AN ANALYSIS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETIC ELEMENTS
IN THE SPEECHES OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

[Signatures]

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This study analyzes five speeches delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. to determine the ways in which King used the elements of prophetic rhetoric. It examines the major Old Testament prophets, Amos and Ezekiel specifically, for parallels in the following areas: (1) the life, personality, and spiritual calling of the prophet, (2) the language, prophecies, and central themes of the prophet's message, and (3) the historical period in which the prophet lived and the events that created a need for the rhetoric of prophecy.

Study of the Old Testament prophets revealed the following conditions which demand a need for prophetic rhetoric: The people are either (1) in captivity, (2) in social, political, or economic transition, (3) in the midst of corruption and subsequent plenty, or (4) in a struggle with those possessing power and denying them access to it.

This study revealed the following characteristics of a prophet: (1) The prophet feels a direct call from God to be a spokesman for Him to a specific group of people. (2) The prophet speaks out enthusiastically for God. (3) The
prophet is a preacher. (4) The prophet exhibits social awareness and sees religion as a means of social transformation. (5) The prophet is a man of action. (6) The prophet speaks out in a time of crisis. (7) The prophet is aware of the conditions in the lives of the people to whom he is speaking.

The criteria used to analyze the rhetoric of King are as follows: (1) It should condemn the social and religious sins of a group of people. (2) It should include predictions of what God will do as a result of these sins. (3) It should include an element of hope. (4) It should advocate a peaceful approach to the problem. Patience is an important virtue; God, not man, is the Vindicator. (5) It should advocate a plan of action which is practical. (6) It should abound in parables and metaphors stated in a language familiar to the hearers.

This study reveals that the socio-economic conditions of the American Negroes closely paralleled the situations of the Old Testament Hebrews. The blacks were held in social and economic bondage by the whites. At the time when King entered the civil rights movement, there was an embryonic struggle between the blacks and the whites.

The life of Martin Luther King, Jr. closely resembled the characteristics of the lives of the Old Testament prophets. King felt that he had a direct calling from God. He spoke out enthusiastically for God and was a preacher by
profession. King used religion as a means of social reform, and he was the object of physical and verbal abuse. He championed the American Negroes as well as other minorities.

All of the speeches contained most of the criteria of prophetic rhetoric. The speeches condemned sin and included predictions. The speeches included elements of hope and advocated a peaceful approach to the racial problems. Four of the speeches advocated a plan of action that represented a solution. All of the speeches abounded in parables and metaphors stated in a language familiar to the hearers.

In conclusion, it is apparent (1) that there are parallels between the situations of American blacks and the Old Testament Hebrews; (2) that King reacted to a modern situation in the same enthusiastic way as did the Hebrew prophets; and (3) that the rhetoric of King was characterized by prophetic elements. Therefore, Martin Luther King, Jr. may be called a twentieth-century prophet.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most impressive figures of the Civil Rights movement in America was Martin Luther King, Jr. Generally projecting an image of a soft-spoken advocate of love and brotherhood, King was actually a complex man. Although King's rhetoric has been the subject of much research, one facet of his speechmaking has been virtually unexplored: the prophetic elements in his rhetoric. Peter Schrag, in his article "The Uses of Martyrdom,"\(^1\) called King a modern-day prophet. Furthermore, King compared himself to the eighth-century prophets in an article in *The Atlantic*\(^2\) when he said that he left his home to aid the downtrodden "just as the eighth-century prophets left their little villages and carried their 'thus saith the Lord' far beyond the boundaries of their home town." Furthermore, King said, in "Facing the Challenge of a New Age,"\(^3\) that he identified himself with the tradition of Hebraic prophecy. Therefore, King's rhetoric may be similar to the rhetoric of the Old Testament prophets.

A rhetorical analysis of a speaker is often based upon artistic criteria which encompass principles embodied
concretely in particular works. For example, classical rhetoric, notably that of Aristotle and Cicero, provides the traditional canons of rhetoric—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *pronuntiatio*, and *memoria*—from which criteria have been developed to evaluate rhetoric. However, there is no particular source which provides the criteria to evaluate the rhetoric of prophecy. Therefore, criteria must be developed from other sources.

Normally, authority, or tradition and consistency, have been consulted as a source for criteria. Hugh Blair, in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, viewed criticism as "an art founded wholly on experience; on the observation of such beauties as have been found to please mankind most generally." Both Aristotle, in establishing the criteria for rhetoric, and Blair, in establishing the criteria for literary criticism, drew upon their observation of the practices of the better speakers and writers of their times. This sense of what is good practice is generally consistent with authority or tradition. There is a circularity in which the appeal to good practice helps to establish principle, and the appeal to principle helps to determine good practice. Such circularity is inevitably a part of building a tradition.

This study, therefore, pools the knowledge of rhetorical and theological experts and the practices of the well-known prophets in order to arrive at criteria by which the rhetoric of prophecy can be analyzed. Those criteria are then applied to King's rhetoric.
The use of "prophet" in this paper is derived from the Greek word meaning "spokesman" and is especially applied to a spokesman for God. It is in no way to be confused with the seer or fortune-teller. The prophets were interpreters of the mind and purpose of God, and their task was to make any visions from God real to their fellows.

The definition of rhetoric can be taken from Aristotle: "So let rhetoric be defined as the faculty of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion."5 Other contemporary definitions of rhetoric can be used to reinforce Aristotle's. Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird defined rhetoric as: "a practical skill serving as a direct link between the individual and his immediate social environment on one hand and the larger political pattern of the state on the other."6 Robert L. Scott and Bernard L. Brock said: "Rhetoric may be defined as the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols."7 Finally, James Richard McNally, Associate Professor in the Department of Rhetoric and Public Address at State University of New York, said: "rhetorical study . . . is an examination of instances of . . . communication. Its two major divisions are historical analysis and critical analysis."8 Therefore, prophetic rhetoric is the symbolic and instrumental behavior of a spokesman of God.

This study adds another dimension to the understanding of Martin Luther King, Jr. and indicates that King revealed insight into his own social situation by adapting his rhetoric.
to modern problems which indicated a need for prophetic rhetoric.

Purpose

It is the purpose of this study to analyze selected speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. in order to determine in what ways, if any, they were characterized by prophetic elements.

Selection of the Speeches

Distinctly different speeches were chosen in order to examine King's prophetic speaking in and out of church. This way, he can be viewed in situations which normally would not call for religious themes as well as ones which would. Differing in subject matter, audience, and occasion, the selected speeches discussed are "I Have a Dream," "I've Been to the Mountaintop," the Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and two of his sermons, "Love in Action" and "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart."

Method and Procedures

The Golden Age of Old Testament prophecy began in about 850 B.C. with Elijah and Elisha and ended about 460 B.C. with Malachi. It was not until about 33 A.D., with the coming of John the Baptist, that the next prophetic voice was recorded in the Bible. When his cry of "Repent, thus saith the Lord" was brought to an end with his death at the hands of Herod Antipas, Biblical prophecy ended. During the past several
hundred years, however, many men were called upon to carry a message from Jehovah to His people. If such inspired men still preach and prophesy, perhaps criteria can be established to determine whether the prophet has been stilled or has simply been unrecognized by modern evaluators. Carl Sumner Knopf said in his book *Ask the Prophets* that the prime characteristics of the prophets were "the joy of faith, the fire of indignation, and the certainty of conviction." Yet, there appear to be other characteristics, perhaps more concrete than Knopf's, that can be used to analyze the modern-day prophet.

Three of the major sources of information concerning the Old Testament prophets used in this study were Carl Sumner Knopf, R. B. Y. Scott, and the *Abingdon Bible Commentary*. Knopf is Dean of the School of Religion of the University of Southern California and has written several books on theology (*Ask the Prophets, The Old Testament Speaks, Bible Youth in Modern Times, and Comrades of the Way*). Scott is Professor of Old Testament Literature at the United Theological College in Montreal, Canada. His book *The Relevance of the Prophets* has been used extensively as a source in this study. The *Abingdon Bible Commentary* is a collection of commentaries by several experts in Bible history.

Additionally, it was necessary to view the practice of the Old Testament prophets and to analyze specifically the rhetoric of Amos and Ezekiel in order to arrive at the criteria for the rhetoric of prophecy. According to John W. Rathbun, a professor at California State College at Los Angeles, King's
social and political situations closely paralleled those of
the prophets Amos and Ezekiel, and King also associated him-
self with these two prophets.12

There are several threads which appear in the rhetoric
of the Old Testament that are characteristic of many of the
prophets who lived between 850 B.C. and 460 B.C. Recurring
themes are evident in (1) the life, the personality, and the
spiritual calling of the prophet, (2) the language, the pro-
phecies, and the central themes of the message of the prophet,
(3) the historical period in which the prophet lived and the
events that created a need for the rhetoric of prophecy.

Even though the prophets were similar in many ways, their
backgrounds were varied. Some were highly educated; others
were illiterate. Some were skilled professionals; others were
lowly laborers. Some were very wealthy; others were plagued
by poverty. Even though differences existed, similarities
occurred that far outweighed the differences.

The Hebrew prophet, far from being a mere fortune-teller,
was really one who spoke out enthusiastically for God.13 The
prophets who spoke between 850 B.C. and 460 B.C. were, at
that time in history, the voices of God. The prophets were
primarily preachers rather than teachers or prognosticators.14
Even though they were not fortune-tellers, they did express
on occasion their moral certainty of what God was about to
do. They were not moral philosophers, for they had no system-
atized scheme of the world. Their apprehension of reality
was intuitive rather than rational. They might have been
called preachers, but not preachers in the sense that the Hebrew priest who presided at religious ritual was. They were not only mystics, but men of action. Their writings revealed them to be poets, social radicals, and religious conservatives. They were spokesmen of God to their nation and consequently to men of all ages.15 These men have been described as "a lonely succession of incorruptible men, called by their contemporaries heretics and traitors."16

A calling appears to have come to each prophet in a time of intellectual and emotional tension among the people of that nation he represented, and each one addressed his message to those people who could not or would not acknowledge their own spiritual needs. Though set apart for his task and often forced to stand alone, the prophet, in his approach to God, spoke for his own people, whether he belonged to them by birth, choice, or direction of God.17

The message that the prophets preached was always addressed to the people in their own times, in the conditions and under the circumstances in which they lived, and in a language which only men of their own nation and time could fully understand. The messages abounded in figures of speech and contemporary allusions which to modern readers are often obscure because knowledge of that ancient time is often far from complete. Most of the prophets were convinced that evil was increasing and approaching a climax which would bring the catastrophic intervention of God and the end of that particular age.18
In general, most of the Old Testament prophets can be characterized as follows: (1) Although they may have lived centuries ago, they are the contemporaries of every generation because the truth they declared is applicable to moral problems in any age. (2) The prophets were men who had given themselves with complete abandon to the service of the Hebrew God. (3) The great prophets were tremendously concerned with social conditions and public issues which might have created a spiritual crisis and consequently a separation from God. They did not speak merely in general terms of sins and repentance, nor did they conventionally discharge their religious obligations. They were specific in their indictments. (4) The prophets were vividly aware of the presence of turmoil in men's ordinary social lives. Because of this awareness, the prophets used religion as a directive in social transformation. (5) They performed the valuable service of coming to the people in the midst of calamities and desolation with words of comfort, assurance, or reformation. They gave the heartening assurance of ultimate victory over their enemies and deliverance from the afflictions that came upon them because of the errors of their ways.

The message of the prophets seemed to follow the same pattern. They condemned with a passion the particular evils that existed in society: oppression, violence, debauchery, greed, theft, dishonesty, lust for power, callous inhumanity, and faithlessness to trust. These evils might appear in any form in any society, and even though these evils might be
politically and economically rooted, they were at the same
time religious evils. Because the prophets' messages con-
cerning society were not evolutionist nor reformist but revo-
lationary, and because they often preached that the existing
social order was doomed, the prophets frequently aroused
resentment among the politically powerful and planted a class
feeling among the victims of injustice and exploitation.

Most of the prophets expressed great sympathy for the down-
trodden masses, and most spoke scathingly of the wealthy
oppressors. They opposed all manner of exploitation, economic
as well as religious. The prophet must have felt that the
poor needed defending, since they had not the social nor
economic power with which to defend themselves. They did not
desire simply the abolition of wealth and wealthy classes.
They desired the correction of abuses in the distribution of
wealth, but above all, they denounced sin in all classes
wherever it was found.

The prophetic message, therefore, covered the following
areas: (1) A narrowness of the vision of both the oppressed
and the oppressor was emphasized by the prophet. Neither
group seemed to be able to see beyond its particular
situation, and neither could visualize the consequences of
its indifference on future generations of its own race.
(2) The leadership was depicted as false. The prophets did
not hesitate to condemn any of the leaders from the king down
to the humblest official, secular or religious. (3) An abuse
of economic power was revealed. The prophets were advocates
of the dispossessed and exploited poor and cried out against the injustices perpetrated by the wealthy.\textsuperscript{22} (4) The prophetic message preached that whenever ruthless forces of the modern world bore down upon and crushed the spirits of men and women, God would be the Vindicator of those for whom the odds were too great.\textsuperscript{23}

Usually one of three social crises had occurred when the prophets delivered their messages: (1) The nation to which the prophet appeared was in slavery and was being oppressed by its captors, as were the Hebrews, for example, during the prophecy of Ezekiel. (2) The nation was in the midst of a transition period, as during the prophecy of Elijah and Elisha. The Hebrews, during this time, were strained in the transition from mobility to permanent settlement, from a simple to a more complex culture, from the small kinship groups to the large political society comprised of many who were not of Israelite blood; from a mainly pastoral economy to one predominantly agricultural and commercial; and from a property system where possessions were held in common to a system of private ownership, where wealth gave power to the individual and stratified society.\textsuperscript{24} (3) The nation had risen to great economic heights and, as a result, had turned its eyes from God, a situation which existed during the time of the prophecy of Amos. In contrast, if there were no need for the prophetic message, a prophet was unlikely to appear. Thus it is essential to include the aspects of the existing situation in order to understand the appearance of a prophet.
The prophets were deeply concerned with the nature of the social order in which they lived because the form of their social organization largely determined a people's way of living and even the pattern of their thought. Social order also determined the nature and purpose of political authority, economic and class interests, social institutions, the individual's place in the community, the physical conditions under which the community maintained its existence, and the worth of life itself. To the prophets it was a religious imperative that society be so ordered as to make possible a way of life which was good in the eyes of God. It was the unhappy task of the prophets to declare that the national life could not measure up to the standards that God demanded of His chosen people.

Rathbun stated that the situation of Martin Luther King, Jr. closely paralleled those of the Old Testament prophets Amos and Ezekiel. According to Rathbun, the message of King was similar to Ezekiel's because both declared "that God judged as well as individuals." Again, Rathbun compared the historical situation of Amos to that of King's:

America has fallen under the divine condemnations, as Amos, speaking for God, placed Israel under God's wrath: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; . . . The United States cannot escape prophetic history. It, too, must feel God's wrath in order that the divine providence might work its intent. In this, men of goodwill may play a role. They may collaborate with God, so that, as King says, we might "speed up the coming of the inevitable." Rathbun also felt that the language used by King had the same "prophetic and biblical overtones that one catches in Amos and Ezekiel." Since there is an apparent similarity between
King and Amos and Ezekiel, and since Amos and Ezekiel are two of the major prophets, an analysis of their practices helped establish the criteria used in this study for the rhetoric of prophecy.

Amos came from the rugged little country of Tekoa, where he was a shepherd and an itinerant orchard worker living on the desert fringe. He was probably a sincere, enthusiastic worshiper of God. Economically, he belonged to the workers' class. He was a blunt man to the point of being tactless, had no sense of humor, and, as a result, was disliked by most who heard his message. In spite of the fact that he lived in a small village, he had a wide outlook. He was an eloquent orator and poet. Stranger still, he was a world citizen, a genuine internationalist. Therefore, he did not deal with Israel alone, but with the nations outside of Israel as well. He proclaimed that he had not received either his message or his commission from man, but from God, and apparently there was no accounting for this man in any other fashion, for he was not a product of his day. In fact, he was far ahead of his day and very sure of his call from God.

At the time that Amos appeared in Israel, the people were in a postwar period when the rich were extremely wealthy and the poor were extremely poor. The law of the land was made and administered to benefit the rich rather than the poor. The Israelites had migrated to Palestine from the desert, a vast desert that needed no fences. Since, however, most of this land was useless, the desert dwellers did not built up an
appreciation of private property in land. Furthermore, the desert compelled cooperation. Either the people worked together or they died. The water at the well was for everyone, and the oasis sheltered all alike. It was all very democratic.

Palestine, on the other hand, was different. It was a walled city, and for hundreds of years, it had been occupied by farmers and traders. Every inch of the land was controlled.

Onto this land came the Hebrews with their simple desert democracy and their God. The ideas of these two groups were bound to conflict. It was not easy for Israel to choose. A man's feelings are different about a field that he has plowed and sweated over from those about an unoccupied desert. The idea of a Hebrew clan was a new concept in this farming country. Farming stimulated interest in private property, and with private property came the possibility of one man getting more than another. Palestine had accepted that idea for centuries, but, to the Hebrews, it was a new and puzzling problem. The Hebrews acquired land but retained their clan loyalty and still worshiped their God. However, the Hebrews could not resist meeting their neighbors at the shrine festivals. As a result, problems of idolatry, immorality, and a growing economic oppression crystallized. The Aramean wars ended, and, as usual, war had to be paid for. Taxes mounted; money was borrowed; debts came due. Slowly the national wealth got into the hands of a smaller privileged class. The free landholding, property-owning group gradually succumbed to paganism. Because of the concentration of wealth which
drained off the economic surplus of the community, the masses were in poverty. The importing of great new quantities of gold and silver forced prices upward. Men were compelled to mortgage their lands, their persons, or their children to pay the exactions. Many of the free Israelites lost their land and became slaves, while those who had an initial advantage amassed lands and money.\textsuperscript{36}

The wealth was concentrated among the leaders in the courts, the army, and the professional groups of priests and "wise men." They lived in a style of luxury which was a startling contrast to the poverty of their neighbors. The mass of people were farmers, fruit growers, herdsmen, small merchants, artisans, unskilled wage-laborers, and slaves. There was no systematic education of children, and literacy was largely confined to the professional scribes. The juxtaposition within narrow confines of luxury and destitution, judicial corruption and commercial dishonesty, debauchery among the wealthy, and struggle for private gain by the community's leaders undermined the integrity of the nation. At such times crimes of violence and immorality were common. Thieves infested the highways, and neither life nor property was safe.\textsuperscript{37}

Amos was the first prophet who recorded his message, and thus he became the first writing prophet in the Old Testament. Most of his message concerned economic and social issues. Amos told the Israelites about God's judgment on them, for they had sold out and enslaved their countrymen; they were
immoral; they were criminal. According to Amos, ritualism had supplanted religion, and the people were worse off at their religious exercises than at home. Amos attacked the youth, and, with barbed sarcasm, he denounced their music, their excessive drinking, and their overly adorned bodies. The Hebrew women, he declared, were overfed, overindulged creatures with all the characteristics of "donkeyhood." They degraded womanhood. They were weakening their country, and, according to Amos, when the womanhood of a nation loses its idealism, that nation faces doom.38

The message of Amos was in direct opposition to the prevailing thought of his age. It was largely one of rebuke and of judgment. In the manner of all the great prophets, he spoke to the needs of his time. He rebuked those sins that he felt were responsible for men making war against individuals and other nations. Mainly Amos's message covered four major areas of social and religious sins: (1) Amos rebuked man's inhumanities to man. This unbrotherly cruelty expressed itself both passively and aggressively. He rebuked the nations for their heartless cruelty to those whom they had conquered. It was a matter of the weak and the poor being exploited by the strong and the rich. Passively, this aggressive cruelty and injustice went hand in hand with a heartless indifference. Absorbed with their winnings and in their own schemes, the greedy grafters had no thought for the needs of others. (2) Along with this accumulation of wealth had come an orgy of dissipation. According to Amos, the grinding down of one
group by another hurts the oppressed, but, generally speaking, it hurts the oppressors even more. (3) A third sin that Amos rebuked was that of self-sufficient pride. The affluent were sure of themselves. Along with this pride of prosperity and success, there was a swelling pride of race. They were the people God had chosen, not because of His own goodness and mercy, but because of their goodness. (4) Finally, Amos rebuked his people for their blindness. The religion of Moses had taught them that God was a God of righteousness, but they had convinced themselves that God was interested in ritual rather than in right living. Amos made it clear that such mingling of wickedness and worship could not please God.\(^{39}\)

The book of Amos in the Bible is divided into three parts: the introduction, three sermons, and the epilogue. The introduction includes the first two chapters and is a survey chapter describing the people to whom he is speaking and condemning some of their characteristic sins. The three sermons, found in chapters three, four, and five-six, tell of Israel's privileges, and describe the special penalties which will be exacted from the Hebrews. The last of the three sermons denounces the sins which have engulfed the nation, recalls the warnings which have been neglected, and then proclaims the mourning of that "Day of Jehovah" when the Assyrian invaders will execute the righteous indignation of God. Amos used several symbolic comparisons in his five visions of judgment. Among these are (1) locusts (7:1-3), (2) fire (7:4-6), (3) the plumb-line (7:7-9), (4) summer-fruit (8:1-3), and
(5) the smitten sanctuary (9:1-8). The last part of the book is the epilogue. In this part is found the element of hope and the final restoration of prosperity to the Israelites. Amos's solution to the prevailing problems was simple. The Hebrews must elevate the standard of national life, and womanhood must be fit for motherhood and for character building. A generation of good mothers was offered as a solution to many moral problems. The youth must concern themselves with serious matters. As it was, they lived an unbalanced life. The solution to many a youth problem, said Amos, was just a bit of commonsense and balance in life. Frolic must be balanced by thought and constructive effort. Amos also insisted that the people restore real religion, change their motives, and make justice and rightfulness the rule of life. Amos's supreme solution to man's problems was justice and rightfulness. In return, Amos promised salvation for the faithful remnant.

In addition to attacking social problems, Amos's message also included some predictions. In 750 B.C., he predicted the end of the Northern Kingdom. It came to an end in 732 B.C. How did Amos arrive at his conviction that Israel was doomed to punishment and exile? Not by way of an intimate knowledge of or keen insight into the course of international politics. As a matter of fact, Amos did not name the agent through whom this punishment was to be executed. It is not at all likely that he knew. Assyria, the perennial world power, was suffering a continuous decline of power and was in no condition
to be regarded by any observer as an imminent peril to her neighbors about 750 B.C. Nor was the situation in Egypt at that time any more threatening to western Asia. The only thing of which he seems to have been certain was that God was about to punish Israel for its sins. In still another prediction, Amos told Amaziah, the chief priest, "Your wife will play the harlot in the city; your sons and daughters will fall by the sword; your land will be distributed by measure; and you yourself will die upon an unclean soil; and Israel will be entirely carried into exile."

The message of Amos was ignored by both the captors and the captives. Biblical historians say that, in all probability, Amos returned to Tekoa. His predictions came true; the Hebrew nation was destroyed.

Nearly two hundred years passed before Ezekiel, the earliest exilic prophet, came upon the scene. Unlike the uneducated Amos, Ezekiel was of priestly descent. He was regarded as a leader by his fellow exiles, and he enjoyed the authority of a prophet among the exiles. They often sought his counsel, although it was generally contrary to their desires. He exercised a pastoral care among his people and formed a spiritual center for those who were cut off from their land and its temple.

In 597 B.C. Jerusalem fell to Babylon, and, though the conquerors left the city unharmed, they immediately carried into exile some ten thousand of her choicest citizens, including Ezekiel. After the long trek from Jerusalem to Babylon,
the people lived in what amounted to a concentration camp on
the banks of the river or canal of Chebar, not far from Baby-
lon.\textsuperscript{45} They suffered greatly. They lost their homes. They
lost their native land. They lost friends and loved ones.
Many lost their faith in God. They were embittered and desperate.

During the twenty-two years of captivity, Ezekiel preached
a message of comfort to an almost hopeless people. Judah, he
said, would be restored, and God must surely triumph over the
powers of heathendom. Unlike Amos's vengeful God, Ezekiel
spoke of God as a loving shepherd who took care of his needy
flock. God, said Ezekiel, was not vindictive. He took no
pleasure in destroying the wicked. Ezekiel advanced the doc-
trine of individual responsibility to a group-conscious people.
To the Hebrew, sin was often thought of as a national respon-
sibility rather than a personal one. Since the book of Eze-
kial is a priestly one, it tells of an ideal state and a
religion that encompasses a perfected ritual. The nucleus of
this perfected situation was to come from the exiles, not
from among the survivors still in Palestine.\textsuperscript{46} Ezekiel's
themes concerned the empty pride and false confidence of his
compatriots in the reign of Zedekiah, their immoralities prac-
ticed as a part of the popular pagan cults, and the oppression
and the exploitation that flourished in Jerusalem. For these,
ruin would come. After this destruction of the state, he
encouraged belief in a restoration through powerful inter-
vention of God. He was always sensitive to his high respon-
sibility as a religious leader.\textsuperscript{47}
Ezekiel was more a writer than an orator, and his style of writing abounded in symbolism and allegory. In one symbolic vision, the prophet stood in a valley filled with the dry bones of people long dead. An angelic voice instructed him, and lo, the bones moved, assembled, and finally stood up as men in the flesh. Whether this symbolism grew out of Ezekiel's style of writing or whether it was a means of coded communication among the captives is not known. However, it was determined that the people did understand the message and obeyed the instructions of God through Ezekiel.

The book of Ezekiel, being priestly, dreams of an ideal religious state. The prophet used a symbolic comparison to describe this state. He compared the state to a great church; the population of the state would be the congregation; the constitution to govern the state would be the will of God; and the executors, or the governing body, would be the priests.

The great contribution of Ezekiel to the development of religious thought was individualism. Earlier prophets had been concerned primarily with the nation as a unit. Ezekiel insisted that the individual had a standing before God. He was not condemned because he was the descendant of guilty ancestors, and he could be redeemed from his own guilty past. God, according to Ezekiel, was just in His dealings, and the individual was judged by his own present conduct. 48

The predictions of Ezekiel can be divided chronologically into two parts: prior to 586 B.C., when Ezekiel told of the coming fall of Jerusalem; and after 586 B.C., when the city
fell to Nebuchadrezzar. Ezekiel spent twenty-two years as a captive predicting the restoration of the city of Jerusalem. The central theme of Ezekiel's theology was his conception of God as an all-powerful Deity who was compelled to destroy the Hebrews because they profaned the holiness of God. Ezekiel, however, offered hope of a restoration to all those who remained faithful to God. Another prediction in symbolism was made by Ezekiel concerning a great world conflict. In listing the countries that would eventually fall into ignominy, the prophet used national names such as Rosh, Gog, Gugu, Magog, and Paras. Although many interpretations of this world conflict have been described by various writers, biblical scholars disagree whether this is an accomplished or a yet-unfulfilled prediction.

The failure of events to justify some of his predictions tended to discredit Ezekiel, but the two most important predictions came true: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem, and (2) the restoration of the city in 37 B.C. under Herod the Great.

From this review of the writings of theologians and of the practices of the Old Testament prophets, there are three general categories which have emerged as characteristics of the rhetoric of prophecy.

First of all, the nation to which the prophet appears is in a state of social discontentment. Thus, the following criteria have been used to determine whether a nation is susceptible to the rhetoric of prophecy: (1) The people are
either a captive people, or a people during a social, political, or economic transition, or in the midst of corruption and subsequent plenty. (2) There is a struggle between the haves and the have-nots, those in power and those denied access to power.

Secondly, the prophet himself is deeply concerned with the social disorder of the nation and views his role as being a deliverer of the people in need in spite of personal risks. Thus, the following criteria have been used to determine whether King exhibited the characteristics of a prophet. (1) He feels a direct call from God to be a spokesman for Him to a specific group of people. (2) He speaks out enthusiastically for God. (3) He is a preacher rather than a teacher. (4) He exhibits social awareness and sees religion as a means of social transformation. (5) He is a man of action regardless of the consequences. (6) He speaks out in a time of crisis. (7) He is aware of the social conditions of his time and the relationship of those conditions on the lives of the people to whom he is speaking.

The above conditions produce the rhetoric of prophecy, for when the context of the times is ripe for a prophet, he usually appears and speaks out in an effort to help the oppressed people. In speaking out, he employs rhetoric, or specifically the rhetoric of prophecy. The following are criteria which have been used to determine whether King's speeches exemplified the rhetoric of prophecy.
The rhetoric of prophecy tends to contain certain themes: (1) It condemns the social and religious sins of a group of people, even the leaders, both religious and secular. (2) It includes predictions of what God will do as a result of these sins. (3) It includes an element of hope. Additionally, certain strategies are usually employed: (1) It advocates a peaceful approach to the problem. Patience is an important virtue; God, not man, is a Vindicator. (2) It advocates a plan of action which is practical in that it represents a solution to the problem. Finally, the rhetoric of prophecy has an impressive and lofty style which abounds in parables and metaphors which are stated in a language familiar to the hearers and about situations within the experiences of the audience.

Thesis Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
   A. Purpose of the study
   B. Selection of the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.
   C. Methods of approach
      1. Times that produced prophetic rhetoric
      2. Message of the Old Testament prophets
      3. Language of the prophets
      4. An analysis of the lives, times, and messages of Amos and Ezekiel
   D. Chapter outline

II. A social and political comparison of the American Negroes and the Hebrews
   A. A comparative history of the two groups
   B. An analysis of the majority groups which held the Hebrews and American Negroes in physical, social, and economic captivity
   C. A comparison of the social and economical position of both oppressed groups
III. The elements of prophecy in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.
   A. A summary of King's early life and education
   B. King's participation in civil rights activities
   C. An analysis of the prophetic elements in his life based on the criteria from Chapter I

IV. An analysis of the prophetic message in King's speeches
   A. Introduction to the five selected speeches
   B. An analysis of the speeches based on the criteria established in Chapter I

V. Summary and evaluations
FOOTNOTES


2 Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro is Your Brother," Atlantic, CCXII (August, 1968), pp. 78-84.

3 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," Phylon, XVIII (April, 1957), pp. 31-35.


9 Carl Sumner Knopf, Ask the Prophets (New York, 1938), p. 27.


11 Knopf, p. 19.


13 Knopf, p. 20.


15 R. B. Y. Scott, p. 43

16 R. B. Y. Scott, p. 52.

17 R. B. Y. Scott, p. 89.

18 R. B. Y. Scott, p. 5.
26 Knopf, pp. 172-173.
21 Benjamin O. Herring, Studies in the Prophets (Nashville, 1944), p. 73.
23 R. B. Y. Scott, pp. 16-17.
24 Knopf, p. 158.
30 Smith, p. 66.
31 Smith, p. 70.
32 Smith, p. 61.
33 Knopf, p. 22.
34 Knopf, p. 32.
35 Knopf, p. 31.
36 Knopf, p. 33.
37 Knopf, p. 36.
38 Knopf, p. 71-73.
40 Knopf, p. 40.
41 Knopf, p. 36-40.


45. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 714.


47. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 714.

48. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 714.

49. Hal Lindsey, in The Late Great Planet Earth, describes an impending world conflict and identifies "Roth" as Russia, etc.


52. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 715.
CHAPTER II

A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMPARISON OF THE
AMERICAN NEGROES AND THE HEBREWS

The forced exile is certainly an unhappy man. He is uprooted from his native soil and transplanted in a strange land and sits at the perimeter of the affairs of his adopted country awaiting a leader who will give him hope. The Hebrews lived in physical bondage under the Babylonians awaiting Ezekiel. The Hebrews of Amos's time lived in economical and social bondage as newcomers to the old and settled inhabitants of Jerusalem. They awaited a leader who would lead them from the despair of being second-class citizens. The American Negroes also awaited leadership. In the United States, white men held the Negro in physical bondage for nearly two hundred years and then in mental and economical bondage for the next hundred years.

There appear to be several similarities between the Old Testament Hebrews during the prophetic periods of Amos and Ezekiel and the Negroes in the United States:

(1) Both became exiles when they were brought from their native land to become slaves and were an important part of the economy of their captors.

(2) Both groups were overshadowed by a people who had developed a higher degree of art, science, and education.
(3) Both groups expressed their unhappiness of their physical bondage with songs of lament.

(4) Both groups were forced into a lower social position by the majority when they were no longer slaves.

(5) As a free people, the former slaves were given the most unskilled jobs, and their wages were usually lower than the majority.

(6) To a large degree, both minority groups, by choice or pressure, segregated themselves from the majority—physically, socially, and economically.

(7) Both groups were targets of local law-enforcement officials who were often prejudiced toward the minority groups.

(8) Both groups presented a threat to the status quo.

During the time of Ezekiel, the Hebrews had been captured by the Babylonians. They were forced to live in concentration camps and served as slave laborers for their captors. Perhaps because of this physical separation from Israel and having lost their homeland and property, the captives became virtually uninterested in the affairs of the Babylonians and more interested in the destiny of the Hebrew people. They strongly advocated divine vengeance upon their captors when they could no longer depend upon human revenge. The Hebrews, then, became a lonely people, content with their own tribal customs and affairs. They became narrow, bigoted, and wholly detached from the rest of mankind. As long as there was no active leadership among the Hebrews, and as long as Babylon ruled, Hebrew destiny was at a standstill and the Babylonians had no fear of any political activity from them. Therefore, the Babylonians enjoyed the status quo. As a result of being
cast into second-class citizenship, the Hebrews felt the humiliating brand of servitude. Supremacy and power had long been a part of Hebrew legacy; therefore, to the Hebrew, servitude was a sign of disgrace.³

Some Hebrews during the time of Amos were liberated, but they were in the minority. For the most part, they were farmers, unskilled wage-laborers, and paid servants to the old and settled citizens of Jerusalem. They had no political power and were not appointed to judicial positions. Their children were largely illiterate because there was no system of education offered them. Social positions and privileges for the Hebrews were carefully defined by custom and law. Differing little in condition from the slaves were the "hirelings," the poor Hebrews who possessed nothing but their labor power.⁴

During the time of Amos, the Hebrews were often victims of unjust administration of law. Although the king was the head of the state, the general administration of justice was in the hands of local elders who heard arguments and gave decisions in the presence of the citizens. Often these local officials were unqualified to administer unbiased justice, and the Hebrews found themselves at the mercy of prejudiced men.⁵

For the most part, the picture of the Hebrew during the time of Amos closely resembles the picture of the Negro in American history. After 1661, when the Virginia Colony gave statutory recognition to slavery as a system, the Negro became
a vital part of Southern economy. With the invention of the
cotton gin and the advance of the Cotton Kingdom into the old
Southwest, the black was bound to the South by further eco-
nomic fetters. During the period that followed the end of
the Reconstruction, the Negro learned what was to be his
place as a citizen in the reunited nation. It was a position
that lacked physical dignity and economic opportunity. The
issue of slavery was dead. Segregation was now the way of
life.

Progress within the framework of segregation was slow,
and as Negroes rose in socioeconomic status, they withdrew
more and more into the isolation of the Negro community,
leading a life that was completely unknown to most white
people. The drift of Negroes into urban centers, impersonal
and segregated, facilitated this isolation.

As had the Hebrews before them, the Negroes, too, knew
the meaning of injustice and inequality under the law. During
the first half of the twentieth century, the white man learned
that the best way of keeping the black man "in his place" was
to beat him, jail him, and lynch him. Many of the municipal
and state laws of the South, especially in the criminal code,
were unjust to blacks. That which might be classified as a
misdemeanor for the white often became a felony when a black
was charged. Policemen and sheriffs were white and were
often sadistic and brutal to blacks.

Blacks continued to follow the pattern of the liberated
minority in educational and economical opportunities. They
lagged dangerously behind the whites in educational preparation for the type of society that they were about to enter.\(^9\)

For many white Americans, the 1950's was an era of prosperity, but for a large percentage of Negroes entering the labor market, it was a time of economic hardship. Many young Negroes had already fallen into the abyss of unemployment, and even those Negroes who were supposedly secure in their unskilled and semi-skilled jobs were closer to the brink of unemployment than they or anyone else realized.\(^10\)

The National Committee on Employment of Youth estimated that, in Negro slum neighborhoods, a youth unemployment rate ran as high as thirty-five to forty percent, with a fifty percent rate for dropouts.\(^11\)

This lack of opportunity bred discontentment, and discontentment demanded leaders who understood their problems.

There were solutions to these problems. Negroes wanted an equal opportunity to advance economically. In the structure of education, the position of the "New Black" has been defined by Theo Smith as follows:

> My most effective role in tomorrow's society will be to lead the advancement of Black Power; and I, the New Black, dedicate my life to that role . . . . We at Exeter are here to obtain knowledge of ourselves, and when we become leaders, we will derive our strength not from your friendship, or your brains, or your money, but from ourselves.\(^12\)

The final similarity between the American Negro and the Hebrew was the songs of lament that became a part of his individual culture during the days of slavery, and which continued to be important after his physical liberation. The Hebrew slaves occupied their minds during this period by
writing poems and songs describing their conditions, their hopelessness, and their longings to return to their native land. The book of Lamentations is a collection of these songs and poems. In this book, the author (or authors) recalled the days before captivity (chapters one and five). He deplored the conditions as they were (chapter five, verses two-fifteen). One story is told of a lonely captive who sat by a canal and was tormented by the native freemen he saw around him. Another is the story of an exile who longed to be a beggar at the Temple, which was located in his native Jerusalem, rather than to share the Babylonian luxury. In many ways these songs and poems are similar to the Negro spirituals sung by the slaves. It seems, perhaps, that captivity demands freedom of expression, and both captive people found that release in the sad and mournful songs they sang.

In comparing the Hebrews and the American Negroes, Louis Rachames said:

There are many parallels to be found between the histories of the Jew and the Negro in America. None, however, seems to me to be so meaningful as the lesson that the rights that both our peoples enjoy today were not given us as gifts, without effort on our part. They have had to be fought for with courage and determination, by men who refused to accept the status of second-class citizenship . . . . It was affirmed by the prophets of Israel who exposed and attacked the evils about them though they paid for their criticism with contempt of their well-placed contemporaries, with jail, and even with their lives. It was expressed in the determination of Jews to accept exile from their homes and even the fires of the inquisition, rather than live as slaves to other men's opinions.
There are several parallels between the Old Testament Hebrews and the American Negroes. Both groups came to their adopted countries by force and spent years in physical captivity. They were slaves and were a major part of the economy of their captors. The Babylonians had an advanced culture that boasted of superior advancements in art, science, and education. The American whites had the same advantages over the blacks. Both Hebrews and blacks expressed their unhappiness through song. When the Hebrews and blacks gained physical freedom, each group was forced into a low social position and was given only the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. As a result of this social and economical position, both peoples retreated into a segregated society that excluded their former masters. Both minorities received unfair treatment at the hands of prejudiced law-enforcement officials. Finally, the status quo was threatened by both the Hebrews and the Negroes, and, therefore, leadership in either of these two groups posed a danger to the majority.
FOOTNOTES


2 Knopf, p. 98.

3 Knopf, p. 113.


5 Knopf, p. 118.


7 Grigg, p. 4.


10 Mandelbaum, p. 118.


CHAPTER III

THE ELEMENTS OF PROPHECY IN THE LIFE OF

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The modern development of black activism for equal opportunity began with the passive resistance of Martin Luther King, Jr., a Negro minister who was the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference until his assassination on April 4, 1968. He was both practical and visionary: to implement the idea of equality, he helped organize sit-ins, freedom marches, and voter registrations. Some of these activities perhaps bore little fruit, but one year after his assassination, Reverend Jesse Jackson of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago said:

People ask what good did he do? Nobody but fools can ask that question. There wasn’t anybody hardly doing anything before Dr. King came on the scene. Today, black militants run up and down shouting, 'Liberation by any means.' Well, I can remember just ten years ago, those same militant cats didn’t get thirsty in a lot of places downtown. They didn’t get hungry, and they didn’t even have to go to the bathroom. Not downtown in a lot of cities.

Now they walk around talkin’ bad. Where were those cats when Rosa Parks decided to ride in the front of the bus in Montgomery in 1955? Their minds were in the back of the bus then, and Dr. King was workin’ on the case.¹
Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, into a middle-class Georgia family which had been active for two generations in the civil rights cause. He was the second child and, as the first-born son, was named after his father, Michael Luther King. The elder King, who was pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, changed both their names when Martin was five to honor the Reformation rebel who nailed his independent declaration to the Castle Church.  

King graduated from high school in Atlanta and entered Morehouse College at the age of fifteen. At Morehouse he picked the ministry as a vocation and pursued his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he was elected class president and outstanding student. It was at Crozer that King discovered the works of Hegel, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Gandhi, whose mystic faith in nonviolent protest became King's guide for the remainder of his life. It was easy for King to accept the philosophy of Gandhi for two reasons: King seemed to have a natural inclination for large ideas and concepts; and, the civil rights movement was based on a religious tradition. What King did was to turn the Negro's rooted faith in the church into a social and political revolution by welding the image of Gandhi and the image of the Negro preacher. King's added ingredients were the Negro's songs and symbols, some of which had been familiar to the Negro since slavery. From Gandhi, King also learned that the history of mankind is crowded with evidence proving that force does not always result in moral regeneration; that
the sinful inclination of man can be subdued only by love; and
that evil can be exterminated from the earth only by good-
ness. As King said, "There is great security in being gentle,
harmless, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy; that it is
only the meek who shall inherit the earth, for the violent who
resort to the sword are destined to perish with the sword." The
influence of Gandhi in King's life can best be summed up
by this statement from King himself: "From my background, I
gained my regulating Christian ideals. From Gandhi I learned
my operational technique." Jim Bishop called King "the
Black Gandhi of America."

From Hegel, King learned of an analysis of the dialec-
tical process and of progress and growth through pain. He
was also impressed by Hegel's theory that "World-historical
individuals" were agents by which "the will of the World
Spirit" is carried out.

Of Walter Rauschenbusch, the articulate exponent of the
social gospel, King said, "He left an indelible imprint on
my thinking." King was fascinated by Rauschenbusch's book
*Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which told of the appli-
cation of the social principles of Jesus to the problems of
the modern world. Thereafter, the "social gospel"—the
idea that the church should take a direct, active role in
the struggle for social justice—became a pivotal element in
King's personal philosophy. Rathbun said there were four
areas of the social gospel that King adopted into his rhe-
toric: (1) the collective guilt of institutional forms,
(2) the divine judgment on public policies and actions,
(3) the prophetic quality of the deeply religious life, and
(4) the primacy of love for the individual and his institutions. Rathbun further stated that King's reading in the social gospel led him to believe that good ultimately prevails over evil and that social justice finally triumphs over the "fanatical resistance" of institutionalized evil.

King graduated from Crozer Seminary in 1951 at the head of his class and won the Pearl Plafkner Award for scholarship, as well as the J. Lewis Crozer Fellowship. He received his Ph. D. in 1953 at Boston University. In 1954, King became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

Shortly after King began his active involvement in the civil rights movement, Peter Schrag wrote the following: "It is a great art, possibly the greatest art, to know when to move, when to break roots, often in pain and tears, when to shake hands and say goodbye, when to shake old soil off growing feet and strike out, not looking back, for the new. It is a great art to know when to do this—and Martin Luther King, Jr. seemed to know it." Apparently, King's time to move came as a result of an incident that happened on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955.

Rosa Parks, a seamstress and local secretary of the NAACP for years, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. As a result of her arrest for disturbing the peace, King was invited to join a committee for a one-day boycott of
all the city buses by Montgomery's Negro population. After
the boycott's first successful day, the black leaders of
Montgomery organized the Montgomery Improvement Association
and unanimously elected Martin Luther King, Jr. its first
president.16

Benjamin E. Mays, president emeritus of Morehouse College
in Atlanta, said this concerning King's position on the
Montgomery Improvement Association:

It may be that only one man in ten million could
have led the Montgomery boycott without that city
exploding into one of the worst race riots in his-
tory. If he had accepted a position on the faculty
at Morehouse, he may have never developed into the
kind of man that he was. If Rosa Parks had behaved
as Negroes in Montgomery and in the South were supposed
to behave, get up and let a white man have her seat,
the Montgomery Improvement Association would hardly
have been organized. If the organization had chosen
another person other than King to communicate the
Negroes' grievances to the city father, Dr. King
may have gone through life as a successful Baptist
preacher and no more. His rare ability to lead and
inspire the classes as well as the masses, in a
crusade for social justice, may have never been
called forth.

But he was thrust into leadership at a crucial
moment in the history of the city of Montgomery,
perhaps in the history of the United States. The
time and the right man met. Here young King had to
draw upon all that he had learned and read at More-
house, Crozer, and other non-violent writers; and
all that he had gained through meditation and
prayer. Only an exceptional mind, a rare spirit,
and an abiding faith could have enabled Dr. King
to be absolutely fearless and absolutely non-
violent, in jail and out, when stabbed and
threatened, and when his home and family are
constantly harassed and at one time came near
being destroyed by bombs.

To some, the rise of Martin Luther King, Jr.
to world reknown is just an accident. To others
it is the divine hand.17
Furthermore, Mays said: "Significant, indeed, is the fact that he did not seek the leadership in the Montgomery controversy. It was thrust upon him by the people."\textsuperscript{18}

It was shortly after the Rosa Parks incident and the successful boycott of Montgomery buses that King became known for his nonviolent philosophy in seeking social change. The reaction to him was not always favorable.

As a result of the boycott, King received much verbal and physical abuse, which finally culminated in the bombing of his home. It was at this point in his life, a January night in 1956, that King told of an experience that was to be the turning point in his life. He was sitting in the kitchen of his home, finally aware of the real dangers that would come to him and his family if he continued the work that he had begun with the civil rights movement. At that time he told God that he couldn't go any further alone: "I am here taking a stand before them without strength and courage; they, too, will falter; I am at the end of my powers, I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." After this plea for help, King became aware of the "presence of the Divine," and he thought he heard the "quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.'" After this experience, King said, "My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."\textsuperscript{19}

The boycott resulted in a position of national leadership for King. On May 17, 1956, he was invited to speak at
the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. In August, he appeared before the platform committee of the Democratic National Convention. By the spring of 1957, he was one of America's most sought-after speakers. He had appeared on the covers of both Time and Jet. Articles appeared in almost every large American periodical and many foreign newspapers. Most of them were favorable. Jet called King "a kind of modern Moses who has brought new self-respect to Southern Negroes." 20

King set the stage for the ultimate liberation of the Negro by freeing him from the white man's definition of being black. Before King, black people had forgotten how to believe strongly in themselves, each other, or in their leaders. In Montgomery, Negroes learned to talk together, pray together, march together, and sit-in together in the name of civil rights. When the Negroes achieved this unity, the course of events was predictable. It is difficult to hold people back who believe in themselves and in each other.21 Thousands of Negroes sacrificed convenience, security, and the goodwill of the white population to follow King under circumstances that were uncertain, dangerous, and against established tradition and circumspection.22

In the spring of 1958, King was arrested on a charge of perjury in the filing of his 1956 and 1957 state income tax returns. On May 29, 1958, he was acquitted by a jury of twelve white men. After the acquittal, author James Baldwin made these observations while listening to King's sermon
entitled, "Autobiography of Suffering:" M King spoke more candidly than I had ever heard him speak before, of his bitterly assaulted price, of his shame, when he found himself accused, before all the world, of having used and betrayed the people of Montgomery by stealing the money they had entrusted to him." Now King was beginning to understand that the Biblical injunction, "overcome evil with good," does not mean necessarily that good will triumph over evil.\(^{23}\)

Those in high political positions whose attitudes stood in the way of the progress of the Negro were not immune to King's rhetorical attacks. Even though President Kennedy's influence had earned King's release from the Reidsville State Prison in Tatnall County, Alabama, in October, 1961, King openly denounced the President for "critical indecisiveness" by the end of Kennedy's first year in office:

It is not only that the administration too often retreated in haste from a battle field which it has proclaimed a field of honor, but more significantly its basic strategic goals have been narrowed. Its efforts have been directed toward limited accomplishments in a number of areas, affecting individuals and altering old patterns only superficially. Changes in depth and breadth are not yet in sight, nor has there been a commitment of resources adequate to enforce extensive change. It is a melancholy fact that the administration is aggressively driving only toward the limited goal of token integration . . . . Many people of good will accept the achievement of steady advances, even when fractional. They feel simple addition must eventually accumulate a totality of social gains which will answer the problem. Others, however, viewing the task from the long perspective of history, are less sanguine. They are aware that the struggle being waged is against an opposition capable of most tenacious resistance, either actively or through constant exertion.
To illustrate, it is not practical to integrate buses, and then over an extended period of time expect to add another gain, and then another and another. Unfortunately, resistance stiffens after each limited victory; inertia sets in, and the forward movement not only slows down, but is often reversed entirely. What is required to maintain gains is an initial sweep of positive action so far-reaching that it immobilizes and weakens the adversary, thus depriving him of his power to retaliate. . . . In short, what is required is massive social mobilization uniting the strength of individuals, organizations, government, press, and schools.

King apparently saw no evidence that the Kennedy Administration was prepared to mobilize the required social energy. His assessment of the first year of the New Frontier was harsh: "From this perspective, the New Frontier is unfortunately not new enough; and the Frontier is set too close to the rear."24

Such attacks were bound to bring retribution. King was under no illusion about the depths of American racism that has been a part of American history. King had confronted police dogs and fire hoses; his house had been bombed; he had been abused by mobs of all colors and descriptions. "Negroes," he said after the shooting of John F. Kennedy, "know political assassination well. In the life of Negro civil rights leaders, the whine of the bullet from ambush, the roar of the bomb have all too often broken the night's silence."25 He expected violent responses to nonviolent tactics. "We often must begin a march," he wrote, "without knowing when or where it will actually terminate."26

In 1964, King was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. He was the third black man, the twelfth American, and the
youngest person ever to be so honored. As he stood before an audience of dignitaries in Oslo, Norway, on December 10, 1964, he was true to his cause and to his commitment. He said he did not consider the prize "an honor to me personally," but a tribute to those who sought to establish a reign of justice. He donated his purse of $54,600 to their fight.

According to *Time*, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a transcendent Negro. He bridged the void between black despair and white unconcern. King spoke so powerfully of and from the wretchedness of the Negro's condition that he "became the moral guide of civil rights not only to Americans but also to the world beyond. If not the actual catalyst, he was the legitimizer of progress toward racial equality. His role and reputation may have been thrust upon him, but King was amply prepared for the thrust."28

At the time of King's death, Schrag wrote:

It was King, more than any other single man, who carried the battle for racial justice to the front door of America. It was King who gave the American Negro his own national voice, and who transformed the leadership and the tone of the civil rights movement from armchair liberalism and judicial litigation to the radicalism of direct action and the rhetoric of an indigenous popular movement . . . . For him the promised land was not an exit from this world but an entrance, a rap on the locked shutters of the national conscience . . . . In his New Jerusalem, the Negro would not simply absorb all the existing values of the white society but become a 'creative dissenter' calling the nation to a 'new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.' The Negro, with his deep experience of suffering would renew America.29
In the midst of plans for a "Poor People's March on Washington," King made the second of two trips to Memphis to rally support for the garbage collectors who were on strike for better wages and improved working conditions. While in Memphis, he was murdered by an assassin as King stood on a balcony of the Lorraine Hotel. It was the fourth of April, 1968.

At King's funeral, Benjamin Mays paid this lasting tribute:

God called the grandson of a slave on his father's side, and the grandson of a man born during the Civil War on his mother's side, and said to him: 'Martin Luther, speak to America about war and peace; about social justice and racial discrimination; about its obligation to the poor; and about nonviolence as a way of perfecting social change in the world of brutality and war.'

The periodical America associated King with biblical prophecy in the following eulogy:

Martin Luther King denounced one sin, one wickedness, of men. The evil he denounced was 'the sin of our time, the sin of the respectable, of the good, the sin that has been laundered and tricked out as relatively innocent, quite understandable, and--after some token penance--best forgotten rather than repented. It is that black sin against the black man that has been white-washed, aptly enough, by the white man. This prophet warned that America would pay for its sin. We are so paying, and will pay for a long time to come.

But above all else, Martin Luther King was a prophet of hope and not of doom. 'I have a dream,' he cried again and again in his most eloquent hour; and, on the night before he died: 'I have seen the Promised Land. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.' As he believed in the ultimate might of nonviolence, so did he strongly believe in the ultimate triumph of racial justice in these United States. He would not have it otherwise than that one
day the black American and the white American would face one another not as sworn enemies, but as blood brothers, would face one another and shake the other's hand in equal dignity and opportunity and mutual respect, with unfeigned love.

It seems, therefore, that King's speaking might fulfill the requirements set forth in the criteria of the prophet. He did feel that his was a direct calling from God. He experienced this call in the quiet of his home, during a period of crisis, and said that this calling represented the turning point in his life. He spoke out enthusiastically for God, not only in his sermons, but in most of his rhetoric spoken in various non-religious situations. King was a preacher by profession. He saw religion as a means of social transformation, and his respect of Rauschenbusch's social gospel theory was demonstrated in many of his speeches for social reform. Many times King spoke out in situations that might result in jail sentences and physical abuse. There is little evidence that he tried to avoid such situations. Even the bombing of his home and the threat of physical harm did not stop King from participating in the civil rights movement. The plight of the American Negro in the early 1950's was indeed a time of crisis. The Rosa Parks incident was the first in a long series of crises that King, by choice or pressure, championed. Behind much of King's social reform was his continued awareness of the conditions of the American Negro. Over and over again he spoke out against prejudice, intolerance, and the status of the Negro as a
second-class citizen. It seems, therefore, apparent that King's life fits the pattern of an Old Testament prophet.
FOOTNOTES


3 Lerone Bennett, Jr., What Manner of Man (Chicago, 1964), p. 33.

4 Bennett, p. 25.

5 Bennett, p. 28.

6 Bennett, p. 26.


8 Bishop, p. 141.

9 Bennett, pp. 33-41.

10 Bennett, p. 40.

11 Bennett, p. 41.


15 Schrag, p. 20.

16 Bishop, pp. 138-139.

17 Bennett, p. ix.

18 Bennett, p. 80.

19 Bennett, p. 28.

20 Bennett, p. 79.

21 Bennett, pp. 88-89.
22 Lincoln, p. xiii.
23 Lincoln, p. xii.
24 Bennett, pp. 116-118.
26 Schrag, p. 21.
27 "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Ebony, XXIII (May, 1968) p. 135.
29 Schrag, p. 19.
31 "Will This Prophet Be Heard?" America, CXVIII (April 20, 1968), p. 532.
CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE
IN KING'S SPEECHES

The rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. was both prodigious and prolific. From the solemnity of the Nobel ceremonies to the evangelistic Baptist pulpit, his speeches coincided with or helped to set the mood of the occasion. Many of his speeches were liberally sprinkled with biblical metaphors which reflected both his background and his profession. The five speeches to be analyzed were selected because each represents a different rhetorical situation. The two sermons, "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" and "Love in Action," are examples of King's ministry at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. The Nobel speech was delivered before dignitaries and world leaders. "I Have a Dream" and "I've Been to the Mountaintop" were delivered to inspire active participation in the civil rights movement. These selected speeches apparently represent a few of the many facets of the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Both the sermons, "Love in Action" and "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," were delivered to a predominantly Negro, Baptist congregation at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of
Montgomery, Alabama. Both were written early in King’s involvement in the civil rights movement and were prepared specifically as sermons.

The text of "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" was taken from Matthew 10:16: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." The circumstances of the biblical audience and King’s audience were similar. Jesus preached the original text to the disciples when they faced opposition from the Roman rule, when Christian doctrine was treason in the eyes of the Romans. King preached to the Negroes who were emerging with a new order, and he warned about opposition of the Southern whites, who enjoyed the status quo.

"Love in Action" was taken from Luke 23:34: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The text was taken from the story of the crucifixion of Christ. The guilt denounced in this sermon is the sin of omission. The text is divided into two major areas: the ability to match words with action, and the inability of the morally blind to make good choices.

The third speech chosen for analysis is King’s acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in December, 1964. This speech was delivered before the elite of the educational and political world. They were not predominantly black; they were not oppressed. For eight years prior to this time, King had proclaimed that his mission was "brotherhood" between Southern blacks and the sons of former slave-owners. In Oslo, for the first time, he embraced the Orientals. His reference
to the Caribbeans and South Americans was also another first for him.\textsuperscript{2}

The fourth speech, "I Have a Dream," was delivered in Washington, D. C., on August 28, 1963. At this time, King spoke before a larger and more heterogeneous audience than ever before. This audience was composed of more than 210,000 marchers, plus a national television audience. The speech reflected a new approach in King's thinking about confrontation. This new idea was based on the concept that nothing substantial would happen in the field of race relations if men and communities were not forced to face the evils of segregation. He had come to believe that direct action was indispensable for racial progress. "Pressure, even conflict," he said, "was an unfortunate but necessary element in social change."\textsuperscript{3}

The fifth speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," was delivered in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 3, 1968. It was his last speech. The speech followed the near chaos which had begun as a protest movement to support the Memphis garbage collectors in their efforts to gain better working conditions. The address was delivered at the Mason Street Temple before a national television audience and more than two thousand rain-soaked listeners inside the church. Jim Bishop described King's words as "lachrymose, honed with sorrow, self-pity, and death . . . . King was preaching his funeral oration all the way."\textsuperscript{4}
The criteria of the rhetoric of prophecy which was developed in Chapter I have been used in the analysis of these five speeches. The rhetoric of prophecy is characterized by the following:

1. It should condemn the social and religious sins of a group of people, even the leaders, both religious and secular.

2. It should predict what God will do as a result of these sins.

3. It should include an element of hope.

4. It should advocate a peaceful approach to the problem. Patience is an important virtue; God, not man, is the Vindicator.

5. It should advocate a plan of action which is practical in that it represents a solution to the problem.

6. It should abound in parables and metaphors stated in language familiar to the hearers and about situations within the experience of the audience.

Condemnation of Social and Religious Sins

All five of the speeches selected contained condemnation of social and religious sins. In "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King condemned the narrow vision of the soft-minded when he said: "Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think." King used television advertisements as an example of "soft-mindedness;" "We are so easily led to purchase a product because a television or
radio advertisement pronounces it better than any other." He warned that all mass media tend toward slanted reporting. "Few people have the toughness of mind to judge critically and to discern the true from the false, the fact from the fiction."

King then attacked the Southern politician:

Too many politicians in the South recognize that this disease of softmindedness engulfs their constituency. With insidious zeal, they make inflammatory statements and disseminate distortions and half-truths which arouse abnormal fears and morbid antipathies within the minds of uneducated and underprivileged whites, leaving them so confused that they are led to acts of meanness and violence which no normal person commits.

Later in the same sermon, King also applied the "tough mind, tender heart" theory to the civil rights movement. "Soft-minded individuals among us feel that the only way to deal with oppression is by adjusting to it. They acquiesce and resign themselves to segregation. They prefer to remain oppressed." As an example of similar resignation, King reviewed the story of Moses and the children of Israel. Many of the Israelites did not want to leave the slavery of Egypt for the freedom of the Promised Land. "They would rather bear those ills they have, as Shakespeare pointed out, than flee to others that they know not of." King reminded his congregation that "We cannot win the respect of the white people of the South or elsewhere if we are willing to trade the future of our children for our personal safety and comfort. Moreover, we must learn that passively to accept
an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil."

In "Love in Action" King dealt with the social sin of slavery and white supremacy. "Slavery in America was perpetuated not merely by human badness but also by human blindness. . . . So men conveniently twisted the insights of religion, science, and philosophy to give sanction to the doctrine of white supremacy." This, said King, became a part of our culture and was exploited by men who were morally blind, not by bad men. "Millions of Negroes have been crucified by conscientious blindness." King concluded this sermon with this final condemnation of moral blindness:

Unlike physical blindness that is usually inflicted upon individuals as a result of natural forces beyond their control, intellectual and moral blindness is a dilemma which man inflicts upon himself by his tragic misuse of freedom and his failure to use his mind to its fullest capacity.

King's acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize began with three specific social and religious sins. These were incidents of violence inflicted by whites:

Only yesterday in Birmingham, Alabama, our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with firehoses, snarling dogs and even death. . . . yesterday in Philadelphia, Mississippi, young people seeking to secure the right to vote were brutalized and murdered.

King also condemned by rejection some of the socially accepted concepts of man:

I refuse to accept the idea that the 'isness' of man's present nature makes him morally incapable
of reaching up for the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life which surrounds him. . . . I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality. I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of . . . destruction.

In "I Have a Dream" King cited four specific social injustices that were yet to be corrected: (1) "the unspeakable horrors of police brutality," (2) "the unattainable motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities, (3) "insufficient housing," and (4) "the inability of the Southern Negro to vote."

In "I've Been to the Mountaintop," King, for the last time, attacked the social sins of America. He said at the beginning of this speech, "The world is all messed up. This nation is sick. Trouble is in the land." Later in the speech, he dealt with specific sins and used the injunction against the marchers as an example. King referred to the "illegal injunction" and the "unconstitutional unjunction." He accused Americans of not living up to "what you said on paper." The specific guaranteed liberties that the injunction denied, according to King, were: freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of assembly. King also named individuals when he suggested that the listeners "tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right."
Predictions

The predictions made in the rhetoric of prophecy are usually general, rather than specific, and tend to deal with what will happen as a result of ignoring or promoting social or religious sins. King made predictions in all five of the speeches analyzed in this study.

In "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King predicted the outcome of a soft-minded nation: (1) Men would be led "to acts of barbarity and terror that are unthinkable in civilized society." (2) "A nation or civilization that continues to produce soft-minded men purchases its own spiritual death on the installment plan." King also predicted the results of using violence in the struggle for freedom: "unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to them will be a never-ending reign of chaos. . . . History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow Christ's commands."

In "Love in Action" King made only one prediction when he foresaw the results of sins of omission, ignorance, and moral blindness: "Western civilization will continue to degenerate until it, like twenty-four of its predecessors, will fall hopelessly into a bottomless void. The cause will not be only its undeniable sinfulness, but also its appalling blindness."

King also made a single prediction in his Nobel Peace Prize speech, and this was in the form of a parable. In
predicting ultimate acceptance of the black by the white, King told the story of the lion and the lamb, two incompatible animals, which learned to lie down together in peace. This peaceful picture represented the compatibility of all mankind learning to live peacefully together.

"I Have a Dream" began with this prediction: "There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights." At the end of the speech, King used the closing line of the first verse of "America" to predict the ultimate victory for the Negro:

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!'

The only specific prediction which King made in "I've Been to the Mountaintop" was one at the beginning which set the mood for the entire speech. He said, "If something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed." Jim Bishop, King's biographer, said that in retrospect, some of King's followers felt that he also predicted his own death in this speech. Although the actual prediction is difficult to pinpoint, "Dr. King was overwhelmed with the thought of non-existence."10 The Reverend Andrew W. Young, executive vice-president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference,
said after the slaying that King's words in this speech "were
a premonition." Following his death, America said this in
an editorial:

As we listen now to the moving words Martin
Luther King uttered, close to tears, on the night
before he died, we are willing to believe that
this man, in some sort, peered into the misty
future and half glimpsed his death. Humbly and
simply he said: "I want to live"--as if he knew
he would not. "No matter," he said, gently brush-
ing aside his intimation of death, "I want to do
God's will." This good man spoke exactly as did
another on the night before he died.

The Element of Love

The third criterion for prophetic rhetoric is that the
message should contain an element of hope. All of these
speeches contained the elements of hope through God, love,
and equality.

King constantly urged his listeners to put their faith
and hope in God. He referred to this hope in the sermon
"Tough Mind and a Tender Heart." King noted: "He does not
leave us alone in our agonies and struggles. He seeks us in
the dark places and suffers with us and for us in our tragic
prodigality." Again, King said:

When we are staggered by the chilly winds of
adversity and battered by the raging storms of
disappointment and when through our folly and sin
we stray into some destructive far country and
are frustrated because of a strange feeling of
homesickness, we need to know that there is
Someone who loves us, cares for us, understands
us, and will give us another chance. When days
grow dark and nights grow dreary, we can be
thankful that our God combines in his nature a
creative synthesis of love and justice which will
lead us through life's dark valleys and into
sunlit pathways of hope and fulfillment.
These ideas, according to King in his speech, were the ultimate hope.

"Love in Action" cautioned against human revenge, and, at the same time, reminded the listeners that "only goodness can drive out evil and only love can conquer hate."

In the Nobel speech, King listed several areas in which hope is the foundation. These concepts are: (1) "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality."

(2) "I believe that ... justice ... will reign supreme among the children of men." Again, King summed up several affirmations of faith and hope for future generations. "I . . . believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits." Finally, King offered hope for all oppressed people in his final statement: "When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born."

King began the peroration of "I Have a Dream" by saying that his hope still lay in the American dream that all men are created equal. Three such dreams involved Southern states. Specifically mentioned were Georgia, where King dreamed that all men might one day sit down at "a table of brotherhood," Mississippi, which would be "transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice," and Alabama, "whose governor's
lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification," would one day become a state where children of all colors "will be able to join hands and walk together as sisters and brothers." King also hoped that his four children would one day "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." King ended this list of dreams with this biblical description: "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." It was this last dream that King called the "hope" of all Negroes. With this hope and faith, King promised that the Negroes would be able to "work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together" because one day they would be free.

King began "I've Been to the Mountaintop" with an element of hope. "I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding. Something is happening in our world."

In the conclusion, and perhaps the most famous part of this speech, King compared himself to the biblical Moses who was given a glimpse of the Promised Land which represented the ultimate goal of the Hebrew children after they had wandered in the wilderness. "I just want to do God's will,"
King said, "and He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land." Not only had King seen the promised land, but he promised his audience that, "I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."

A Peaceful Approach to the Problem

The fourth criterion for prophetic rhetoric is that the message should advocate a peaceful approach to the problem; therefore, patience is an important virtue because God, not man, is the Vindicator. Since nonviolence was King's key word, this philosophy was emphasized in each speech.

In "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" King warned: "There are hardhearted and bitter individuals among us who would combat the opponent with physical violence and corroding hatred." In return, King cautioned against retaliation. "Violence brings only temporary victories; violence, by creating many more social problems than it solves, never brings permanent peace."

In the Nobel speech, King often made reference to peace as the answer to world problems. "Nonviolence is the answer," King said in the opening paragraph. King, then, accepted the Nobel award because it "is in profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time—the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression."

Again, King emphasized that sooner or later "all people of the
world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood." The only way that this transformation can take place is for man to adopt a method which "rejects revenge, aggression and retaliations." King advised that "the foundation for such a method is love."

In "I Have a Dream" King spoke of the urgency of now. Lest, however, any listener should mistake urgency for violence, King cautioned, "In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence." The weapon the Negro must use to counteract physical force is "soul force."

In "Love in Action" King reminded his congregation that God is the Vindicator. He warned that "The potential beauty of human life is constantly made ugly by man's ever-recurring song of retaliation." According to King, "In spite of the fact that the law of revenge solves no social problems, men continue to follow its disastrous leading. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path."

"I've Been to the Mountaintop" gave King's alternative to nonviolence. "It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence. It is nonviolence or non-existence." Later
in this speech, King named the civil rights workers as "masters of nonviolence." Then King plotted the course of action for the march in support of the garbage workers. "We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles; we don't need any molotov cocktails." The plan called for withdrawal of economic support from businesses that did not recognize racial equality. Several prominent Memphis firms were boycotted by King. "Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal."

Champions the Poor

The fifth criterion used to determine prophetic elements in King's speeches is that the rhetoric should urge reform where injustice is prevalent and therefore it champions the poor and downtrodden. This feature is not found in "Love in Action," but it is found in the other four speeches.

King questioned the motive of charity in "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" when he warned that men seem to be "unmoved by the pains and afflictions of his brothers." Hardheartedness has resulted in men being able to pass "unfortunate men every day, but never really see them. He gives dollars to worthwhile charity, but he gives not of his spirit."

In his Nobel speech, King made it clear at the onset that he was speaking not solely for the American black man but for mankind. "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. Something within reminded the Negro of his birthright of freedom,
and something without has reminded him that it can be gained." Then King included other groups of depressed people—"his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers in Asia, South America and the Caribbean."

King began "I Have a Dream" with a list of examples to show that the Negro "is still not free." Instead of physical chains, the Negroes "are enslaved by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination." The purpose of the Freedom March, King said, was "to dramatize an appalling condition." King emphasized reform:

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice, to the solid rock of brotherhood.

One purpose of "I've Been to the Mountaintop" was to make public the condition of the garbage workers in Memphis. King said the issue was "injustice." "The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers."

In urging his audience to march again the next day, King reminded them that "there are thirteen hundred of God's children here suffering. Sometimes going hungry, going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out."

A Plan of Action

The only speech to outline a specific course of action was "I've Been to the Mountaintop." The garbage workers march
depended on a practical, workable, nonviolent strategy, and
King supplied it:

We just need to go around to these stores, and
to these massive industries in our country, and
say, "God sent us here, to say to you that you're
not treating his children right. And we've come
by here to ask you to make the first item on your
agenda fair treatment, where God's children are
concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do
that, we do have an agenda that we must follow.
And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic
support from you."

King, then, listed several business firms in Memphis which
the blacks should boycott, and he told why the boycott should
be put into effect. "We are choosing these companies because
they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are
choosing them because they can begin the process of saying
that they are going to support the needs and the rights of
these men who are on strike." Not only should some white
businesses be boycotted, but King urged that black businesses
be supported by blacks. King specifically named the banks
and insurance companies.

Although the other speeches did not include specific
plans, they did design general courses of action which included
methods of nonviolent resistance. In "Tough Mind and a Tender
Heart," King urged the Negroes to use the tough-mind, tender-
heart theory so that "we may move creatively toward the goal
of freedom and justice." In "I Have a Dream," King promised
that, if "we let freedom ring," one day "all God's chil-
dren . . . will be able to join hands and sing . . . 'Free
at last!'" A very simple plan was advocated in "Love in
Action." King simply said, "We have a mandate both to conquer sin and also to conquer ignorance."

Parables and Metaphors

The final criterion used is that the message should abound in parables and metaphors. These should be stated in a language familiar to the hearers and tell of situations within the experiences of the audience. Some of the parables used by King were taken from the Bible, while others were based on his own experiences. Most of the metaphors used by King were flavored with biblical overtones.

In demonstrating the folly of superstition in "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King told about a trip up in an elevator in New York City and of his surprise upon finding that the hotel had no thirteenth floor. He was told that this was the practice of most large hotels because of the fear of people to stay on a floor with that number. "The real foolishness of fear," said King, "is to be found in the fact that the fourteenth floor is actually the thirteenth."

King used this metaphorical phrase to describe the Negro in a white society. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." In describing a hardhearted person, King compared him to an isolated island and added, "No outpouring of life links him with the mainland of humanity."

King told a modern parable in his Nobel speech which demonstrated the necessity for unity. He reminded the audience that the successful trip was the result of the "unknown ground
crew* as well as the "known pilot." This was King's way of explaining that his long trip from the beginning of the racial equality acts to the acceptance of the Nobel prize was the work of many people. Some of the crusaders were as unknown as the plane's ground crew, and King cautioned that these unknown were just as important to the movement as the better known personalities. Without this large group, the movement would die. Other metaphorical language included in this speech includes: (1) King's refusal to accept "the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life." This elevated mankind above the status of worthless wreckage or unwanted discards. (2) King's reference to "the starless midnight of racism" painted a realistic picture of the blind, unguided, hopeless search for a solution to the racial problems. (3) He rejected the idea that nations of the world "must spiral down a militaristic stairway" toward destruction. (4) Finally, King's certainty of a march that would ultimately end in "the city of freedom" which appeared to be another name for the Israelite's Promised Land.

In "I Have a Dream," King used metaphors to describe the black's situation. The language used was familiar to most of those gathered there, for it dealt with the everyday realities of indebtedness. King said that the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence gave every man a "promissory note" which "guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In the case of the
American Negro, this promissory note had come back marked "insufficient funds."

Other notable metaphors from this speech are: (1) "The Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity." (2) "seared in the flames of withering injustice." (3) "the bank of Justice is bankrupt." (4) "the tranquilizing drug of gradualism." (5) "the quicksands of racial injustice." (6) "veterans of creative suffering."

The first parable, which was a contemporary one, in "I've Been to the Mountaintop," told of an incident in Birmingham, Alabama, during a demonstration. Dogs and fire hoses were used on the marchers as they left the church, and finally many were arrested. King said that it was unknown to the perpetrators of the arrests that "there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out." King added that, because the marchers met violence with nonviolence, "we won our struggle in Birmingham."

The next parable was a biblical one which had first been used by Jesus to demonstrate brotherhood. The parable, known as the "Good Samaritan," took place on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, a "meandering road . . . conducive for ambushing." King updated the story by telling about his trip down the same road, and then he taught the same lesson of brotherhood as had the original teller of the story.

The last parable was based on the plane trip to Memphis. It seems that the plane was delayed for about an hour before
the pilot announced the reason. "We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night." King used this study to emphasize the dangers which faced the marchers the next day.

One of the most famous and descriptive metaphors used by King in this speech was the term "soul-force." This concept summed up the underlying theme of the civil rights movement. It was the opposite of violence. "Soul" is that spiritual quality in a person, and this force was the ultimate weapon against aggressive violence. King ended the speech with this biblical metaphor: "mine eyes have seen the glory." He did not finish the words "of the coming of the Lord." Instead, he stopped, turned, picked up his coat from the chair, and walked out the side entrance.13

Summary

It appears, therefore, that King made heavy use of the elements of prophecy in these selected speeches. He condemned social and religious sins, from the common man to high political figures. He predicted what God would do as a result of disobedience to His will. He offered elements of hope and faith. Nonviolence was a key word in his philosophy; God was named as the Vindicator. King urged reform, primarily to the American blacks. He was a champion of many minorities.14 His speeches used practical strategy because King believed
in a "relevant ministry." Finally, King used parables and metaphors to emphasize and to teach moral lessons.
FOOTNOTES

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York, 1963), p. ix.


3 Bishop, pp. 327-339. Since this biography contains the complete script of this speech, all quotes from "I Have a Dream" will refer to this source.

4 Bishop, p. 44.

5 King, *Strength to Love*, p. 1. Hereafter all quotes from "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart" will refer to this source.

6 King, *Strength to Love*, p. 25. Hereafter, all quotes from "Love in Action" will refer to this source.

7 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech," *Negro History Bulletin*, XXXI (May, 1968), pp. 20-21. Hereafter, all quotes from King's acceptance speech will refer to this source.

8 King made reference to the murder of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner (members of Congress on Racial Equality), and their civil rights guide, James Chaney, in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in the summer of 1964.

9 Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountain-top," (1968), pp. 1-8. Permission has been granted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, for the use of this speech in this research.

10 Bishop, p. 45.


12 "Will This Prophet Be Heard?" *America*, CXVIII (April 20, 1968), p. 532.

13 Bishop, p. 45. Bishop and the *New York Times* were the only two sources which noted that King did not deliver the last six words of this quote, "of the coming of the Lord."
14 Bishop, p. 55.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Martin Luther King, Jr., long associated with the civil rights movement, was an advocate of nonviolence and brotherhood. Although his rhetoric has often been studied and analyzed, the prophetic elements in his speeches have been left virtually unexplored.

This study pools the knowledge of rhetorical and theological experts and the historical precedent of prophecy based on the study of Old Testament prophets, in general, and on Amos and Ezekiel, specifically, and arrives at criteria that can be used to analyze the rhetoric of prophecy. These criteria were then applied to King's speeches. The recurring elements which were explored were: (1) the background, the personality, and the spiritual calling of the prophets, (2) the language, the prophecies, and the central themes of the message of the prophets, and (3) the historical period in which the prophets lived and the events that created a need for the rhetoric of prophecy. The criteria established followed these recurring themes.

First of all, the nation to which the prophet appears is in a state of social discontentment. Thus, the following
criteria have been used to determine whether a nation is susceptible to the rhetoric of prophecy. The people are either (1) a captive people, (2) a people during a social, political, or economic transition, or (3) in the midst of corruption and subsequent plenty. In addition, (4) there is a struggle between the haves and the have-nots, those in power and those denied access to power.

Secondly, the prophet himself is deeply concerned with the national social disorder and views his role as being a deliverer of the people in need, in spite of personal risks. Thus, the following criteria have been used to determine whether King exhibited the characteristics of a prophet: (1) He feels a direct call from God to be a spokesman for Him to a specific group of people. (2) He speaks out enthusiastically for God. (3) He is a preacher rather than a teacher. (4) He exhibits social awareness and sees religion as a means of social transformation. (5) He is a man of action regardless of the consequences. (6) He speaks out in a time of crisis. (7) He is aware of the social conditions of his time and the relationship of those conditions on the lives of the people to whom he is speaking.

The above conditions then produce the rhetoric of prophecy, for when the context of the times is ripe for a prophet, he appears and speaks out in an effort to help the oppressed people. In speaking out, he employs rhetoric, or specifically the rhetoric of prophecy. The following are criteria which
have been used to determine whether King's speeches exemplified the rhetoric of prophecy.

The rhetoric of prophecy tends to contain certain themes: (1) It condemns the social and religious sins of a group of people, even the leaders, both religious and secular. (2) It includes predictions of what God will do as a result of these sins. (3) It includes an element of hope. Additionally, certain strategies are usually employed: (1) It advocates a peaceful approach to the problem. Patience is an important virtue; God, not man, is a Vindicator. (2) It advocates a plan of action which is practical in that it represents a solution to the problem. Finally, the rhetoric of prophecy has an impressive and lofty style which abounds in parables and metaphors stated in a language familiar to the hearers and about situations within the experiences of the audience.

The socio-economic condition of the American Negroes closely parallels the national situation of the Old Testament prophets which demands a need for the rhetoric of prophecy. The blacks were held in social and economic bondage by the whites. At the time King entered the civil rights movement, there was an embryonic struggle between the blacks and the whites, the have-nots and the haves. In addition, there were other similarities between the American Negroes and the Old Testament Hebrews. They were both held as slaves by their captors and were an important part of that nation's economy. Both groups were overshadowed by a people who had developed
a higher degree of art, science, and education. Both groups expressed their unhappiness of their physical bondage with songs of lament. Both groups were forced into a lower social position by the majority when slavery was abolished. As a free people, the former slaves were given the most unskilled jobs, and their wages were usually lower than the majority. To a large degree, both minority groups, by choice or pressure, segregated themselves from the majority—physically, socially, and economically. Both groups were targets of local law enforcement officials who were often prejudiced against the minority groups. Finally, both groups presented a threat to the status quo.

Both the life and the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., were characterized by the criteria set forth for a prophet and his rhetoric. He did feel that he had a direct calling from God. King spoke out enthusiastically for God and was a preacher by profession. King used religion as a means of social reform and was the object of physical and verbal abuse because of his dedication to social reform. He championed the American Negro as well as other minorities by speaking out against prejudice and intolerance. It seems, therefore, that King fits the criteria of the Old Testament prophet.

Five of King's speeches were analyzed to determine if each was characterized by the criteria of prophetic rhetoric. Those five speeches differed in situation, purpose, and audience and spanned King's career from early in his
involvement in the civil rights movement until his last speech
given the night before his death. Those five speeches are:
"Love in Action," "Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," "I Have
a Dream," the acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize,
and "I've Been to the Mountaintop." It was found that most
of the elements of the criteria were found in all five
speeches. Therefore, the speeches of King fit the criteria
for prophetic rhetoric.

In conclusion, it is apparent: (1) that there are
parallels between the American blacks and the Old Testament
Hebrews and their situations; (2) that King reacted to a
modern situation in the same enthusiastic way as did the
Hebrew prophets; and, (3) that the rhetoric of King was
characterized by prophetic elements. Therefore, Martin
Luther King, Jr. may be called a twentieth-century prophet.
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