becomes so involved in "higher criticism that he unconsciously stops there." This is certainly a weakness that the liberal theologian should attempt to avoid. After the Bible has been stripped of all of its mythological and non-historical content, the liberal theologian must be able to answer the question—what then? It is certainly justifiable to be as scientific as possible in proving that the Pentateuch was written by more than one author, that the whale did not swallow Jonah, that Jesus was not born a virgin, or that Jesus never met John the Baptist. But after all of this, what relevance do these scriptures have? What moral implications do we find growing out of the Bible? What relevance does Jesus have in 1948 A.D.? These are question which the liberal theologian must of necessity answer if he expects to influence the average mind. To often do we find many of the liberals dodging these vital questions. This is the first great weakness of liberal theology.

[signed] M. L. King


The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

"The Weaknesses of Liberal Theology" II

[1948]

[Chester, Pa.]

Last week we concluded that one of the great weaknesses of liberal theology is that it becomes so involved in higher criticism, in many instances, that it fails to answer certain vital questions. Today we will discuss another weakness of liberal theology which is equally pernicious. This weakness lies in its failure to contact the masses. Liberal theology seems to be lost in a vocabulary. Moreover, it seems to be too divorced from life.

This tendency to move out of the market-place of everyday life has led liberal theology to become so theoretical that it forgets the practical. This is certainly a danger to any system of theology, for it presupposes that all life is theory, when in reality theory is not effective until it can be reproduced in the realm of the practical. This is certainly a point of warning, for it is the danger that faced the scholastics when they lost their heads to logic. Liberal theology

---

6. Davis added a quotation mark after the word "criticism."
7. Davis crossed out the second "of" in this sentence.
8. The Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Davis added the word "of" between the words "born" and "a."
9. Davis crossed out the word "of."
10. Davis indicated that "A.D." should have come before "1948."
11. Davis added an "s" to the word "question."
12. Davis added another "o" to the word "To."
13. King folded this assignment lengthwise and signed his name on the verso of the last page.
14. Davis drew a star between the words "market" and "place" to indicate one word, not two.
will only be recognized when it begin to grapple with the problems of the un-
sophisticated man.15 16 Feb

[signed] M. L. King16

AHDS. CSKC: Sermon file, folder 165.

15. Davis circled the word "only," drew an arrow to move it between the words "recognized" and "when," and circled the misspelling "grappel."
16. King folded this document lengthwise and signed his name on the verso of the last page.

Sermon Sketches

[30 November 1948–16 February 1949?]
[Chester, Pa. ?]

King probably wrote these exercises for the course Preparation of the Sermon.¹
Throughout his life, he would revisit many of these themes and utilize many of these titles, including "Facing Life's Insecapables" and "What Is Man?"²

Sermon Sketches I

Title—The Assurance of Immortality

Job 19:25³

Theme—We are able to attain immortality through the men and women that we influence, and through the children who are touched by the flame of our spirits.

Purpose—To show that the desire for immortality will not be in vain.

In this sermon I purpose to show that the actual meaning of this text has often been misunderstood. Actually this was a developing concept of immortality. The word redeemer comes from the Hebrew word go'el mean-

1. The organization of these sketches reflects King's class notes for Preparation of the Sermon, which defined the components of a sermon as the title, theme, purpose, introduction, body, and conclusion. King recorded in his notes that a sermon's title "is not the theme or subject," but that it "is primarily for advertising purposes." His notes also indicated that the theme was "the thing you are saying to the people," while the purpose was what "you expect to accomplish in your particular sermon. I must attempt to get people to see, do, or be something." King characterized the sermon's conclusion as a recapitulation "bringing the audience to a place where there is emotional impact" (King, Class notes, Preparation of the Sermon, 30 November 1948–16 February 1949).


3. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."