False Gods We Worship

In July 1953, while King assisted his father at Ebenezer for the fifth consecutive summer, Atlanta's WERD, the first black-owned radio station in the United States, began broadcasting "messages" from Ebenezer and featured King as the speaker. The brevity of these typed manuscripts and the dates written therein suggest that he wrote them for the WERD broadcasts. King filed these sermons together in a folder that he titled "False Gods We Worship." In "The False God of Science," King challenges humanity's overdependence on the promises of science by revealing its shortcomings.

"The god of science which we so devoutly worshipped has brought about the possibility of universal annihilation." In "The False God of Nationalism," he argues that God and nationalism are "incompatible" and asks, "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?" In his concluding sermon of the series, King reflects on "the tragic consequences which develop when men worship the almighty dollar." Using language that would reappear often in his oratory, he asserts that his listeners must choose between "the transitory god of money which is here today and gone tomorrow" and "the eternal God of the universe who is the same yesterday, today and forever."

"The False God of Science"

5 July 1953

[Atlanta, Ga]

Dr. William Ernest Hocking has said that all life is divided into work and worship, that which we do for ourselves and that which we let the higher than ourselves do. Certainly worship is as natural to man as the rising of the sun is to the cosmic order.

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1 "Ebenezer Begins WERD Broadcast Sunday Morning," Atlanta Daily World, 4 July 1953
3 On the inside of the folder containing these sermons, King noted that he also preached the "False Gods" series at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in January 1955. At that time, he included the sermon False God of Pleasure in the series (King, January 1955, p. 206 in this volume). He filed a sermon titled On Worshiping False Gods, which incorporated ideas espoused in these shorter addresses in the folder as well (King, January 1955, pp. 203-206 in this volume)
4 Harry Emerson Fosdick used similar language in his sermon "Why Worship?" (in Fosdick, Successful Christian Living: Sermons on Christianity Today (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), pp. 173-174). "Professor Hocking is right in saying that all man's life can be reduced to two aspects, work and worship—what we do ourselves, and what we let the higher than ourselves do to us." Fosdick may be referring to the tenor of William Ernest Hocking’s The Meaning of God in Human Experience, which deals with the subject of work (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1912). Fosdick was a Baptist preacher who served as pastor at the nondenominational Riverside Church in New York from 1915 until 1948 and was one of liberal Protestantism's most influential figures. King kept a copy of Successful Christian Living in his personal library and annotated it.