The old order is passing away. Evil carries the seed of its own destruction. William Cullen Bryant caught it and said “Truth across the earth will rise again.” Carlisle caught it and said, “No lie can live forever.” James Russell Lowell caught it and said, “Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, and yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown stands God within the shadow keeping watch above his own.” The Bible caught it right, “You shall reap what you sow.” Evil carries the seed of its own destruction and that is just as true as the rising and the setting of the sun. If we understand the facts of nature, let us understand the facts of history.

14 Bryant, “The Battlefield” (1839)
15 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837)
16 Lowell, “The Present Crisis” (1844)
17 Cf Galatians 6:7 and 2 Corinthians 9:6

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“The Task of Christian Leadership Training for Education in the Local Community”

[28 June–3 July 1955]
[Atlantic City, NJ?]

King traveled to Atlantic City on 28 June to attend the National Sunday School and Baptist Training Union Congress. The subject matter of the following undated, typed manuscript indicates that it may have served as the basis for an address at the conference. King lays out three primary challenges facing local communities: economics, religious sectarianism, and race. He criticizes “the attempt on the part of Negroes to build up a class system within the bounds of the Negro race.” King calls for leaders who are open-minded and intelligent to address spiritual and physical needs and to exhibit moral authority.

About two weeks ago, a little more than five hundred Negro young men and women graduated from the six institutions of higher learning in my home City, Atlanta, Georgia. In that City a little more than six hundred boys and girls received high school diplomas. I am all but sure that this same thing happened in numerous other communities of our nation.

1 In a letter written 28 June 1955, King indicated he was departing for the convention (see King to Benjamin Elijah Mays, 28 June 1955, in Papers 2:562–563) The National Sunday School and Baptist Training Union Congress was a division of the National Baptist Convention.
2 King most likely refers to Atlanta University, Clark College, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, Spelman College, and Gammon Theological Seminary, all historically black institutions in Atlanta during the 1950s.
Does this mean anything to you as ministers, as laymen, as leaders, as potential leaders, and as followers of Christ? Does it mean something worth while and far reaching to you or does it impress you as merely another phenomenon taking place in this moving world of activity? Does it mean that you will go out with a rebellious air saying that education is harmful or does it mean that or does it mean that you will attempt to synthesize education and religion, realizing that the problems of the local community are so gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail that it will take a good dose of education mixed with a good dose of religion to solve them.

Before discussing the task of Christian leaders for education in the local community, let us define the community and set forth some of the pressing problems that are present within the local community.

By community is meant a given territory within which people live together, sharing daily life. They possess a common language, means of transportation, a web of custom, folklore and tradition, and a marked degree of social coherence. Now what are some of the problems that we are faced with in every community? I might say while passing that the problems of the local community are reflections of the problem of the world community. So that each of these problems that will be discussed as characteristic of the local community are also characteristic of the world community on a larger scale.

First, we are faced with that glaring economic problem. It radiates in our communities like the rays of the beaming sun. In every community people are hungry, unemployment is rising like a tidal wave, housing conditions are embarrassingly poor, crime and juvenile delinquency are spreading like the dew drops on an early fall morning. All of these conditions result from the economic problem. Moreover, the economic problem has brought about one of the major conflicts of our time, the conflict between capital and labor. This internal war between labor and capital is a basic problem within every community.

I would not be so naive as to say, as the communist do, that if we solve the economic problem all problems will be solved. But we will have to admit with the communist that the economic problem is a major problem. Too often have we in America taken necessaries from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. Have we been all together fair to the laboring man, that man who has to work sometimes until his hands are all but porched and his eyebrows all but scorched. Our failure to give the laboring man a fair break is the very reason why capitalism is her death bed in America.

There is a second problem which each community is faced with, namely, the religious problem. It expresses itself in the narrow sectarianism which is so rampant. The dissention between the denominations of the Protestant church has become quite alarming. Many of these various denominations stand out with an authoritative voice saying, "we are right and everybody else is wrong." Every minister is aware of the problem in the local community. This Civil War within the Protestant Faith makes the larger conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism much more extensive.

There is a third problem present within each of our communities which is so ostensible that it hardly needs explanation, namely, the race problem. It is this problem that threatens the well-being of Christianity as an influential power in world affairs. In practically every community, men of color are being still being suppressed economically, politically and socially. We continue to recite our democratic creeds but fail to practice them in deeds.
This race problem has brought about another problem which is just as anti-
Christian as its source, namely, the attempt on the part of Negroes to build up a
class system within the bounds of the Negro race. This has lead many Negroes who
have had educational and economical advantages to exploit and even discriminate
the Negroes who have not had these advantages. We the oppressed, instead of
profiting by the mistakes of the oppressors, have fallen victims of the philosophy of
the oppressors. This practice is deep within the fiber of the local community and its
advocators are increasing daily. This brings us next to the question of the task of
Christian Leaders for Education in the local community. In other words, what type
of leaders are needed to face these perplexing problems which are found in the
local community? In the face of these problems, what type of leaders are needed to
put over a worthwhile educational program in the community?

First, every Christian leader has the task of being open-minded. Have not our
Christian leaders too often been advocates of narrow sectarianism? Have not our
educational programs in the community been to Baptist, to Methodist, to
Presbyterian, and not to Christian? Has not this internal war between the diverse
denomination caused a lapse in community progress? Christian leaders must come
to see that problems of the local community are so intricate that it will take the
united effort of all denominations to solve them. Christian leaders must come to see
that God is not a denominational God, and that in the final analysis we are all in the
same boat. Although we differ in minute detail, such as ritual and minor doctrine,
we should be working forward to the coming of God's Kingdom in earth. This plea
for ecumenical minded leaders cannot be exaggerated, for everywhere one turns
he sees narrow minded leaders.

A second task facing Christian leaders is that of being intelligent. By intelligence
I mean the ability to keep abreast with the problems of a changing culture. This
demand for intelligence is somewhat inevitable, for how can we interpret the situa-
tion in the community without a knowledge of them? It is the job of every leader to
keep up with the changing trends through intellectual discipline. I realize that
there are many who would agree that the Christian leader only has the job of being
sincere and pious, but sincerity and piety are not enough, as important as they are.
We must remember that the same Jesus that said love the Lord thy God with all thy
heart and soul also said love God with all thy mind. Some of the most crucial peri-
ods in history have been those periods when we loved God with our hearts and souls
and failed to love him with our minds.

The third specific task of the Christian leader is that he must deal with people as
whole beings, not as fragments. He must not see individuals as "souls" divorced
from the material secular bodies. He must come to see that man is a Psyco-Physical
being, and that his body is as important as his soul. Somehow we must come to see
that Christianity is a two way road. On the one hand, we must attempt to changemen's souls so that society will be changed. On the other hand, we must attempt to
change society so that the soul will have a chance. How can we be concerned with
the souls of men and not be concerned with the conditions that damn their souls

3 Cf Matthew 22:37
How can we be concerned with men being true and honest and not concerned with the economic conditions that made them dishonest and the social conditions that make them untrue? Too often do we become so absorbed in a future good "over yonder" that we forget the present evil here.

Finally, the Christian leader must be consecrated. There is a dire need for leaders who have been touched by the hand of the Divine. Too many leaders make religion only a one-day affair, something that they put on Sunday morning and hang up in the closet on Sunday night. Too many leaders have only been inoculated with a mild form of Christianity. We stand today in dire need of a moral voice able to call forth all its powers. The weakness of leaders today is that they exercise no moral authority. They are picking around the surface of our really vital problems. We need leaders today who are able to convince the secular world that we are engaged in the most dangerous, the most daring and at the same time the most necessary business on earth, that of saving men from moral bankruptcy. What we need today is more spiritual engineers to guide this train of religion. When our leaders will have reached this point we will sail safely into the harbor of God's Kingdom. This is our overwhelming responsibility and our profound challenge.

TD CSKC Sermon file, folder 36, "Sermon Notes"

4 Fosdick, The Hope of the World, p. 25. "I plead instead for a church that shall be a fountainhead of a better social order. Any church that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the city government that corrupts them, the economic order that cripples them, and international relations that, leading to peace or war, determine the spiritual destiny of innumerable souls—that kind of church, I think, would hear again the Master's withering words 'Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!'

"Worship,"
Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[7 August 1955]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

King notes in this handwritten, dated sermon that effective worship should "cause us to serve our fellow man in every day life." After pointing out the possibility of worshiping God on one's own, King highlights the value of public worship. "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...

1 King wrote "Preached at Dexter, Aug 7 1955" on the file folder containing this sermon. He delivered a version of this sermon at Dexter on 28 April 1957 (King, The Rewards of Worship, pp. 293-302 in this volume). For another sermon on worship, see King, "Worship at Its Best," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 14 December 1958, pp. 350-351 in this volume.