I Introduction—the existence of evil in the universe  
Because of this evil disputes and conflicts arise between individuals. The question which every individual and every nation confronts soon or later is, how will I deal with this evil force.

II Now one method is the method of violence. The sword method. This is the popular method. To this method Jesus said, “He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.”2 History is replete with the bleached bones of nations. So this method carries the seed of its own destruction. It is perilous. Over against this stands the method of non-violence. It resists just as strongly as the violent method.

III (a) The method of violence assumes that evil can overcome evil. It confronts a negative with a negative. Retaliatory violence does nothing but multiplies the existence of Man and his deeds are two distinct things.
1. The use of the sword presupposes that evil can overcome evil. The doer of the deed must always be respected.
2. The aim of the sword is to defeat, injure, and humiliate an oppressor. But the true aim should be to convert him, to change his understanding and his sense of values.

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 5, “Man’s Sin and God’s Grace” / “The Pen1 of the Sword.”

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1 For example, see King, “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious,” 18 March 1956, pp. 257–259 in this volume. In an October 1960 letter which King wrote while in the Georgia State prison in Reidsville, he requested that Coretta King bring him this and seventeen other “sermons from my file” (see King to Coretta Scott King, 26 October 1960, Papers 5:531–532).

2 Cf. Matthew 26:52.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

God in History: Four Proverbs

[1959–1968]

King mentions his September 1958 stabbing as he reflects on lessons that can be learned from life and history.1

Ps 37:1–3

I The first truth which the centuries have to tell us is summed up in the old Greek proverb “Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad.”3 The Bible says

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1 King wrote the sermon title on the folder containing this handwritten outline. After his stabbing, he did not return to active preaching until late 1958.
2 Psalm 37:1–3: “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”
3 King most likely drew the main points of this homily from a sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick,
the same thing in two familiar passages "Pride goeth before destruction" "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased."

This is saying, in substance, when a man loses his head over his own importance, he has taken the first step on the road to his own self destruction.

The process is easy to describe. A man does good work for a period, he is praised for it, he receives awards, he becomes popular. But then he becomes drunk with power inflated with vanity, and wrecks himself.

A. (Benito) Mussolini
B. Napoleon (Bonaparte)

II The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small." Evil and injustice may seem strong for a time, but they do not endure. Right is right and wrong is wrong, it is never [right?] to do wrong and wrong always brings its own punishment.

A. (Adolf) Hitler
B. Colonialism
C. Slavery

III There is another truth that history has to teach us. "The bee alway fertilizes the flower which it robs."

A. Negroes like R. Hayes & M. Anderson
B. Poverty
C. The bee of war robbed the flower of civilization of those who have in there faces the flow blossom of youth.

IV There is a final truth which Dr. Beard tells us history has to teach. "When it gets dark enough you can see the stars. Sunlight always hides the depths of the heavens, you cannot see the Milky Way in daytime, but the darkness of the night unveils the North Star by which we chart our course.

A. Buyan, Milton, Beethoven, Handel
B. Personal sins & errors
C. Personal tragedies/my stabbing
D. What is the darkest [century?] on record

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 77, "God In History (Four Proverbs)"

"What Keeps Religion Going?" Fosdick wrote. "Professor Charles A. Beard, one of the leading historians of our time, was asked sometime since what major lessons he had learned from history, and he answered that he had learned four. Here they are. 'First, whom the gods would destroy they first make mad with power. Second, the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small. Third, the bee fertilizes the flower it robs. Fourth, when it is dark enough you can see the stars.'" (Fosdick, Riverside Sermons, p. 156) King annotated his copy of Fosdick's book, which he kept in his personal library.

4 This phrase is found in both the Old and New Testaments, for example, see Proverbs 16:18 and Matthew 23:12
5 Cf. Euripides Bacchae 882-887
6 King refers to singers Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson
7 Historian Charles Austin Beard (1874-1948) was noted for emphasizing a relationship between politics and economics in historical analysis.
8 In other sermons, King refers to those individuals' ability to triumph over adversity. For an example of this, see King, Unfulfilled Hopes, 5 April 1959, p. 363 in this volume.
9 Iola Ware Curry stabbed King during a book-signing in New York City on 20 September 1958.