My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry. At first I planned to be a physician, then I turned my attention in the direction of law. But as I passed through the preparation stages of these two professions, I still felt within that undying urge to serve God and humanity through the ministry. During my senior year in college I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become. A few months after preaching my first sermon, I entered theological seminary. This, in brief, is an account of my call and pilgrimage to the ministry.

Martin Luther King, Jr

THD MLKP-MBU Box 21

\[2\] King preached his trial sermon at Ebenezer in the fall of 1947 and was ordained in February 1948. He graduated from Morehouse College in May of that year and entered Crozer Theological Seminary the following September.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“Divine and Human Mutuality”
“Man’s Helplessness Without God”

[9 August 1959]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

King offers two possible titles for this handwritten sermon outline. He criticizes those who rely too much on their own power, as well as those who “wait on God to do everything” and believe they “don’t need to do anything about the race problem.”

1 Introduction—One of the things that has characterized human life through the centuries has been man’s persistent attempt to remove evil from the face of the earth. Very seldom has man, collectively or individually, thoroughly adjusted himself to evil. In spite of all of his rationalizations, compromises, and alibis, man knows that the “is” is not the ought and the actual is not the possible. Though he often treasure in his heart the evils of sensuality, selfishness, and cruelty, something within him reminds him that they are intruders. Even and again man, in his deepest attachment to evil is reminded of a higher destiny and

\[368\] 1 A 9 August 1959 Dexter program indicates that King preached the sermon “Man’s Helplessness Without God.”
a more noble allegiance. Man’s attachment to hankering after the demonic is always disturbed by his longing for the divine. As he seeks to adjust to the demands of time, he knows that eternity is ultimate habitat, and even while dwelling in the lowest valley something reminds him that he is made for the highest star. When man comes to himself he sees evil as a foreign invader that must be driven from the native souls of his life before he can achieve moral and spiritual dignity.

But the problem that has always confronted man is his inability to conquer evil by his own power. He is constantly asking is pathetic amazingment, “Why can I not cast it out?” “Why can I not remove this evil from my life?”

These questions are reminiscent of an event that took place during the life of Christ. The event took place immediately after Christ’s transfiguration. Give the details of the story.

Jesus ends up telling the disciples that the reason of their failure is they they have been trying to do by themselves what they can only do when he is behind them, when their nature are so open that His strength can freely flow through them. This is the meaning of faith.

II This brings us again to the question, how can evil be cast out? There are two ideas that man has usually held about the way evil is to be eliminated and the world saved.

A One idea is that man must do it by his own power.

1. What man can do through education and legislation.

2. The beginning of this philosophy had its beginning with the Renaissance. Then came the Age of Reason. The earth would be changed by reason not religion. They envisioned the whole world being cleansed of crime, poverty and slavery and war by reason alone.

3. Modern Humanism—The cult of modern science.

4. The words of Invictus.

5. The most aggressive advocate of this doctrine is Marxism.

6. Yet in the midst of all of this optimism and humanism, the evils have persisted. And today this people are crying in utter bewilderment, “Why could not we cast it out?” “Since 1914 on tragic event has followed another.”

Cf Matthew 17:18-19
Cf Matthew 17:14-21
Hamilton, Horns and Halos, pp 62-63 “The Renaissance, on the other hand, went too far in excessive optimism. Perhaps the most optimistic book ever written was published on the eve of the French Revolution. By a French humanist Condorcet. He thought the whole world would speedily be changed, not by religion but by reason. It was to be the age of reason. He envisioned the whole world cleansed of crime and poverty and slavery and war by reason and reason alone.”

KING most likely refers to William Ernest Henley’s poem “Invictus” (1875), which concludes “It matters not how strait the gate, / How charged with punishments the scroll, / I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul.”

6 In the published version of the sermon “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” King wrote, “Reinhold Niebuhr has said ‘Since 1914 one tragic event has followed another as if history were designed to refute the vain delusions of modern man’” (Strength to Love, p 74, see also Niebuhr, Faith and History [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949], pp 6-7)
B The other idea says that man must wait on God to do everything
(1) Let men lie still, purely submissive and God in his good time will bring salvation
(2) The one sided emphasis of the Reformation
Man, they said, is so depraved that he can do nothing, but wait on God
(3) This emphasis has lead to a purely other worldly religion (Religion does deal with man ultimate concern, but also his preliminary) It has postponed redemption to beyond the skies. By emphasizing man’s helplessness and stressing the need for concentrating his efforts on getting his soul prepared for the world to come it has paralyzed social reform, and divorced religion from life. No wonder the Marxist call religion an opiate
(4) The idea in everyday life of wait on the Lord
(3) you don’t need a doctor
(2) you don’t need to do anything about race problem
(5) This idea ends up a failure. Waiting on the Lord still leaves evil present. This view two is a lack of faith
C Then in the failure of these two ideas came another which is distinctly different from either

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 9, “Divine and Human Mutuality”

“The Conflict in Human Nature,” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[16 August 1959]
[Montgomery, Ala]

King draws on J. Wallace Hamilton’s sermon “Horns and Halos in Human Nature” to develop this handwritten introduction.¹

“The good that I would, I do not ‚ ‚”²

Introduction These words from the pen of the apostle Paul tell us a great deal about the nature of human nature. Paul, through the undisputed authority of experience, had learned something basic about man. The theology of Paul is not a systematic formulation that he quietly worked out through persistent contemplation. Rather, it is a system that grows out of his experience. Paul had tried desperately to live up to the demands of the law. And yet in the midst of all of his attempts, he failed. The good that he wanted to do, he couldn’t do, and the evil he didn’t want to do, he found himself doing. This was his tragic and helpless plight.

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¹ King wrote “Preach at Dexter August 16, 1959” on the folder containing this sermon
² Cf Romans 7:19