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Never Leave Us Alone: The Prayer Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Book Review

Never Leave Us Alone: The Prayer Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Lewis V. Baldwin

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010

Martin Luther King Jr. has been a profound spiritual leader and guide for many Christians over the past 50 years. His call for justice arose from the Black Christian churches in the southern USA but was carried forward by other Christian leaders and ministers throughout North America and the world. How did he open himself to the vision which brought the gospel into the political realm and increased people's collective energy walk and work against racism and injustice? He was years ahead of his time. Though not a lone voice, his vision mobilized people.



Lewis Baldwin focuses on King's spirituality and prayer life which has had less attention from King's biographers. He traces King's spiritual foundation to his father and maternal grandfather as well as to the Black Christian churches which helped people see beyond their current circumstances to a new world where all had dignity. But King was not "other worldly"; he saw the dream as the vision for today and tomorrow in the United States for his children, grandchildren, and all peoples.

From his initial experiences in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta to Morehouse College and then Boston University where his more conservative faith came in contact with liberalism and later with Gandhi's thought, King matured spiritually. He fostered a practice of prayer which brought him into vulnerability with God. Prayer was very serious work, not the avoidance of tasks. It helped him focus himself as a student and then as a congregational minister and community leader.

Prayer could be misused by asking God to meet one's personal needs and wishes. King found prayer to be other-oriented, the search for justice and community, selflessness and humility (p. 35). He was very disturbed by prayers which did not draw people into a deeper spirituality. Prayer was also a release from possible violence and fear.

I was surprised to learn that King usually took 2 – 3 days per week as times set aside for prayer and meditation. Sometimes he would rent a hotel room so that he had silence and was undisturbed. My vision of King was as a prophet, visionary leader, and strategist; now King as mystic has emerged.

Though Baldwin was able to read King's sermons, prayers, and meditations, they were not made available in this book. I would have found the book even more enlightening with prayers and meditations which demonstrated King's searching and then wisdom, drawn from his vulnerability with God.

Baldwin's book is a thought provoking read, especially as we search for the meaning and value of prayer in our lives. It would be a good discussion book in a ministerial cluster

as well as for adult study in a congregation, especially if accompanied by King's prayers and sermons which are available on the internet or in other books.

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