

Wayne E. Croft, Sr. *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching during Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era: There's a Bright Side Somewhere*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. 158 pages. \$36.99.

The legacy of hope throughout African American history is nothing short of a miracle. Surprisingly, there are few studies that explicitly explore the anatomy of African American hope, particularly as manifested in Black preaching. Wayne Croft's *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching During Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era* helps to fill this void in the literature. An experienced pastor and professor, Croft articulates a richly textured account of the motif of hope in African American preaching, chronicling its evolution during slavery (1803–1865) and the post-Civil War period (1865–1896). Drawing on prayers, spirituals, and especially sermons, he proposes that hope morphed in the African American pulpit during and after slavery in ways that addressed both this-worldly and other-worldly concerns. This concise, illuminating book will be of interest to students and teachers of preaching and scholars of rhetoric, history, and African American culture.

The book opens by delineating Croft's methodology. Defining hope as the anticipation of something better than the present, Croft employs a historical perspective and core investigative questions to explore this homiletical motif. The remainder of the book is arranged into four chapters. The first chapter surveys contemporary African American scholarship on hope. Croft engages a range of homileticians and theologians, including Henry H. Mitchell, Cleophus J. LaRue, James H. Cone, Major J. Jones, and A. Elaine Brown-Crawford. Though these scholars' work sharpens the lens Croft uses to consider the motif of hope, he concludes that they do not offer an in-depth analysis of this major dimension of the African American experience. The second chapter demonstrates how the motif of hope is visible in slave preaching. Due to the paucity of extant slave sermon texts, Croft considers this motif through secondhand reports of slave preaching as well as prayers, spirituals, and slave revolts. His analysis of the slave revolts led by the preachers Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner is especially intriguing. He surmises that during slavery hope was understood as "freedom from oppression," a freedom to be experienced both in the present and in the future (64).

Chapters 3 and 4 focus attention on the homiletical motif of hope after slavery through looking at the sermons of two noted preachers: African Methodist Episcopal bishop Daniel Alexander Payne (1811–1893) and famed folk preacher John Jasper (1812–1901). In chapter 3, Croft finds that Payne's preaching reveals that hope did not diminish after slavery, but instead shifted from a focus on freedom from oppression to a focus on racial equality. Chapter 4 highlights how the motif of hope is not "a central" theme of Jasper's sermons, but is an "essential" one (118). Though Jasper's sermons are primarily dominated by other-worldly hope, they also reveal traces of this-worldly and "apocalyptic hope"—that is, hope that anticipates God bringing an end to evil and suffering at the end of time (106, 121, author's emphasis). The book concludes with a helpful summary and a delineation of several areas for future research.

*The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching* provides a much-needed treatment on the nature of hope in Black preaching during and after slavery. Drawing on sermons as primary source material, Croft presents a nuanced portrayal of hope as both this-worldly and other-worldly. In so doing, he challenges James Cone's early work, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), that claimed that in the post-Civil War period, Black preachers settled for an other-worldly hope (90). Croft's argument against Cone would be further substantiated through surveying a larger sample of preachers' sermons. Inclusion of women preachers would

particularly be a welcome addition. Though Croft acknowledges that African American women preachers existed in the era of his study, such as Jarena Lee, Maria Stewart, and Julia Foote, he states that the dearth of sources available from the period makes it difficult to examine the evolution of hope in their sermons (xiv). I wonder if this could be rectified through a broader conception of how varied sources can reveal sermonic content. This was done in Croft's investigation of the nature of hope in slave preaching through considering prayers, spirituals, and slave revolts. What if autobiographical material, sermon and speech excerpts, and descriptions of women preaching were drawn upon to find the motif of hope?

In short, *The Motif of Hope* is a rich piece of scholarship that opens new avenues for research. It will be of interest to scholars desiring to learn more about the theology and history of African Americans. Moreover, pastors and preachers will be enriched through its inspiring presentation of hope in Black preaching. Croft reminds us of the multivalent nature of African American hope as other-worldly and this-worldly—a hope that is desperately needed in our world today.

Edgar “Trey” Clark III, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA