

Warren, Mervyn A. *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 223 pp.

Mervyn A. Warren is professor of preaching at Oakwood College. He has also written *Black Preaching: Truth and Soul* (University Press of America, 1977) and *God Made Known* (Review and Herald, 1984). *King Came Preaching* is a recast of his 1966 doctoral dissertation done at Michigan State University.

The book opens with a homiletical biography that places King squarely in the tradition of preaching and the life of the church. This chapter provides a thorough history of King's education, both formal and practical, as well as the people and events that influenced him to follow the paths of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather in going into the ministry. It also establishes the fact that King's foremost principle was preaching the Gospel and not merely promoting a political agenda.

In discussing King as a black preacher, Warren makes two important points: (1) King's preaching was certainly relevant, especially as he called for justice; (2) his principles were concentered in the Bible, family, and theological underpinnings (48,50). King, however, made a clear distinction between his sermons and civil rights speeches: the former addressed congregants while the latter addressed mainly the socio-political masses. Nevertheless, his sermons spoke to civil rights issues and his speeches were infused with theological information (56-57).

The core of this book deals with the content and themes of King's sermons. As far as content is concerned, Warren contends that in terms of ethos (ethical substance) "*the preacher as person* constitutes the strongest content of any preaching situation" (77). And such was the case with King. His ethos was characterized by sincerity, uncompromising convictions, competence, persuasion, and goodwill (78-79). Although attacked on several fronts, King's ethos has stood the test of time (80-86). Warren then uses actual examples from some of King's sermons to demonstrate that he used both rational and emotional substance to make his point. His sermons were rife with examples, narratives and stories, statistics, and quotations (87-97).

King was profoundly influenced, though not always in total agreement, with certain philosophers. For example, from Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas K. Ghandi he learned "nonviolent resistance;" from Walter Rauchenbusch he learned about the "social gospel;" from G. W. F. Hegel he learned that "growth comes through struggle" (121); and from Jesus Christ he learned the "love ethic." Certain themes highlight his sermons: good neighborliness, God, Jesus Christ, the church, the preacher, people, the balanced life, prayer, faith, and good and evil (123-39).

To illustrate the power and sheer rhetorical beauty of King's words, Warren dedicates a chapter to "Language in Kingly Style." He analyzes sixteen sermons and demonstrates that King's sentences were simple, yet direct and varied; vividness and imagery were achieved through devices such as alliteration,

comparison and contrast, synecdoche, and so forth (144-51); and all the elements of oral style are to be found in his presentations.

In terms of sermon design, preparation and delivery, Warren says that King usually followed the textual and topical, though not the expository style. His sermons generally had an introduction, a three-part body, and a conclusion. King spent numerous hours in preparation and prayer over his sermon. He delivered extemporaneously, marked by confidence, control, poise, and dignity. He practiced good articulation and pronunciation in a southern style and was quite adaptable to his diverse audiences.

Warren believes that in terms of King's contributions to preaching and theology, three elements are focal: (1) the emphasis on relevance and application; (2) love for God means love for our fellow human beings, especially those in struggle; and (3) the use of philosophy and reasoning in proclaiming and defending Christian doctrine (169).

The book closes with five appendices consisting of a 1962 address at Oakwood College, three sermons, and the most useful, an analysis of King's use of sources. This book is must reading for anyone intrigued by preaching and even the history of the Civil Rights Movement. It is commendable on several fronts:

1. It is well researched as evidenced by extensive footnotes, although I think that footnotes would have served the reader better. Further, it would be useful for a future edition that a bibliography be provided.

2. Warren's language is beautiful and this promotes the readability of the book, urging one not to pause in its reading.

3. This book tells us not only about King's preaching but also informs us about preaching both as an art and a science. Warren's studies in communication come to the fore in a forceful and powerful manner. It uplifts the preaching of not only "one of the most effective and celebrated preachers in Western history" (12) but also encourages all preachers to be better, more responsible communicators of the word of God.

4. A special treat in the book are the pictures (98-113), particularly those that show King in the pathos of preaching. I was also moved by the portrait of Ghandi that overlooks the family dining. It suggests King's deep respect for a man in similar throes. Perhaps, too, it implies that King's multi-cultural ideas were well entrenched even before the term itself came into common parlance.

5. Finally, a future edition may see light in providing an in-depth analysis of King's famous "I have A Dream" speech. Though delivered as a Civil Rights speech, its power, beauty, and magnitude are as moving and dynamic as a sermon.

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