

Michael P. Graves. *Preaching the Inward Light: Early Quaker Rhetoric*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009. 462 pages. \$49.95.

For more than 300 years, members of the Religious Society of Friends (known as “Quakers”) have been sometimes revered and other times suspect. Even today, their distinctive worship practices and social ministries remain something of an enigma to most mainline Christians.

In his incisive look at early Quaker preaching and rhetoric, Michael Graves shines an informative and illuminating light on the origins of the Friends’ extraordinary witness. As Professor of Communication Studies at Liberty University, for over three decades Graves has researched early Quaker sermons as they arose amid the complex milieu of seventeenth-century England. His comprehensive and detailed study was undertaken through fellowships funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and extensive research conducted at several Quaker colleges in the U.S.

For those unfamiliar with Quaker faith and practice, Graves provides a helpful introduction to the origins of their religious rhetoric and public worship. His study of Quaker sermons preached during the last quarter of the seventeenth-century reveals the vibrant, even “revivalistic” nature of Quaker impromptu preaching. Graves asserts that among early Friends the divine Light was not considered an inherent part of the human psyche that shone *outward* but “the *inward* enlightening of and from God to every person” (17). From the time of their origins, Quakers recognized the preaching of both men and women.

The four sections of his book explore the theory and practice of Quaker impromptu preaching among a variety of preachers. The first section includes chapters describing the sociopolitical currents and cultural constraints imposed on early Quaker preaching. Graves also reconstructs the early Quaker worldview of late seventeenth-century England, including their hope that “anyone may overcome the effects of the fall through the light of Christ” (66) and an epistemology based strongly on the immediate revelation of the Spirit of Christ (69).

In the second section Graves describes the development of seventeenth-century Quaker impromptu preaching theory. He examines the preaching of seven well-respected Friends, including two women. The strategies these ministers employed include directing their listeners to the Inward Light as the true source of revelation, a readiness to expand on types and figures (drawn largely from biblical knowledge), and a willingness to engage in debate (especially outside worship settings). The writings of Robert Barclay and Samuel Bownas provide important grounding for late seventeenth-century Quaker theology and preaching theory.

The third section is the most dynamic. Graves examines seventy-nine surviving sermons from 1671-1700 and identifies several recurring themes among them, including theological and behavioral emphases as well as Quaker responses to persecution. It is disappointing that given the enduring impact of Quaker testimonies in opposition to slavery, their anti-war convictions, and support of women’s equality, Graves mentions these only briefly (179-181).

Most impressive in this section is his exploration of five key metaphors in early Quaker sermons (chapter 7). The author’s description of analogy and metaphor as “the conceptual essence” of these sermons deserves the careful attention of current-day preachers, students, and teachers of homiletics. Instead of structuring their sermons according to doctrinal arguments that depend on rational, argumentative discourse, Graves identifies the essence of early Quaker linguistic strategy as the use of key metaphors (i.e., light-dark, voice, seed, hunger-thirst, journey). Through these, Quaker preachers were able to establish familiar ground with their

listeners, extend their listeners' conceptual worlds, and employ an intentional tool that helped address the challenges inherent in impromptu preaching situations.

The fourth and final section of the book closely examines four select Quaker sermons from the same period. The sermons of George Fox, Stephen Crisp, Robert Barclay, and William Penn are given detailed attention.

Graves' study of late seventeenth-century Quaker preaching would have benefited from allusions to the maturation of Quaker thought and reflection on worship during the subsequent "quietist period" (1700-1820). The vocal ministries of Fox, Penn, Fell, and others not only inspired generations of preachers but the development of "silent assemblies" for worship as well. For those who do not know how to gather in silent, expectant worship, it would be helpful to hear something of later developments among Friends who await a divinely-inspired word among God's people.

*Preaching the Inward Light* is an excellent resource not only for students of religious rhetoric, preaching, and history, but also for persons who would encounter a radically different approach to discerning God's living word amid the community of faith. The extraordinary history of Quaker preaching bespeaks the integrity of a tradition that seeks to worship in spirit and truth, in word and deed.

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