

“The False God of Science”

5 July 1953
[Atlanta, Ga.]

Dr William Ernest Hecking 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.⁴ Certainly worship is as natural to man as the rising of the sun is to the cosmic order

¹ “Ebenezer Begins WERD Broadcast Sunday Morning,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 July 1953

² King dated these three manuscripts 5, 12, and 19 July 1953, respectively, while the *Atlanta Daily World* announced different topics for the services at Ebenezer on those same Sundays (“‘When God Seems to Deceive Us,’ Rev M. L. King, Jr.’s Subject,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 July 1953, “‘Transformed Non-Conformists’ to Be King Jr.’s Topic,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 11 July 1953, “Mrs Burney, ‘Women’s Day’ Speaker at Ebenezer Sunday,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 18 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 Worshipping 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 1925 until 1946 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.

5 July 1953

Men always have worshipped and men always will worship. There is the ever present danger, however, that man will direct his worship drive into false channels. It is not so {much} disbelief as false belief that is the danger confronting religion. It is not so much downright atheism as strong, determined polytheism which impedes the progress of religion. The scripture furnishes numerous examples of this ever present tendency of man to substitute false gods for the One true God. {Judges 2 12}⁵

When we move from the pages of the Bible to the scene of the modern world, we find this same tendency present in even greater proportions. On every hand modern man has turned from the One true God of the universe to the worship of false gods round about him. These false gods that modern men worship are numerous in number. I want to deal with three of them. Because of limited time, I will deal with only one of these false gods this morning. The other two will be discussed on the following two Sundays.

Let us notice this morning how modern man has made a god of science. It was quite easy for modern man to put his ultimate faith in science because science had brought about such remarkable advances, such tangible and amazing victories. He realized that man through his scientific genius had dwarfed distances and placed time in chains. He noticed the new comforts that had been brought about by science, from the vast improvements in communication to the elimination of many dread plagues and diseases. And so after noticing these astounding successes modern man ushered in a new god and a new religion. Individual scientist became the high priests, chemical and biological instruments became sacramental agencies through which the invisible grace of the scientific god became visibly manifested, and scientific laboratories became the sanctuaries. And so modern man dutifully worshipped at the shrine of the god of science.

But today we are confronted with the tragic fact that the god of science which we so devoutly worshipped has brought about the possibility of universal annihilation, and so man today stands on the brink of atomic destruction aghast, panic-stricken and petrified. He realizes now that his greatest need is not science which is power, but wisdom which is control.

Doubtless some one has been saying, but is it not right to devote ourselves to scientific adventure? Is not science important for the progress of civilization? To this I would answer yes. No person of sound intelligence could minimize science. It is not science in itself that I am condemning, {but it is the tendency of projecting it to the status of God that I am condemning.} We must come to see that science only furnishes us with the means by which we live, but never with the spiritual ends for which we live. And so we must turn back and give our ultimate devotion to the God who integrates the whole of life, to the God in whom we live and move and have our

⁵ "And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger."

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

12 July 1953 being, to the God who has been our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.⁶

Preached July 5, 1953

TAD CSKC Sermon file, folder 18, "False Gods We Worship "