

Cleophus J. LaRue, ed. *More Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. 164 pages. \$24.95

Cleophus LaRue's *More Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons* supplements the previous volume entitled *Power in the Pulpit* (Westminster John Knox, 2002) with fewer pages and minimal overlap. As the editor, LaRue employs multiple contributors to this volume: four women and six men who complement each other by sharing their exegetical process, devotional practices, and testimony. In one volume each preacher uses a conversational tone to provide a clear and concise description of his or her weekly routine that incorporates sermon preparation.

LaRue intends for readers to evaluate the methodology of the ten exemplary preachers and advance their own means of sermon preparation. LaRue and the contributors direct the readers to spiritual disciplines, and expose preachers who read scripture for sermonic development alone. The book gives little emphasis to biblical criticism or sermon design, instead suggesting that "effective preachers recognize that this daunting task of creatively engaging the scriptures and pairing them with black lived experience is at the center of their weekly preparation" (3).

This book stimulates curious preachers, seminarians, and scholars who wonder how other preachers deal with the demands of frequent sermon preparation with consistent excellence and spontaneity. Much of the leading books on expository preaching exclude the African-American tradition. This text, however, fills that gap. Traditionally, African-American preachers acquire their hermeneutic and sermonic delivery style from their exposure to other preachers within the tradition more than through books or the classroom, and "this book reflects the continuing interest on the part of those who continue to learn to preach in this manner" (7).

Willette Burgie-Bryant speaks against focusing on the congregation as a distraction from focusing on God. Her sermon demonstrates that having God on one's mind is essential for navigating through the rough terrains of life. William Epps concludes that the Bible preaches itself and therefore the preacher must have a narrow focus of preaching content so that the preacher can effectively "preach one sermon at a time." Veronica Goines emphasizes resting from the sermon preparation process by sharing her personal account of stagnation in the sermon preparation process. Cynthia Hale emphasizes that the entire sermon needs to be celebratory rather than reserved for the conclusion. She stresses the necessity to find a location in which God meets the preacher in terms of preparation with minimal distractions. C.E. McClain encourages sermon familiarity in order to avoid memorization or manuscript recitation. He also acknowledges that preaching reflects the preacher's prayer life, while recommending the use of imagination prior to seeking exegetical helps. Otis Moss Jr. emphasizes the vitality of Holy Spirit reliance and preaching that challenges oppressive systems which are concrete manifestations of evil. His analogies of the library and the garden illustrate the preacher's need to refer to wisdom of the past and to pull from one's life experiences. Otis Moss III presents an exceptional model of multigenerational preaching, criticizing prosperity preaching and aspects of hip-hop that fail to deliver good news to the poor. He recommends preaching prophetically and prophetic contradiction (100). Raquel St. Clair emphasizes the need for preaching from the overflow of the fullness of life which includes the formational reading of the Bible, care for the physical body, and nurturing interpersonal relationships that are not related to vocational ministry. Her model sermon exemplifies the meaning of preaching with a hope larger than the

reality of the present in order to make action compelling. Walter Thomas embraces the Hegelian approach of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis for sermon structure. He also advocates looking to the story for content. The reality of the resurrection is the most essential requisite for preaching. Melvin Wade emphasizes the need for Bible reading without looking for a sermon idea. Wade encourages preachers to engage in devotional reading for a personal word from God.

One area that the editor and contributors overlook is the situation of bi-vocational preachers. Bi-vocational preachers maintain pastoral charges that demands full time services, but they have significantly less time and energy for preparation. The volume could have been strengthened with a bi-vocational voice that addresses pastors who yearn to fully prepare for congregations in need. Nonetheless, the editor understands the preacher's need to keep up with the high expectations of pulpit ministry, with the accurate assumption that many of the readers have experienced the fatigue that accompanies such a profound task.

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