In the following two handwritten outlines, King urges his listeners to remain aware of the evil potential of human nature while maintaining faith in the individual's ability to rise above the limitations of heredity, environment, and injustice. In the first outline, King cites two recent events as reasons for holding a pessimistic view of "the nature and destiny of man." The lynching in 1955 of Emmett Till and the recent rioting at the University of Alabama in response to the admission of the school's first African-American student, Autherine Lucy. He argues, however, that despite human shortcomings, Jesus "saw within this sea of humanity not a dead sea of impossibilities, but an ocean of [infinite] possibilities and potentialities." A newspaper report of the sermon quotes King as hopefully predicting that the bus boycott will end in a victory that will ripple out beyond Montgomery. "It will be a victory for justice, a victory for fair play, a victory for democracy." 1

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

"Faith in Man" I

I  Intro —

(a) One of the things that we are witnessing in our age is a growing pessimism concerning the nature and destiny of man. Man has lost faith in himself. There are And so many would cry out with the writer who referred to man as "a cosmic accident." 2 Other would affirm with the cynical writer that "man is the supreme clown of creation." Still others would affirm with Jonathan Swift than "man is the most pernicious little race of odious vermin." 3

(b) At many points it is quite understandable why it is difficult for us to have faith in man. Man has often made such a poor showing of himself. Within a generation we have fought two world wars. We have seen man's tragic inhumanity to man. We have looked to Mississippi and seen supposedly Christian and civilized men brutally murdering the precious life of a little child. 4

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3 Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was an author and Anglo-Irish satirist. King cites the words of King Brobdingnag to Gulliver in Swift's Gulliver's Travels (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), p. 140. "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

4 King refers to the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. 253
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cious law of the land and crush it blow of their tragic whims and caprices. We have seen England trampling over India with the iron feet of oppression. We have seen the British and the Dutch and the Belgians and the French crushing Africa with the battering rams of exploitation.

Yet, in the midst of this Christianity insist that there is hope for man. Christianity has always insisted that man's plight is never so low that it can't be better.

This was certainly expressed in the life of Jesus. Throughout his ministry Jesus revealed a deep faith in the possibilities of human nature. He saw within this sea of humanity not a dead sea of impossibilities, but an ocean of infinite possibilities and potentialities.

This is expressed very beautifully in a passage in the first chapter of John. Jesus is presented talking to Peter. Now you remember Peter was undependable, vacillating so fickle in his ever changing moods. But Jesus says to him in substance, although you are Simon now, you will be Peter. It did not look like it. And it was a long time in coming. But it did come. He was saying to Peter “actually you are like sand, but potentially you are a rock.”

“Faith in Man” II

I. Introduction

1. In our age there is a growing pessimism about the nature and destiny of man. Man is fastly losing faith in himself. Many would be in accord with the writer who spoke of man as the supreme clown of creation (quote other poets?)

2. There was a time when man had to much faith toward man is far out of line with the Christian religion. Christianity has always insisted that man's plight is never so low that it can't be better. We might go so far as to say that Christianity stands or falls with its power to change human nature.

5. Students noted at the University of Alabama on 6 February to protest Lucy's court-ordered admission. The University expelled Lucy, allegedly for her protection. It later reinstated her by order of the court only to expel her again, this time for allegedly making accusations against school officials. The court that had ordered Lucy's reinstatement later upheld the University's actions. For more on Autherine Lucy, see note 2, King to Fred Drake, 7 February 1956, in Papers 3 128


7. King quoted Psalm 8, Shakespeare's Hamlet, and Thomas Carlyle's French Revolution in an introduction to a similar sermon (see King, "What Is Man?" Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 11 July 1954, p. 175 in this volume)