geoffrey Godsell, “From the Bookshelf,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 July 1963; Lynd, “The New Negro Radicalism,” *Commentary*, September 1963, p. 252.

164. On 17 September 1963, Arnold wrote a letter to King’s agent, Joan Daves telling her that the publishers had overshot their projected percentage of sales spent on advertising for *Strength to Love* by eight percent. “If an 18% outlay on a sale of 12,686 books is a disappointment to you and to Martin, then Gene and I are disappointed, in turn. With this outlay, we are publishing the book without profit” (Arnold to Daves, 17 September 1963). For the book’s selection by the Religious Book Club, see Exman to King, 28 May 1963. He noted that the Club feared that they might “suffer through the loss of subscribers in the south.”

Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. King's assessment of segregation as one of "the ugly practices of our nation," his call that capitalism must be transformed by "a deep seated change," and his depiction of colonialism as "evil because it is based on a contempt for life" were stricken from the text.¹⁶⁵ King's contention that Jesus' response to his crucifixion was not hate but "a radical love" was revised to depict it as "an aggressive love."¹⁶⁶

Wallis and the other editors seemed particularly sensitive to King's vivid anti-military and anti-war statements. In his draft sermon of "Transformed Nonconformist," King warned Americans, "When we would seek to build our nations on military power and put our abiding trust in a policy of massive retaliation, Jesus reminds us that 'he who lives by the sword will perish by the sword,'" and further challenged the military establishment by writing that "there are millions of people in our country who are tired of the arms race." He went on to characterize the early Christian church as anti-war: "Its views on war were clearly known because of the refusal of every Christian to take up arms." These statements were removed from the sermon's published version.¹⁶⁷

The editors also stripped some of the familiar set pieces King used to illustrate points in his sermons. Wallis found that King's use of an illustration about human beings' chemical value in his sermon "What Is Man?" was "almost too widely known to bear added repetition." While it was readily available in a Harry Emerson Fosdick sermon, the illustration had also become a familiar element in King's homilies.¹⁶⁸ King's memorable characterization of political tyranny as "the iron feet of oppression" was repeatedly stricken from the version published in *Strength to Love*.¹⁶⁹ His references to world figures such as Ghanaian independence leader and eventual president Kwame Nkrumah and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose position of non-alignment was assailed during the Cold War, were also edited out of the book as was King's reference to Mahatma Gandhi as "the Saint of India."¹⁷⁰

The Harper & Row editors reduced the emphatic nature of King's statements and softened his direct calls to act or change. In the draft sermon "Transformed Nonconformist," he challenged those who upheld the status quo and submitted to

165. King, Draft of Chapter III, "On Being a Good Neighbor"; Draft of Chapter II, "Transformed Nonconformist"; Draft of Chapter XIII, "Our God Is Able," July 1962–March 1963, pp. 480, 471, and 530 in this volume, respectively. In reaction to King's biting statement on colonialism in his draft for "Our God Is Able," Charles Wallis asked in his comments on the sermon, "Was colonialism altogether a blight? Did not the enlightened colonialism of England bring in its wake the trained leadership which made possible the assuming of government by former colonials?" (Wallis, Editorial notes on *Strength to Love*, 3 October 1962).

166. King, Draft of Chapter IV, "Love in Action," July 1962–March 1963, p. 489 in this volume.

167. King, "Transformed Nonconformist," July 1962–March 1963, p. 473 in this volume.

168. King, Draft of Chapter XI, "What Is Man?" July 1962–March 1963; Wallis, Editorial notes on *Strength to Love*, 3 October 1962.

169. King, "What Is Man?" July 1962–March 1963; and Draft of Chapter VIII, "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," July 1962–March 1963, p. 505 in this volume.

170. King, Draft of Chapter I, "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," July 1962–March 1963, p. 461 in this volume; and Draft of Chapter VIII, "Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," July 1962–March 1963, p. 508. Wallis claimed that such references would "date the ms" (Wallis, Editorial notes on *Strength to Love*, 3 October 1962).

peer pressure, saying, “So many forces in our world are saying if you want to live a respectable life, just conform! Don’t take a stand for unpopular causes; and don’t allow the glaring search light of public opinion to catch you standing in an isolated minority of two or three. Choose the line of least resistance. Conform!”¹⁷¹ Wallis and company revised those sentences to read: “Many voices and forces urge us to choose the path of least resistance, and bid us never to fight for an unpopular cause and never to be found in a pathetic minority of two or three.”¹⁷² The exclamatory force of King’s disdain and the direct nature of his appeal were lost.

King’s tendency to hammer home his point through repetition or a reiteration of his message also fell before the editor’s pencil. In his sermon “How Should a Christian View Communism?” King began, “There are at least three reasons why the preacher should feel obligated to speak to his people about Communism.”¹⁷³ He repeated a variant of this sentence at the head of the paragraphs that discussed these reasons. In the published version, these echoing pronouncements were eliminated. King would also use reiteration to stress a point that he had made. In his draft of “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” King counseled his listeners, “We must combine the toughness of the serpent with the softness of the dove.” The editors struck most of his following words that reiterated the sermon’s topic: “In other words, Jesus is saying that individual life at its best requires the possession of a tough mind and a tender heart.”¹⁷⁴

In the end, editors blunted the spirit of King’s sermons in an attempt to introduce King to a broader audience and protect him from political attack. Just as Melvin Arnold sought changes to *Stride Toward Freedom* that played down any affinity to communism and moderated sentiments considered too extreme, Charles Wallis recommended that King temper his criticism of American institutions and conventions. He advised King to remove the rhythmic cadences and set pieces that marked his delivered sermons; for the most part, King accepted Wallis’s recommendations. King’s desire to place his sermons before the public and to broaden his audience may have justified his acquiescence in the publication of sermons that lacked a significant measure of their original poignancy.

Yet despite its omissions and changes and its inability to communicate King’s voice from the pulpit in full throat, *Strength to Love* remains a concrete testament to his lifelong commitment to preaching the social gospel. His fusion of Christian teachings and social consciousness remains in print and continues to promote King’s visions of love as a potent social and political force for change, of the value of redemptive suffering, of the efficacy of religious faith in surmounting evil, and of the vital need for true human integration, or as he defined it, “genuine intergroup and interpersonal living.”¹⁷⁵

171. King, “Transformed Nonconformist,” July 1962–March 1963, p. 467 in this volume.

172. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 8.

173. King, Draft of Chapter XII, “How Should a Christian View Communism?” July 1962–March 1963 (TADd).

174. King, “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” July 1962–March 1963, p. 460 in this volume, and *Strength to Love*, p. 2.

175. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 23.

King certainly recognized the worth of producing a volume of his best-known sermons but also knew its shortcomings. As an African American minister imbued with the heritage of preaching's oral tradition and the potency of the spoken word, King rightly had doubts regarding the viability of his sermons' life force in print. He regarded worship as a social, collective experience and advised his congregation that services and sermons heard over the radio could be no substitute for the communion between pastors and congregations as well as the contact among members of the body religious.¹⁷⁶ For King, his ear was as important a preaching organ as his tongue, and a good sermon required listeners. Surely the spontaneous and sometimes fervent response of parishioners to his words, evident in many of King's recorded homilies, demonstrated how he depended on others' reactions to his illustrations, set pieces, metaphors, and use of contemporary events to shape what was to come. As a seasoned preacher who sermonized mainly from outlines, many quickly drafted on a handy piece of paper, King's sense of his audience and confidence in his own ability to cobble together oratory based on a spare sketch and his own memory carried him through many Sundays and calls to worship.

Strength to Love represented a necessary step for King, one that would spread his message through a different medium, the commercial press, and allow him to seek a larger audience for that mode of communication he prized above all others, the sermon. His words circulated in a way typical of mid-century renowned white ministers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick and George Buttrick. Thus, despite its limitations, *Strength to Love* is a fitting tribute to King's early preaching life. The published sermons, developed during the first half of his public career, represent King's choice of those sermons that demonstrated his homiletic range and his identity as a minister. While King was already renowned as a political activist and movement spokesperson, the publication of *Strength to Love* served as another confirmation of his significant stature as a preacher, one whose preachings merited a volume of sermons. It perpetuates his legacy as a spiritual as well as political leader.

The body of foundational sermons King produced and preserved in his sermon file and the audio recordings of his preachings allow us to move beyond *Strength to Love's* limitations. The artifacts of King's earliest years as a preacher lend dimension and texture to this crucial time in his development, help to regain the potency of his prophetic voice, and offer the best available examples of his power as a preacher. In tracing the development of his weekly messages from jottings and brief notes to full-fledged homilies, it is clear that King remained steadfast to his faith in human and social redemption and optimism in a just world. His consistent calls for social justice and to love one's enemy invigorated his words from the pulpit whether they emanated from Ebenezer, Dexter, or the many other houses of worship across the nation and the world in which he delivered his message. These pulpits provided a forum for his belief that only the pursuit of Christian values, of "the moral and spiritual ends for living," would bring about spiritual salvation and social change.

The controversial nature of issues at the heart of these sermons, such as world

176. King, *The Rewards of Worship*, Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 28 April 1957, pp. 293–301 in this volume.

Introduction peace and anti-militarism, nuclear disarmament, the failings of organized religion, and the pursuit of economic as well as social equality, foreshadowed the difficulties that King and the movement would face in light of his contentious rhetoric. His firm belief in “a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color” would bring forth extreme reactions, deepen his differences with the liberal mainstream, and result in his profound alienation from certain elements of the movement. King’s nascent desire to be “a profound advocate of the social gospel” would uplift him and drive the spiritual character of the modern civil rights movement. It would also be a source of great sacrifice.