

Frank A. Thomas. *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018. 111 pages. \$17.99.

Where do we turn for moral imagination when the highest office of American government propagates white nationalism and white supremacy? Frank A. Thomas's *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* provides a timely response for revolutionary proclaimers who would help free individuals, communities, and the nation of its moral depravity. Be ready, though, warns William J. Barber II in his foreword—the prophetic preaching that Thomas advocates is not for the risk-averse. Like the biblical and contemporary prophets whose moral imagination cost them their lives, those who take up Thomas's charge will likely face the oppressors' indignation, a worthy calling for the hope of divine liberation.

Drawing on Edmund Burke's origination of the term, Thomas defines moral imagination as the preacher's aptitude, despite the melee of human experience, for perceiving and relaying "God's abiding wisdom and ethical truth" for the good of the "individual and common humanity" (3). America is in desperate need of moral imagination, argues Thomas, because the powerful and privileged rationalize their dominance and the restrictions it imposes on the unfree—"black, Latinx, female, LGBTQ" and others, including disenfranchised whites, all denied the rights and privileges of freedom reserved for an ever-narrowing category of whiteness (12). Only moral imagination can supplant the white supremacy that America's "idolatrous and diabolical imagination" reproduces (xxxii). This is the role of the church.

Thomas identifies four qualities of moral imagination in preaching through a close reading of Robert F. Kennedy's campaign address on the night that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and King's last sermon, "I've Been to the Mountain Top," the night before his murder. Situating both orations in light of their exigencies and rhetorical contexts, Thomas demonstrates how the two male political figures, one white and one black, envisage equality and embody that vision through their tangible presence; recognize the possibilities that empathy creates for moving beyond the past and establishing future pathways to justice and harmony; draw on the knowledge and veracity found in ancient text-based resources; and evoke a sense of "wonder, mystery, and hope" in the audience through art and poetry (45). The strategic juxtaposition of Kennedy's and King's moral imagination lays bare not only the historical situatedness of their addresses, but also the possibility and obligation for every preacher to declare the injustice of withholding freedom and equality from the marginalized.

In the chapter that follows, Thomas applies the qualities of moral imagination to national leadership, thereby illuminating the extreme dearth of morality in the American imagination, the Trump presidency, and other national and local leaders. The way forward, says Thomas, is for those with moral imagination to impart what is lacking. For the preacher, this means bringing the qualities of moral imagination into their sermonizing. Thomas offers a preaching worksheet and questions aligned with the four qualities of moral imagination for preachers to use in sermon development. He also walks the reader through the process, using his own responses to the questions to compose a dangerous sermon on a selected biblical text. The result is a practical illustration of gospel preaching that is timely and culturally responsive.

The last "word" Thomas gives to luminary Prathia L. Hall, which prevents the near omission of a female exemplar. A contemporary of King in the fight for civil rights, Hall's political activism and homiletical genius captures the essence of "freedom faith," a concept that she began delineating in the mid-60s and that, as Thomas acknowledges, closely resembles the four qualities of moral imagination that he articulates. While Thomas does not make this known

until the end of the book, there is something to be said for the womanist theologian having the final say. Thomas presents the text of Hall's 2000 sermon, "Freedom-Faith," in its entirety and without analysis. In tribute to her legacy, he prefaces the sermon with an informative biographical sketch and explanation of the resonance between Hall's freedom faith and the qualities of moral imagination. Thereafter, Hall speaks for herself and her words sound a clarion call for freedom. There could be no more fitting close to what is sure to become a seminal text for 21<sup>st</sup> century prophetic preaching.

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