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Preaching Media & Technology

"DIGITAL JAZZ, MAN: THE INTERSECTION OF PREACHING AND MEDIA IN THE ERA OF COVID (AND AFTER)"

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Abstract

This paper seeks to lay the foundation for a larger project on the intersection between preaching and media. Covid-19 has provided a paradigmatic shift in how this intersection between preaching and media is both understood and implemented. A personal narrative regarding the author's history with technology and contemporary context will be offered. Then, the paper will address current concerns with the intersection of preaching and media before concluding with a discussion of what is next in the conversation. The larger project would start with more abstract concepts of media from Marshall McLuhan and Craig Detweiler and move to more practical applications such as graphic design, social media, livestreaming and podcasting which emphasize the relation between technology, learning styles and discipleship.

Technology has always been part of my life. It surrounds me and facilitates much of my life. As I write this paper, I am doing so on a Microsoft tablet that has a memory stick inserted into it where the original draft of this essay has been stored. I am working with articles that I downloaded from the Internet and printed off from the copier in my office. I am also working from a couple of books that were written by others using similar methods, books that were printed by a publishing company and then mailed to me from an order that I placed on their website. When the essay is finished, I will send it to the convener of the workgroup that I have submitted to in the past. And, if all goes according to plan, an audience will hear me present this paper through a virtual session at a professional conference being hosted online. And, if the writing gods are gracious, this essay will become the opening chapter of a book that hopes to further the conversation regarding the intersection between preaching and technology. This essay seeks to lay the foundation for a larger project on the intersection between preaching and media. Covid-19 has provided a paradigmatic shift in how this intersection between preaching and media is both understood and implemented. A personal narrative regarding the author's history with technology and contemporary context will be offered. Then, the paper will address current concerns with the intersection of preaching and media before concluding with a discussion of what is next in the conversation.

Why the Title?

The title comes from a scene in *TRON: Legacy*, what might be one of the most underrated films of all time (or, at least, one of the most underrated tech-centric films of all time). The film is a sequel to the original *TRON*, released in 1982.[1] In the original film, a computer programmer named Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is kidnapped by the CPU ("Master

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[1] *TRON*, directed by Steven Lisberger (1982; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios), DVD.

Control") that he developed and transported to the Grid and forced to compete in a lethal video game. With the help of the game's hero—the titular Tron (Bruce Boxleitner)—Flynn is able to defeat Master Control and return to the real world.

However, as we learn in the opening background montage to *TRON: Legacy*, Flynn has become obsessed with the Grid, thinking of it as "a digital frontier to reshape the human condition."[2] In 1985, while conducting further experiments, Flynn is again transported to the Grid, only he cannot return to the real world this time. Twenty-five years later, his son Sam (Garrett Hedlund) travels to the Grid by accident and begins to search for his father. Following a battle where Flynn's protégé Quorra (Olivia Wilde) is injured, Flynn reveals to Sam why he was never able to come home. First, there was the evolution of the ISOs, something like biological algorithms that allow "engineers to test machine designs in a virtual environment to see how they perform without needing to build prototypes in the real world."[3] Flynn thought these ISOs could be the key to revolutionizing almost every human idea, what he refers to as "digital jazz." However, second—and what really kept Flynn away for so long, there was the technocide of the ISOs by CLU, the companion program that Flynn developed to help him administer the Grid. CLU, sadly, saw imperfection in Flynn's plan and sought to eradicate the anomaly in the system—the ISOs. Quorra was the only one that survived, leading Flynn into exile where he meditated about what to do next.

The implications of *TRON* and, specifically, *TRON: Legacy* on technology[4] and philosophy[5] have been discussed well elsewhere and will not be unpacked further here. My intention in adopting this phrase from Flynn (aside from its catchy ring) is the communication world in general—and preaching specifically—is experiencing something of an isolinear revolution. Of course, the technical revolution has been occurring in the broader communication world for some time. However, with the coming of the Covid-19 pandemic, the technological revolution in preaching has reached into even the remotest ecclesial enclaves. As jazz is often a song played through improvisation, "digital jazz" is understood as communicative and technological experimentation.

My History with the "Digital Frontier"

This narrative shares something of a culmination of my lifetime of engagement with technology. As I mentioned above, technology has always been part of my life. My mother was given medication to ease the pain of childbearing and a pen was used to notarize my birth. We often think of only electronic applications as being technology, however technology was used to build the pyramids in Egypt, the roads that connected the Roman Empire, and the Great Wall of China. Technology was used to write the original, now lost, manuscript that would become known as the Gospel of Mark. Technology was used to paint the walls and ceiling of the Sistine

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[2]*TRON: Legacy*, directed by Joseph Kosinski (2010; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios), DVD.

[3]Cassidy Ward, "Biodigital Jazz, Man! *TRON: Legacy*'s ISOs are Kind of Like Real-Life Biological Algorithms," www.syfy.com/syfywire/tron-legacy-science-biological-algorithms-computers-real; accessed 17 September 2021.

[4]Kambole Campbell, "Tron: Legacy Has Morphed Into a Mesmerizing Self-Own," www.polygon.com/2020/12/17/22179890/tron-legacy-deaging-effect-disney; accessed 17 September 2021; and Aylish Wood, "Contests and Simulations: *Tron: Legacy*'s Connections with Technologies," *Journal of Film and Video* 66 (Fall 2014): 31-42.

[5]S. R. Scully, "Messing with My Zen Thing, Man: Transhumanism and the Philosophical Implications of *TRON: Legacy*," https://medium.com/@wanderingskull/messing-with-my-zen-thing-man-transhumanism-and-the-philosophical-implications-of-tron-legacy-18fa811fb1b7; accessed 17 September 2021; and Jason Sperb, *Flickers of Film: Nostalgia in the Time of Digital Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 114-138.

Chapel. And technology was used to record, publish and broadcast Journey's massive hit "Separate Ways" (and then to insert the song into an early scene of *TRON: Legacy*). I used a tape recorder to record some of my earliest sermons and I remember learning to type on a Macintosh desktop terminal and a laptop that literally looked like a suitcase. When my father purchased our first personal computer for our house, I took to word processing and online chatting like it was talking or breathing.

I learned to surf the web and adapt between platforms. I also found that I was decently competent at manipulating various audio and visual applications of technology. However, I was merely a "user"—and not the good kind that Tron fights for. It was not until I discovered social media that I found a reason, a purpose, for using technology for anything more than perfunctory purposes. I was much like Sam Flynn, the son of Kevin Flynn, when he is forced to compete on the grid in *TRON: Legacy*—I knew about and how to use technology, however I did not understand the organic nature of technology. I only saw technology as a tool to accomplish a task. With social media, however, my eyes were opened to how technology could be used to connect persons together and develop a true global village.

By engaging with social media, I embraced my digital citizenship and accepted that I was a "digital native," one who uses "technology fluidly" and operated "with a sense of responsibility and stewardship"—words from my first publication on social media.[6] While I skipped over MySpace and really only used Facebook for connecting with old friends and playing Farmville with church members, it was when I first logged on to Twitter than I really saw possibility. I found people to follow that I could learn from and people found me so that they could learn from me. I quickly bought into Michael Hyatt's concept of "generosity"[7] and sharing as much as I could as often as I could, although it would be a few years before I read the book. Wanting to find my scholarly niche while I was working on my doctorate, I immersed myself in the study of media and technology and their applications to preaching. That first article centered on the idea that social media—all media, really—is relational. I unpacked for preachers the three levels of digital citizenship (#digcit) and explored three ideas central to the healthy use of social media— that social media is relational, influential and generous. From here, I developed a list of "dos" and "don'ts" for using social media in preaching.[8]

And, as I finished my doctorate and continued that research (oh, by the way, I was teaching preaching at three schools by this point), I thought that I had been generous enough. It was time to move onto other things. Then, someone who had read my previous articles and found my teaching profile online invited me to contribute pieces on using technology in the classroom for a new professional blog managed through a partnership with Fortress Press. In the next year, I published pieces on using a variety of multimedia to teach the Old Testament and build commonality through diversity,[9] using Twitter to track attendance in online courses,[10] and using

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[6]Rob O'Lynn, "Social Media and Preaching: A Primer (Part 1 of 2)," *Working Preacher*, www.workingpreacher.org/culture/social-media-and-preaching-a-primer-part-1-of-2; accessed 18 September 2021.

[7]Michael Hyatt, *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 129.

[8]Rob O'Lynn, "Social Media and Preaching: Some Dos and Don'ts (Part 2 of 2)," *Working Preacher*, www.workingpreacher.org/culture/social-media-and-preaching-some-dos-and-donts-part-2-of-2; accessed 18 September 2021.

[9]Rob O'Lynn, "Know Your Students, Know Your Story," *Seminarium*; http://seminariumblog.org/general/semloci/know-your-students-know-your-story; accessed 18 September 2021.

[10]Rob O'Lynn, "Tracking Social Media Footprints in the Online Class," *Seminarium*; http://seminariumblog.org/general/semtech/tracking-social-media-footprints-in-the-online-class/; accessed 18 September 2021.

educational technology to enhance ministry training.[11] In the following year, I published two additional pieces, one on teaching preaching online where I argued that doing so was no different than teaching a seated course[12] and one on using various social media applications in religious education.[13] And, finally, in the two years leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic, I published another piece on using social media and an organization app for debriefing students at a professional conference[14] and was invited to author a piece on how rural congregations can utilize their community connections through social media.[15] In all of this, I have built relationships, attempted to influence others to the uses of media and technology, and, most importantly, sought to be generous.

Preaching to an (Less) Empty Room

Then, March 2020 smacked us in the collective face, as the Covid-19 virus began ravaging it way across the planet. I had attended a denominational preaching conference where we were elbow-bumping but still smiling to one another with uncovered faces. However, just a few days after returning from the conference, it became apparent that there was not going to be much to smile about. The governor of Kentucky, where I live, made a statement that some changes would be coming in order to hopefully protect Kentuckians from the virus. Houses of worship would still be free to worship openly for one more week and then were being mandated to close their doors for the foreseeable future, as a precaution to stop the spread of a virus that seemed to spread by leaps and bounds in clustered spaces. My congregation's attendance that Sunday was the lowest it had ever been, aside from the one Sunday where we canceled due to an unexpected whiteout. Our leadership agreed unanimously with my recommendation that we close, as the governor had mandated due to a largely vulnerable population. We hoped it would only be for a couple of weeks, yet recognized it could be for longer. The question of what to do was laid at my feet.

Up to this point, based on our digital footprint, one may have been a little surprised that my congregation was primarily an older congregation with a more traditional worship style. We have a WordPress website (www.beechstreetchristianchurch.org) and a Facebook page (@BeechStreetChurch), and have used Instagram in the past when we had a more active youth group. Our presence had been mostly informational, such as posting a recorded video of that Sunday's sermon or posting pictures from fellowship meals. It was a way of letting people know who we were and what we were about, however it was mostly a reminder that we were still open. Little did I know that we had already laid some of the necessary groundwork for ministry through a difficult and strange time.

Now, I had been preaching for nearly twenty years when I stepped in front of the camera that first Sunday. In addition to my training in homiletics and communication, I have training in

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[11]Rob O'Lynn, "Learning an Academic Language: An Exercise in Vocabulary," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 19 (July 2016): 298.

[12]Rob O'Lynn, "Not Returning Void: Effectively Teaching Homiletics Online," *Seminarium*; http://seminariumblog.org/general/semtech/ffectively-teaching-homiletics-online/; accessed 18 September 2021.

[13]Rob O'Lynn, "If You'll Tweet Along with Me: Effectively Using Social Media in Religious Education", in *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education*, in Routledge Research in Religion and Education series, ed. John Hilton III (New York: Routledge, 2018), 79-91.

[14]Rob O'Lynn, ""More than a Field Trip: Using Debriefing to Guide Students in Processing Academic and Professional Conferences", *Teaching Theology and Religion* 22 (April 2019): 127.

[15]Rob O'Lynn, "Connecting the Vast Areas: Effectively Using Social Media in Rural Ministry", *Christian Standard* 154 (October 2019): 58-60.

theatre and had directed a collegiate theatre troupe as well as have performed in a number of collegiate and regional productions. I been in videos and on podcasts. However, I was not prepared for that first Sunday in front of the camera. At least my pants were zipped up. My thought process had been on preparing the entire worship service, something that preachers in my denomination do not usually do. I would have to think about the call to worship (usually a reading from Psalms and reciting the Lord's Prayer), the music (I am tone deaf), the sermon (not a problem there) and Communion (also not a problem, but how many original meditations could I really come up with). I prepared the sermon and the Communion meditation and worked with my daughter on playing some music. However, I had not prepared to preach to the empty room.

In what might be the timeliest essay on preaching ever, Alyce McKenzie, the LeVan Professor of Preaching and Worship at the Perkins School of Theology, noted in those first days following our collective recognition of the Covid-19 situation that everyone is "at home…not because no one is interested in being present [at worship], but because they are social distancing to prevent the spread of Covid-19. McKenzie further noted that the preacher's assignment has changed—not so much in what preachers are called to do (to preach "in an engaging and passionate manner") but in what context it is to be done ("to rows of empty seats").[16] I think this was the mistake that I, and many others, made. Preaching still needed to declare the hope-filled word of the gospel, however it needed to evolve communicatively to its new environment. While some have become "wired world"[17] preaching savants, preaching online to multiple campuses or through a podcast, no one was *just* preaching to an empty sanctuary or *only* preaching to a virtual audience.

This is where McKenzie's two reminders in her prophetic essay came into play as many ministers, like myself, contemplated preaching in front of a camera for the first time. First, even in an empty sanctuary (or home office), the sanctuary "is never empty."[18] We may be the only person presently manifested in the room, yet the communion of the saints is still with us. As the writers of Hebrews reminds us,

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of[b] the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (12:1-2).[19]

And, second, preaching "is deeply dialogical."[20] Preaching would need to be more imaginative, more creative—but not merely for the sake of imagination and creativity. Pastoral relationships are what strengthen good preaching, what Fred Craddock calls "empathetic imagination."[21] Here Paul's opening words to the Thessalonian Christians may be of some help to us:

> You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great

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[16]Alyce McKenzie, "Preaching to an Empty Room"; https://blog.smu.edu/perkins/ preaching-to-empty-room/; accessed 8 July 2020.

[17]Jeffrey Peterson, "Preaching Technique: The Ministry of the Word in a Wired World," *Christian Studies* 17 (1999): 47.

[18]McKenzie, "Preaching to an Empty Room."

[19]Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version © 1989.

[20]McKenzie, "Preaching to an Empty Room."

[21]Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 67.

opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:1-8).

It is a reminder that preachers lead by example, something McKenzie focused on in her follow-up essay. In it, she encourages preachers to "preach what you practice," saying that we believe in and live within the presence of God, then that is what we should preach.[22]

What Have We Got to Lose?

If the church is to learn any valuable lessons moving forward from the Covid-19 pandemic, this one should be at the top of the list: technology, in all of its forms, is here to stay and it is time that the church learn to use well what is available in order to meet the present challenges. However, as is a theme in science fiction, we must be cautious not to adopt any form of technology uncritically. Simply adopting any form of technology because it is available can be damaging to the ministry of a congregation, as can adopting a form of technology without knowing why the technology is being adopted. An example would be the rural congregation that spends limited funds on a projector and screen simply because the preacher wants to display slides or pictures with his sermon. Those funds may be needed for something significant down the road. Additionally, many congregations, once they adopt forms of technology, make using the technology a requirement of future employment in order to justify the investment.

Can we quantify what is lost and gained for preaching through the intersection of technology, especially in the era of Covid-19? What should be the conversation *before* exploring what form(s) of technology should be implemented? Here the work of Luke Powery, the dean of the chapel and a homiletics professor of Duke Divinity School, is helpful. In one particular essay, Powery outlines a number of "losses" that should be considered when discerning how and why technology will be integrated into a preaching and worship ministry.[23] To begin with, Powery starts with the concerns, what is lost with using technology in preaching. First, there is the *loss of incarnational preaching*. While preaching requires a message soaked in and connected to the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ, it also requires a body to give voice and movement to that message. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all have

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[22]Alyce McKenzie, "Preaching to an Empty Room, Part Two: Preaching What You Practice," https://blog.smu.edu/perkins/preaching-to-an-empty-room-part-two-preaching-what-you-practice/; accessed 8 July 2020.

It is envisioned that the larger project will include a more detailed narrative of how I implemented a digital strategy for my congregation.

[23]Luke A. Powery, "Preaching and Technology," in *Ways of the Word: Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place*, by Sally A. Brown and Luke A. Powery (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 214-223.

obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ (10:14-17).

Among others, Jana Childers has noted that there is an inherent performative nature to the act of preaching, what she calls a "lively homiletic."[24] Here, performance and persuasion blend in word and act, as the preacher embodies her message.

This, then, leads to Powery's second loss—the *loss of humanity*. Preaching, the act of communicating religiously, is not all that a minister does. We connect with the congregation through offering the sacraments and acts of service, such as prayer by the hospital bedside or serving food at a fellowship meal. We may be "friends" with members on Facebook or are following them on Instagram, however does that mean that we are actually connected to them? Ministry requires a human touch, an embodied presence. Again, Paul speaks of the importance of our humanity in ministry:

> You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

This speaks of intimacy and relationship, vital components to the *pathos* proof of rhetoric which speaks of the audience's "state of emotion."[25] In appealing to our humanity, we make the claim of the gospel "emotionally attractive" because our ministry is more than the words we say.[26] It is the life we live among our people.

This, then, connects to Powery's third loss—the *loss of sense of community*. The concern here is not necessarily the sense of disembodiment that occurs when the word is received through a video link or Instagram story. Those concerns are related to the loss of incarnational preaching and our humanity. The concern here leans more toward the congregation, those who give ear to the sermon. A major concern with the rise of technology has always been the disconnect that humanity would experience, which is demonstrated clearly in the Disney/Pixar film *WALL-E*. Set hundreds of years in the future, the last of humanity spend their entire day floating on hoverbeds eating and talking to one another on screens. At several points in the opening minutes, you see people sitting next to each other talking to one another on a screen.[27] In corollary, can the member sitting at home and watching the worship service on their screen really be part of the congregation? Paul also speaks of this concern in his first letter to the Corinthians:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized

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[24]Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 35.

[25]Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1932), xx; quoted in Joseph Evans, *The Art of Eloquence: The Sacred Rhetoric of Gardner C. Taylor* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2020), 11.

[26]Evans, *The Art of Eloquence*, 101.

[27]*WALL-E*, directed by Andrew Stanton (2008; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios/Pixar Animation Studios), DVD.

into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (12:12-13).

To return to the classic thought from Tom Long, how does the preacher rise from among if there is no congregation surrounding her or him and calling her or him to proclaim the word to them?[28] There is something to be said for the power present in the gathered community, something that is difficult to accomplish or experience when, as one of my deacons stated during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, "we are all shut-ins now."

Powery concludes with his fourth loss—the *loss of spiritual growth and depth*. This is a perpetual concern with preaching, regardless if it is "offline" or "online." Scott Gibson articulates this concern clearly when he notes that while "[p]reaching is not all of what it means to shape believers in Jesus Christ...[p]erceiving preaching as discipleship gives preachers a meaningful way of approaching those to whom they speak." He concludes by noting that "No longer are their listeners an audience or even a congregation; they are believers, followers of Jesu Christ, disciples."[29] The central core of Gibson's argument is that preachers should shift away from a "sage on the stage" mentality to that of being a spiritual director primarily because the sermon is where many in our congregations and communities receive their theological training for Christian formation, a connection that we can see in 2 Timothy:

> Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. … But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2:14-15; 3:14-17).

Preaching, then, should embrace the four curricular stages of formation, as outlined by James C. Wilhoit: *receiving* (cultivating spiritual openness), *remembering* (teaching that leads to deeper awareness of God's presence), *responding* (engaging in service), and *relating* (engaging in community).[30] The challenge is how to accomplish this through media and technology. Ryan Panzer talks about discipleship through "this culture of hybrid connection."[31] Traditionally (and I use that term somewhat loosely), we considered ministry as either "offline" through face-to-face opportunities and experiences or "online" through livestream services. However, the Covid-19

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[28]Long argues that "[T]he preacher is in every way a part of the congregation, a member of the assembly who rises from the midst of the gathered people to perform the task of preaching …. The preacher now is not simply one of the members of the assembly but is one who stands before the community in some new role, some new relationship to the others;" Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 16.

[29]Scott M. Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan: Sermon Strategies for Growing Mature Believers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 18.

[30]James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008)

[31]Ryan M. Panzer, *Grace and Gigabytes: Being Church in a Tech-Shaped Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 46.

pandemic has compelled us to embrace hybridity and counter "context collapse."[32] Through preaching in hybrid spaces, the Church not only continues its discipling work but also invites the surrounding cultures into missional dialogue.

Charting a Course

While there is a cascading effect to these losses, not all is bad news for the conversation regarding preaching and technology. Powery also offers four "gains" that should also be discerned in relation to preaching and technology.[33] First, there is the *gain of cultural knowledge*. Preaching, truly persuasive and gospel-oriented preaching, is contextual. The classic "sermon bridge" exercise is a constant reminder of this. Preachers begin in the "here and now," discerning what Lowry calls the "problematic itch" that is being felt by the congregation.[34] We move to the "then and there," exploring the Biblical world for what Lowry calls the "solutional itch."[35] We then develop the sermon from what we have discovered, crafting an exploration to share with the congregation. However, the sermon must connect with those giving ear (and opening their hearts and minds) to the sermon. As Tillich cautioned, preachers must be careful not to raise obstacles beyond what the text offers because "True communication of the Gospel means making possible a definite decision for or against it."[36] Our familiarity with cultural knowledge, what is also known as cultural intelligence, can raise an obstacle. However, this goes well beyond making culturally-appropriate references. It understands culture as the way a group lives, think and behaves in the world around them.[37] Engaging with technology reveals a desire "to learn from culture, to know what is happening in the world," which increases our ability to proclaim the gospel.[38]

Second, there is the *gain of attending to learning styles*. Yes, listeners should learn from our sermons. Now, this goes far beyond learning the order of the Israelite kings or the order of Paul's missionary journeys. Additionally, it goes even beyond learning the doctrinal positions on salvation, inspiration or the nature of the Holy Spirit. If learning is best understood as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action,"[39] then we must conceptualize preaching as more than a data-transfer activity. There should be a "learn-do" component to our preaching. As Jeffrey Arthurs notes, "One of the most crucial functions preaching accomplishes...is the stirring of memory."[40] In the "stirring of memory' listeners move to action, growing into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-30, 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 1:21-23). Therefore, we must take up the mantle of spiritual director, one who guides the congregation in the mysterious ways of discipleship, shuffling off the mantle of talking head or content expert, choosing instead to understand preaching as a process for "shaping men and women into the

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[32]Panzer, *Grace and Gigabytes*, 81.

[33]Powery, "Preaching and Technology," in *Ways of the Word*, 223-228.

[34]Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 19.

[35]Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 19.

[36]Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 202.

[37]John H. Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System*, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 15; Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 4.

[38]Powery, "Preaching and Technology," in *Ways of the Word*, 224.

[39]Jack Merizow, "Contemporary Paradigms of Learning," *Adult Education Quarterly* 46 (May 1996): 162.

[40]Jeffrey D. Arthus, *Preaching as Reminding: Stirring Memory in an Age of Forgetfulness* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 4.

people God wants them to be...because they have been nurtured to do so by the Word."[41] The preaching event is a learning event, and, therefore, a discipleship event. In relation to a discussion on preaching and technology, we should think how we can craft a multi-sensory aspect to preaching—not only visuals like projected presentations or object lessons but also immersive experiences (i.e., hosting a Passover meal *with fresh food* during the service).

Third, there is the *gain of spreading the gospel message*. Think about it for a moment: What types of technology do you use in preaching? Do you use a Bible? Do you write out your notes on paper with a pen, type up your sermon on a computer, or upload your sermon to tablet? Do you use some kind of visual presentation? Does your congregation livestream its worship service? If the answer is "Yes" to any of these, then you use technology to preach your sermon. The question is not *if we use technology* or *if we should use technology*; it is *how do we use technology*. *Media* helps focus the conversation a bit more because it is what allows the functional nature of the technology. For example, an iPad will always be a form of technology -- whether or not it is actually used. However, an iPad becomes a channel for communication when I use it to facilitate a worship service or my daughter uses it to draw her next graphic design project. To that end, this project will utilize as a baseline Marshall McLuhan's classic definition of *media*—media is what "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action."[42] In other words, media is what provides the content of and interpretive lens for human communication. This aids the spreading of the gospel by providing us the conduit to preach beyond the walls of our confined sanctuary.[43]

In anticipation of a larger project, the following "talking points" are offered in hopes of advancing the conversation regarding the intersection between preaching and technology. First, those invested in preaching must develop a sufficient competency in "cultural intelligence." According to Earley and Ang, *cultural intelligence* is defined as "the capability to deal effectively with other people with whom the person does not share a common cultural background and understanding."[44] Through the process of developing our "cultural intelligence," we become what Matthew D. Kim calls a "bridger of cultures," where we "take the main idea of the text into the deeper alcoves of our listeners' hearts and minds, seeking maximum cultural engagement and sermonic relevance."[45]

Second, those invested in preaching must learn about learning styles and how those who participate with us in the preached moment not only learn biblical and theological content was are shaped into a "living sacrifice" that "transformed by the renewing of [their] minds, so that [they] may discern what is the will of God" (Romans 12:2). Voelz contends that preachers, through the function of teacher (or spiritual director), seek "ways to be in mutuality and solidarity with listeners, attempting to understand how their faith and faith practices have been constructed, and then affirming and interrogating them."[46] Simply voicing the sermon into the

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[41]Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan*, 17.

[42]Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA/ London: MIT Press, 1994), 9.

[43]See Thomas H. Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multimedia Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 19-21.; and David T. Bourgeois, *Ministry in the Digital Age: Strategies and Best Practices for a Post-Website World* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2013), 18-22.

[44]P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang, *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12; quoted in Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 5.

[45]Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 9.

[46]Richard W. Voelz, *Preaching to Teach: Inspire People to Think and Act*, Artistry of Preaching Series (Nashville: Abingdon, 2019), 57.

ether and hoping it will stick in some cliché hope of fulfilling God's promise in Isaiah 55:11 will simply not cut it anymore (not that it actually ever did).

Finally, those invested in preaching must note trends in technology and media and understand what it means to be "resource rich" or "resource poor." Trends in technology include being aware of if not using social media platforms (i.e., Twitter and Instagram), visual media platforms (i.e., Vimeo, ProPresenter and Zoom), organizational media platforms (i.e., Sermonary, Planning Center and Notebird) and graphic media platforms (i.e., Canva and Spark). In relation to being "resource rich" and "resource poor," this is a general assessment of what a congregation has available at its disposal for use in preaching and worship. However, it should be understood that being "resource poor" does not mean that technology cannot be used creatively.

To that end, the larger project is envisioned as following in three units of thought, with each unit being broken down into chapters. The first unit would focus on more abstract concepts, such as Marshall McLuhan and Craig Detweiler's concepts of media, Jack Merizow's concept of transformative learning and how it applies to technologically-located discipleship, and a general study of creativity. The second and third units would focus on various applications, such as web-based applications, social media applications and platform-based applications. Visual images and sermon examples will be included, as would design templates and assessment rubrics.

Hermeneutics & Biblical Studies

A Transformative Engagement with the Scriptures as a Hermeneutic for the Preacher
Woori Han, Ph.D.

Abstract
Traditional interpretation theory emphasizes the objective meaning of the text. This paper will be concerned with a transformative engagement with the Scriptures as an essential element of the spiritual formation of the both the preacher and the congregation, to build up the body of Christ. Specifically, this paper explores a holistic approach to biblical hermeneutics comprised of five steps, (1) preliminary, (2) exegetical, (3) prayerful and meditative, (4) spiritually formational, and (5) practical, for the preacher.

Introduction

This paper explores the concept of a transformative engagement with the Scriptures and develops a holistic approach to biblical hermeneutics for understanding of such texts. This transformative reading of the biblical text is based on God's love for the faithful and their seeking to conform to the image of Christ through empowerment by the Holy Spirit in a way that ultimately builds union with the divine (2 Cor. 3:18). The minister's intimate relationship with the divine allows the preacher to discover the objective meaning of the text (*information*) and also to engage the existential aspect of the text (*transformation*), thus impacting the lives of both the minister and her or his congregation.[47] Here, the task of reading the biblical text in a transformative way is to participate in ontological union with "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) by seeking to build communion with God and with one another so that the reader is empowered by the Spirit to fathom the divine mystery (1 Cor. 2:9–10).

To put it more clearly, in this way of reading the Bible the preacher approaches the biblical text not only by analyzing, criticizing, dissecting, and reorganizing it with the minister's rational, cognitive, and intellectual abilities but also by embracing the possibility that the preacher's whole mode of being may be transformed by the encounter with the imminent presence of the divine, who is present sacramentally in the Word through a prayerful and meditative dialogue with God.[48] Such an encounter leads the minister to surrender her/himself and fills the now emptied space of the preacher's heart with the love of God, eventually resulting in union between the minister and the divine. In other words, a transformative engagement with the Scriptures involves death to one's old self and a rising again in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This is not a negation of self but the self's transformation and expansion into God.[49] The faithful minister is able to build this union with the divine by the mortification and vivification of the Spirit.[50]

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[47] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 13–14.

[48] Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence*, 1–2; Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 43–46.

[49] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 36.

[50] J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of* Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 123.

Preachers, who seek to build union with the divine through being in love with Christ, hope that their faith communities will have a mystical experience developed on the basis of loving God through the channel of preaching the sermon, prepared through the following process: surrendering of oneself, filling that void with God's love, and, lastly, building union with the divine. The minister and the faith community actualize the Word by becoming disciples and followers of Christ. Being a disciple means more than imitating the deeds of Christ; it means becoming like Christ in mind, soul, and heart. Thus, the preacher and the gathered community are able to become like Jesus by embodying "the mind of Christ everywhere, always, and to everyone" for the purpose of "glorifying God in all they do and say."[51]

In this paper, therefore, I suggest a transformative engagement with the Scriptures as a biblical hermeneutic for the preacher. The biblical hermeneutic that I have constructed is comprised of five steps: (1) preliminary, (2) exegetical, (3) prayerful and meditative, (4) spiritually formational, and (5) practical. To elaborate on these five steps, the paper will first explore the basic concepts of idol and icon, which play a significant role in helping the reader to move from an emphasis on the immediate meaning of the text toward focusing on the appropriation of the world of the senses projected by the text. This paper then focuses on developing the exegetical work of the biblical text as an example of dealing with the historical contexts and literary genres of the text in order to better comprehend the textual meaning of the Scriptures. In the following section, this paper explains the preacher's prayerful and meditative reflection (*lectio divina*) on the *informationally* understood biblical text in light of the congregation's truthful and meaningful life narratives. Then, this paper sheds light on the role of the Holy Spirit in the mystical union of the faithful with the divine that relies on a Christ-centered faith. Lastly, this paper examines the significance of the state in which the preacher and the assembly are in and how they abide with Christ by embodying and actualizing the Word in how they live in all times, places, and circumstances.

A. Preliminary Step: Recognizing the Difference between Idol and Icon

The preliminary step in a transformative engagement with the text is recognizing the difference between idol and icon. These two concepts can be distinguished according to whether the viewer's gaze remains on the visible or the invisible. First of all, an idol objectifies and fixes the divine with the human's gaze. In other words, according to French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, in the idol "the divine actually comes into the visibility for which human gazes watch," and the idol "consigns the divine to the measure of a human gaze."[52]

Further, the idol serves to make the human gaze aim at the divine and return to the idol itself.[53] This means that the human gaze is stopped by the idol itself and is reflected by the idol. The human gaze is wrapped up in and filled with the idol. The idol draws the viewer to the idol itself because the idol accords exactly with the viewer's own desire and image of the divine.[54] In this regard, the idol appears as a reflection of the beholder's aim and functions as the focus of the beholder's admiration.[55] That is, the idol appears to be a mirror that reflects the viewer's desire, wish, and imagination. Thus, the approach to the divine is on the beholder's terms. The viewer's

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[51] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), xxviii.

[52] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 13–14.

[53] Marion, *God without Being*, 12.

[54] Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 31.

[55] Marion, *God without Being*, 27.

aim is imposed upon the divine, and the resulting idol is an expression of that aim.[56] Or, as Marion underscores, "[I]n the idol the human experience of the divine precedes the face that that divinity assumes in it."[57] Marion summarizes the nature of the idol as follows: "[T]he idol still remains, in one way or another, proportionate to the expectation of the desire; thus it fulfills (sometimes to a degree more than expected) the anticipation."[58] In other words, the divine in the idol exists at the level that the viewer desires, wishes, and imagines.

In contrast, the icon functions in a different way. The word "icon" derives from the Greek word *eikenai*, meaning image or portrait.[59] The icon cannot be captured by the gaze of the beholder. Rather, the icon leads the gaze of the viewer to go beyond the object; instead, the icon, it serves as a subject that looks at the viewer.[60] Marion writes that "[t]he icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible."[61] In this sense, according to Paul Moyaert, former professor at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, the icon can be defined as having the power to appear first as the visible and then to change the origin of the intention and gaze of the viewer into the invisible.[62] The ray of light falls upon the beholders and transforms their intentionality into receptivity. They find themselves being gazed upon by the icon.

This notion had been highlighted by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, who asserted that "the honor rendered to the image belongs to its prototype," quoting the words of St. Basil the Great.[63] In this context, Marion argues that "the formula that Saint Paul applies to Christ, icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), must serve as our norm."[64] This means that Christ can be understood as the divine icon, in that the believer's sight is guided to the image of the invisible God through the God-Man Jesus Christ.[65] This icon appears to be the existence or "the presence of a non-object."[66] In other words, the icon is a presence that cannot be objectified by the gaze of the viewer. The gaze, therefore, is directed not by the icon itself but by a gaze behind the actual icon.[67]

Therefore, in a transformative reading of the biblical text, instead of staging an *active* approach in which the reader's gaze is only fixed on the immediate meaning of the text (as in the case for the idol), a *receptive* approach (as in the case of icons) opens the reader's gaze to the world projected by the text and anticipates what is being unfolded and what is manifested to the reader. Based on French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's (1913–2005) interpretive method, the new

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[56] Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 32.

[57] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 5.

[58] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 34.

[59] Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol.1, trans. Anthony Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 35.

[60] Merold Westphal, "Phenomenology of Religion," in The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion, ed. Chad Meister and Paul Copan (New York: Routledge, 2013), 738.

[61] Marion, *God without Being*, 17.

[62] Paul Moyaert, "In Defense of Praying with Images," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2007): 601.

[63] St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 59–60 (18, 45).

[64] Marion, *God without Being*, 17.

[65] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 56.

[66] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 21.

[67] Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology,* 32–33.

reference of the text draws the reader into "God's new order of being in Christ," who is the Word (John 1:14).[68] As a result, the reader's mode of being is transformed by gazing upon the object that the reader sees; the invisible God allows Godself to be known. Further, this encounter allows the reader to see where the text is pointing and to see beyond the text to the world to which the text points. As von Balthasar says, "[T]he man Christ sees God as one who is seen (sent) by God and . . . , therefore, whoever sees him sees the Father—provided that one sees him as he must be seen and as he intends to be seen."[69] As believers read the text, they find themselves being gazed upon by the divine so that they are drawn into the love and truth of God, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux experienced. The iconic approach to the Word promotes the encounter between God and the faithful. More specifically, the believer's iconic experience raises her or his gaze toward the transcendent itself behind the object through which the transcendent is being visualized, thereby transforming the faithful's existence into the image of God (Gal. 4:19).

B. Exegetical Step: Analyzing the Historical Contexts and Literary Genres of the Text

The exegetical step in a transformative reading of the biblical text is to approach the text with a critical, attentive, and faithful attitude by exegetically and critically interrogating the text in order to bring into view the world behind the text. Paul Ricoeur describes the process of interpretation of the text as a dialectical movement between explanation and understanding, between explicating the sense and reference of the text and the holistic assimilation of these two elements as an expansion of the reader's existence. The process begins with an initial understanding that naively grasps the meaning of the text and is then subjects it to scrutiny through explanatory procedures that modify and expand the initial understanding into the sense that is finally comprehended.[70]

The initial understanding is the starting point for grasping the meaning of the text. In the first encounter with the text, the reader comes to understand the surface semantics of the text based on the reader's past experience with the text or pre-understanding the text by writing reflections on her or his first impressions of the text. Then, the reader moves on to the process of asking what are the focal points of the text that are generally understood and what are the general interpretations of the text in the reader's tradition of faith. The initial guess of what the text is about and what it says, based on the reader's pre-understanding, called the first naïveté, is the first stage of the interpretive process.

In addition, Ricoeur argues that "there are methods for validating those guesses."[71] According to Ricoeur, a more sophisticated mode of understanding, called the second naïveté, is supported by the explanatory procedure.[72] Explanation or critical consciousness, which mediates between the initial stage of understanding and a second, more sophisticated level of understanding, is the process of methodical interrogation of the text through techniques of investigation. Ricoeur describes it this way: "[T]he transition from guessing to explaining is secured by an investigation of the specific object of guessing."[73]

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[68] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory,* 94–95.

[69] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form* (New York: T&T Clark, 1982), 1:319.

[70] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71–88.

[71] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 76.

[72] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 74.

[73] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 75–76.

According to Schneiders, "The modern historian does not assume the authority of her or his sources but confers authority on those sources that critical investigation shows to be reliable and valuable."[74] Exegesis and criticism, in which historical, literary, and other types of methods are used to understand the meaning of the world behind the text, are the key elements needed for this critical investigation.[75] Since the text is not exclusively historical, other dimensions of the text also ought to be considered, such as the literary elements and genres of the text, whether narrative, poetry, epistolary, and so on. A literary reading of the text is equally important to the historical-critical reading. The literary approach to the text, which concentrates attention upon the text's own stylistic features and pattern of construction, allows the reader to read the biblical text in its original form and understand its literary devices, such as metaphor, imagery, and poetic language, as did its authors and first readers.

Therefore, in this exegetical step, taking into account historical contexts and the literary character of the text, the reader explores the text based on an exegetical process consisting of eight steps to achieve a more sophisticated level of understanding of the text. They include: (1) identifying and describing the literary character and genre of the text; (2) analyzing stylistic features and patterns of the passage based on its literary structure; (3) describing and exploring metaphor, imagery, and significant terms and language in the text, while listing phrases that need to be unpacked and searching Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias or lexicons; (4) placing the text in its larger context by disclosing what happens in the text surrounding the passage selected for exegetical work and considering how the selected passage fits within it; (5) exploring as much as possible about the historical nature of the text (describing both the period illustrated in the text and the period in which the text was written); (6) examining theological themes and issues presented in the text and analyzing the theological vocabulary employed in the text; (7) listening attentively to the text and asking penetrating questions of the text, exploring the text searching for details that emerge, at first glance, as unusual, examining the text's main thoughts and searching for conflict, either behind the text or in the text; and understand the contextual relationship between the text and what comes before and after it; and (8) engaging at least four commentaries (at least one authored by a woman), comparing the questions raised with those of commentators and discovering the concerns or issues raised by commentators one did not consider but found interesting, and, finally, looking up the concerns or issues that commentators neglected that need to be addressed.[76]

C. Prayerful and Meditative Step: Moving from Informational to Transformational Reading

The third step in a transformative reading of the Scriptures is to pray and meditate on the sense of the text once it has been comprehended through critical interrogation (the second step) in light of the truthful and meaningful life narratives of the congregation. This suggests that the preacher ought to be well versed in the hearers' multiple narrative worlds just as the preacher is familiar with the world of the biblical text. Thomas Long, one of the leading scholars in the field of homiletics, describes the interaction between a biblical text and the hearer in this way: "[A]

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[74] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 98.

[75] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 158.

[76] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 52–98; James W. Thompson, "Interpreting Texts for Preaching," in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 61–74; Shauna Hannan, HM 2525 Biblical Preaching, class lectures, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California, spring semester, 2018.

biblical text intersects some aspects of our life and exerts a claim upon us."[77] In this sense, the preacher "prayerfully goes to listen to the Bible on behalf of the people and then speaks on Christ's behalf what she or he hears there."[78] In other words, this step has to do with how faithfully the Scriptures are read and interpreted in relation to the hearers' contemporary experience and faith.[79]

Homiletics scholar Lance B. Pape attempts to connect Ricoeur's understanding of the interpretive encounter with narrative texts as a threefold *mimesis* with the process of text-to-sermon using Ricoeur's approach to interpretation.[80] Pape argues that Ricoeur's theory of narrative as threefold *mimesis* enlightens at two distinct points in the process of interpretation of the text: (1) "it describes and enhances our understanding of the preacher's encounter with the biblical text as she prepares to preach," and (2) "it clarifies our understanding of the congregation's encounter with the sermon as text-like oral event."[81]

In this regard, preachers understand themselves to be under the authority of the Scriptures with the hope of being encountered by the Word, which places them under the special obligation of listening to the text along with the truthful and meaningful life narratives of the hearers.[82] In other words, according to Pape, "[T]he preacher is sent to this particular text by and on behalf of a community whose identity is constituted in part by a pledge to submit to the authority of this text."[83] It indicates that the preacher reads and mediates the text as the gathered community's surrogate, and the preacher, as homiletics scholar Lucy Rose proposes, gathers the community of faith around the Word.[84]

Moreover, the preacher focuses on the textual meaning of the biblical text for ecclesial gatherings, recapitulating the text and wrestling explicitly with its displayed communal world. This process begins with the preacher engaging the text through the lens of the ecclesial community members' multiple narrative worlds; however, it moves further to provide the hearers with a depiction of their life narratives and circumstances illuminated and configured in light of the biblical text.[85] In this respect, as Pape rightly explains, sermonic discourse "is to facilitate an encounter between a particular text and the community of faith such that the biblical text has its say in their hearing."[86] That is to say, it is the world of the text that the ecclesial gatherings have come to experience.

Then, some new sense (the second naïveté) emerges as a synergistic interaction between the world projected by the text and the context of the congregation's life narratives and circumstances. In this sense, the preacher may be imagined as a guide who helps and

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[77] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 52.

[78] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 52.

[79] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 52–68.

[80] Pape explains the concept of preaching as threefold *mimesis* in this way: "The sermon can be judged according to its ability to discern rightly and represent the congregation's narrative prefiguration (mimesis$_1$), its willingness to engage deeply and display the narrative world configured by this particular biblical text (mimesis$_2$), and its capacity to render seriously imaginable the new way of being made available through an encounter with this textual world (mimesis$_3$)." See Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 124.

[81] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 121.

[82] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 121–22.

[83] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 122.

[84] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 98.

[85] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 127–28.

[86] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 129.

accompanies the congregation on its journey with the biblical text.[87] The preacher seeks to discover language adequate to the new sense of what the preacher has seen and experienced in/through the process of reading the text on behalf of the particular faith community.[88] The hearers are invited to encounter their own world refigured in light of the text, and they will be rewarded with a new way of being in the world by God, who is working as a dynamic Word in and through their concrete and real lives.[89] Thus, the preacher helps the hearers to navigate and explore the world projected between them and the text, hoping to facilitate the richest encounter possible between the two worlds.[90] Through the scriptural Word, God will enable the preacher to grow in faith so that Christ may live in the preacher's heart through faith, and, rooted and grounded in love, the preacher will have the strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

D. Spiritual Formational Step: Building Union with the Divine

The fourth step in a transformative reading of the Bible asks that the preacher strives to build union with the divine, seeking to conform to the image of Christ through empowerment by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). This is when the preacher experiences God in the light and love of the Holy Spirit, which should be understood not as a single event but part of an ongoing relationship with God. The attempt to evangelize through words to those who need to revitalize their faith should be supported by an awareness of the preacher's own need for ongoing spiritual renewal.[91] The preacher who humbly seeks the guidance of the Spirit for unity with God in this fourth step proclaims God's Word "with greater clarity, integrity, and effectiveness."[92] This, in turn, enables the preacher and the ecclesial gathering to form a closer relationship with the divine through a more integral and authentic faith.

Before explaining in detail, the concept of the preacher's union with the divine, it is appropriate to point out three premises of the nature of the mystical union. First, the faithful's union with the divine does not mean the annihilation of the self.[93] Second, the unity between God and the believer does not refer to a union of equals. God is not in any sense equal to the believer; rather, God engages in an act of humility to share an experience of God's love with the believer. Last, the experience of union with the divine in the believer's present existence is both incomplete and brief.[94]

The basic understanding of these three premises of the nature of the mystical union between God and the believer helps to provide three practical applications that promote union with the divine. First, the believer unites with God by pouring all the attention and energy of her or his soul into Christ.[95] A spiritually mature believers understand the soul's love of God as a

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[87] This approach to the hermeneutical process can be imagined in the form of a triangle; cf. the integrated model of interpretation in the appendix 1.

[88] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 131–33.

[89] William J. Hill, "Preaching the Word: The Theological Background," in *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 171–74.

[90] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, 133.

[91] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 33.

[92] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith*, 33.

[93] Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 67–68.

[94] Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 69–71.

[95] Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (Jacksonville, FL: SeedSowers, 1981), 50.

union in which they are in consonance with God's will.[96] The passionate love of the believer for Christ is an essential factor in fostering union with God. The more the soul of the believer focuses on "the grace of Christ's incarnation and redemption, the fullness of the paschal mystery," the closer the soul of the believer will be drawn to the presence of Jesus Christ.[97]

Second, the believer unites with God through a mutual relationship, not through the union of equals.[98] Bernard highlights that there is a degree of uplifting for the soul when the believer abides in God and God abides in the believer (1 John 4:16). Bernard correlates the union between God and the soul with the notion of spiritual marriage.[99] Thus, the faithful soul is the spouse and bride of Christ and the image of God being restored in his likeness.[100] It should be noted that the mutual relationship is established not by any innate merit of the believer's soul but by the grace of God.[101]

Lastly, the believer unites with God by means of communion and fellowship with the Holy Spirit.[102] Spiritual union with God takes place in and through the Spirit, who is the unity between the Father and the Son. The Creator Spirit infuses Godself into the created spirit as God wills, and the person of prayer unites one spirit with God.[103] This is related to Kevin J. Vanhoozer's emphatic statement that "[s]anctification is thus the final aspect of the Spirit's work."[104]

St. Basil the Great, a bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (330–379), asserted that "[t]he way, then, to knowledge of God is from the one Spirit, through the one Son, to the one Father. And conversely the goodness and holiness by nature and the royal dignity reach from the Father, through the Only-begotten, to the Spirit."[105] In this sense, the believer enters into Trinitarian communion with the Father and the Son in and through the Holy Spirit. Spirit dwells in the midst of creatures and helps to strengthen the solidarity of spiritual communion and fellowship between God and God's creatures. As such, the believer unites with God by means of *koinonia* with the Spirit, who is the life-giver and the sanctifier.

E. Practical Step: Embodying the Word in Christ through the Holy Spirit

The fifth step in a transformative reading of the biblical text is to embody the Word in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The preacher relies on the help of the Holy Spirit to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). This means that the preacher makes Christ the center and principle of her or his life and lives on Christ's account.[106] This occurs as the will of the preacher is connected with the will of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit "as an intimate and transcendent

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[96] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I,* trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 1.11–12.

[97] Paul Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 163.

[98] Tamburello, *Union with Christ* 70.

[99] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, trans. Irene Edmonds (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 85.IV.12.

[100] Bernardo Olivera, *The Sun at Midnight: Monastic Experience of the Christian Mystery*, trans. Augustine Roberts (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 105.

[101] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 81.V.11.

[102] St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 9, 23.

[103] William of Saint-Thierry, *Exposition on the Song of Songs,* trans. M. Columba Hart, Cistercian Fathers 6 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 95.

[104] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 413.

[105] St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18, 47.

[106] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 100.

cause" mystically assimilates the faithful to Christ and puts the faithful in full trust in Christ.[107] Yves Congar (1904–1995), a French Dominican theologian, said that "through his Spirit, God the Father makes Christ dwell in our hearts, that is, in the depths of our being where our lives are orientated (Eph. 3:14–17)."[108] Thus, the believer is united with Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The preacher embodies the Word of God by participating in the work of Christ because, according to Vanhoozer, Christ is "the unique and definitive embodiment of God's self-communicative act or "Word."[109] Paul Janowiak S.J., professor of liturgical and sacramental theology at Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, describes it this way: "Engaged in the sacred act of embodying the word in our world, we participate in Christ's own answer of self-offering love to the One who utters it."[110] This means that the vocation of the preacher as a biblical interpreter is to embody the meaning of the Word by following the path that Christ walked.[111] Engaging with the way of Jesus is to become a disciple as a fitting image of Christ, who is "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). In other words, "[I]t is the state of being-in, and abiding with, Christ."[112]

To encounter the Word in this way, the preacher ought to actualize the meaning, significance, and truth of the text and embody the righteousness of God through her or his own life (James 2:20–22). This is because, to a great extent, the context of our lives, as Ricoeur insists, is shaped by texts: "For me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood, and loved."[113] The preacher's way of living and acting, therefore, can be understood as her or his interpretation of the Scriptures. This has something to do with the fact that the response to the text by the preacher as a biblical interpreter "is ultimately not only a matter of reading but of being."[114]

The preacher's message, delivered through a life of thinking, seeing, and acting in a Christlike manner, is a way of reflecting the voice of the Spirit who dwells in the preacher.[115] The Spirit's voice invites the hearers to the living and eternal Word of God that leads the congregation to Christ "and then forms the life of Christ in them so that they can continue walking the way of Christ."[116] Now, the members of a congregation embody the Word of God repeatedly in their daily lives until they become members with the Spirit of the living God and become the living letter of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). Vanhoozer stresses that "[t]he church—the sum total of those who bear the name of Christ—bears the responsibility of bearing, of doing, indeed of *being* the Word of God."[117] The meaning, significance, and truth of the Scriptures ought to be continually extended and embodied in the words, deeds, and lives of the members of the ecclesial community.[118] In other words, the church is a living letter from Christ that witnesses the meaning of the text for the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:2). The reason for living a life worthy of the gospel by cultivating godliness and becoming Christlike "is ultimately to glorify God."[119]

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[107] Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 101.

[108] Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 101.

[109] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 440.

[110] Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching*, 184.

[111] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 440.

[112] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 204.

[113] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37.

[114] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 441.

[115] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 216; Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 108.

[116] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 216.

[117] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 440.

[118] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 441.

[119] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 243.

Each believer in the church becomes "fit for the purpose of imaging Christ, embodying his mind and heart, everywhere, to everyone, at all time," by encountering the self-revealing God who is present sacramentally in the Word proclaimed by the preacher.[120] The preacher is also being transformed sacramentally through the Spirit by seeing how God is working in the "concrete and real life" of the congregation and witnessing the ecclesial community's experience of the holy meeting.[121] This reciprocity between the preacher and the ecclesial gathering strengthens believers' union with God as the holy people of God in Christ through the working of the Spirit, who is present sacramentally in them.[122]

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to clarify the concept of a transformative engagement with the biblical text and has explored the possibility of a holistic approach to biblical hermeneutics for the preacher as a contemporary method of interpreting the Scriptures. Throughout the paper, I have discussed the need to consider a five-step transformative engagement with the Scriptures as a biblical hermeneutic for the preacher. In the preliminary step, I suggested an iconic approach to the text in which the preacher as the reader is prepared to see beyond the text to the world to which the text points and to be transformed by being gazed upon by the object that the preacher as a reader sees.

In the exegetical step, I proposed an exegetical approach to the text consisting of eight steps in consideration of the historical context and literary genre of the text for a more sophisticated level of understanding. In the prayerful and meditative step, I suggest the ancient art of *lectio divina*, of praying and meditating on the sense of the text which has been informationally comprehended through the exegetical procedures in light of the context of the hearers' multiple narrative worlds. In the spiritual formational step, I proposed three practical applications that promote the mystical union between God and the believer: (1) the believer unites with God by sustaining all the love and energy of her or his soul in Christ, (2) the believer unites with God through a mutual indwelling relationship, and (3) the believer unites with God with the help of communion and fellowship in and with the Spirit. In the practical step, I suggested a Christ-like life embodying the Word in Christ through the Spirit.

Therefore, preparing for preaching by performing these five exegetical procedures enables the preacher and the ecclesial gathering together to embody and proclaim the good news of God in this world with their words, deeds, and lives, appropriate to the purpose of illuminating Christ through the gifts of wisdom and power nourished by the Spirit for the glory of God. The Word performed in the believers' way of living can be understood as a kenotic act in that they seek to empty themselves and be filled with Christ's way, truth, and life. Dominican theologian William Hill describes it clearly:

> The Word, which is the bearer of God's life and meaning for us, incarnates itself in human history, midway between the one who utters it and those who listen. But we must take seriously the fragility of the *human* situation here. God's act in history is a *kenosis*; [God's] intentions remain those of setting up the kingdom in and through the

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[120] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 206.

[121] Hill, "Preaching the Word: The Theological Background," 174.

[122] Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching*, 183–87; Christopher M. Hadley, "The Theopoetic Constitution of the Church," in *Doing Theology As If People Mattered*, ed. Deborah Ross and Eduardo C. Fernández (New York: Herder & Herder, 2019), 65.

stammering ways in which we strive to give utterance to that Word. It is part of faith to accept that.[123]

The presence of Jesus Christ stirs that faith in both the preacher and the ecclesial community and leads them deeper into "the grace of Christ's incarnation and redemption, the fullness of the paschal mystery."[124]

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[123] William J. Hill, "Preaching as a Moment in Theology," in *Search for the Absent God*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 186.

[124] Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching*, 163, 187.

1. The Integrated Model of Interpretation

Homily

Biblical World

Congregation's World
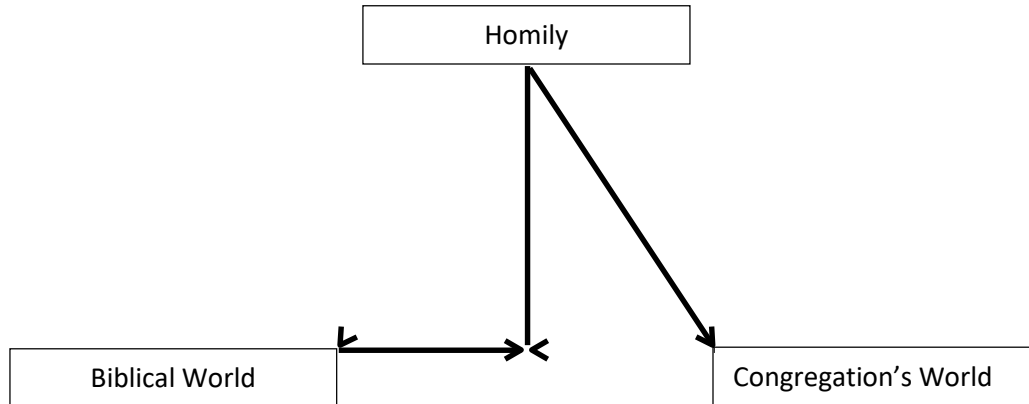
The Word of Exhortation Form in NT Homiletic and Epistolary Discourse

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Abstract

Critical efforts to identify the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue homily form have consistently looked to the Word of Exhortation pattern of Luke's Pauline synagogue sermon in Acts 13:16b-41. Scholars (i.e., Wills, 1984; Stegner, 1988; Black, 1988, 2001) argue that this same form can be observed in the Epistle to the Hebrews which its author labels a Word of Exhortation (13:22). Critics argue that this homily form was likely influenced by the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. However, their argument to this end is more heuristic than demonstrative. I offer specific demonstrations that the source of this rhetorical influence can be found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.43.56). What becomes evident is that both the Hellenistic synagogue homily format and the basic Pan-Hellenic thematic Elaboration treatment were used as a Christian version of the Jewish Word of Exhortation. Contemporary homiletic implications, derived from the rhetorical nature of the Word of Exhortation homiletic form(s), are briefly considered.

> Gerald Bruns reminds contemporary readers that Jewish hermeneutics
> has always understood, "The Torah emerges as what it is and comes into
> its own only in the dialogue it generates; and only by entering into the
> dialogue can one enter the Torah."
>
> —Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient & Modern*[125]

C. Clifton Black offers a chapter length discussion of "The Rhetorical Form of the Early Christian Sermon" in his study, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts.*[126] He concludes by affirming that understanding the influence of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition on the composition of the texts of the NT, "helps us better understand both the pervasiveness and the limits of logic in the course of religious proclamation."[127] He argues that a rhetorical critical understanding of this influence should not only shape the exegetical intuitions of homileticians, he also develops a chapter length discussion of how the parabolic nature of much of the rhetoric of the Gospels should be taken into account by contemporary preachers. In order to allow the gospel to do its work, he urges preachers to follow Jesus' use of parabolic *indirection* rather than assume that *explanation* actually brings change.[128] Black's argument attends to a shift in homiletic understanding that began during the last quarter of the 20th century: a concern to be faithful to the intention of a text's strategy of reasoning and not just to the theological content "atomistically" derived from it.[129]

Notes:

[125] Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient & Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 116.

[126] C. Clifton Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts* (St Louis: Chalice, 2001), 115-133.

[127] Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 132-133.

[128] Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospels*, 135-149.

[129] The word "atomistic" to described explanatory preaching comes David Buttrick, "Interpretation and Preaching," *Interpretation* 25 (1981), 48. On considering what a sermon does and not just what it says based on the

My interest in this essay is to advance the discussion of the NT homily form that scholars like Black sought to recover as the "Word of Exhortation" design Luke used to structure his version of Paul's sermon in Antioch Pisidia (Acts 13).[130] But rather than looking to the rhetorical tradition's genre-centered understanding of how to invent "Proofs" (*epicheirema*) as the influence on the Hellenistic synagogue homily format, I choose to consider the rhetorical tradition's strategy for conducting topical reasoning by Thematic Elaboration (*expolitio*) as the source of this influence. This Pan-Hellenic form of reasoning is found in Book IV of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[131] Given the limits of the essay length, I make my case by reviewing Hellenistic synagogue homily form scholarship and establishing its relationship to the patterned development of the Pan-Hellenic Elaborated Theme. Following this I provide several "demonstrations" of these inventional strategies of reasoning in first century Christian texts and then close by suggesting how understanding the hermeneutic intention of these strategies of reasoning that occur in NT texts might influence homiletic engagement of these "intentions."

The Hellenistic Jewish Synagogue Homily

According to Philo, first century Jews gathered on the Sabbath to "occupy themselves with the philosophy of their fathers, dedicating that time to the acquiring of knowledge and the study of the truths of nature. For what are our places of prayer throughout the cities but schools of prudence and courage and temperance and justice and also of piety, holiness and every virtue by which duties to God and men are discerned and rightly performed" (*Moses* 2.216; Colson trans.). He alludes to the nature of the synagogue homily as discourse conducted by the synagogue leader who begins a talk by "explaining and teaching the multitude what they ought to say and do." Those who gathered listened "so as to improve in virtue, and being made better both in their moral character and in their conduct through life" (*Moses* 2.215). Philo's treatise on *Moses* is addressed primarily to non-Jews and appears to be intended to serve as a general introduction to the ideals of Judaism as exemplified by Moses.[132] The synagogue homily as described, had the purpose of educating Hellenists and exhorting Jews to understand the principled purpose of such moral instruction concerning the cardinal virtues and the pieties of the Mosaic law.[133]

In his study of the Jewish synagogue homily in antiquity, Borgen identified what he called a "proem" homily form that he found to be in common use. His research was based on an extensive body of examples of synagogue homilies from the Amoraic period (ca. 200-500 CE). He argued that the Fourth Gospel presented a Jesus tradition in John 6 that reveals the same Jewish Torah hermeneutic with regard to the "mana" motif as that found in Philo and the

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performative nature of the text see David Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), viii; Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press,1985), 28. This shift to consider issues of rhetorical form in preaching paralleled the shift to consider issues of rhetorical form occurring in the analysis of sacred texts in Biblical studies.

[130] See the discussion of synagogue sermons and their rhetoric in O. C. Edwards, Jr. *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 8-14.

[131] The Loeb edition of this anonymous preceptive rhetoric cited throughout is [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium,* translated by Harry Caplan. Loeb Classical Library 403 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

[132] Louis Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 12.

[133] David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 202.

Amoraic Jewish homilies.[134] The distinguishing form of the synagogue homilies he discusses was the initial reference to the sacred topic derived from a reading from the Torah. He identified this as the "proem" form of the homily. The term "proem" is taken from the Greek rhetorical tradition's term *prooemion*—the discursive portion of a speech that serves as the introduction. Many of the homilies he studied began by citing the text, or key words and phrases shared between the Torah and the secondary text of the synagogue reading.

In a synagogue service, the Torah text for the week was read, supplemented with a second reading, the *Haftarot*, which "completed" the reading of texts. A homily was then offered by the synagogue leader or a preacher who sought to explain the *Haftarot* reading from the prophets in light of the implications of the Torah text. Since *Halakha* texts of the law were considered more important than the secondary sacred texts, a form of topical reasoning was used interpretively (e.g., by a midrashic *qal wahomer* "light and heavy" hermeneutic) in the body of the homily. Borgen adds that a homily would typically conclude with a protreptic Judgement that reiterates a claim made in the proem with words or phrases drawn from the Torah text. A final paraenetic Exhortation might also be present.[135] Unfortunately, as Stegner notes, researchers like Borgen may have been misled by the practice of ancient editors and copyists who had filled in the initial Torah verse alluded to in the exegesis and final judgement portion of the homily. The text may not have actually been in the original proem.[136] However, the basic form of the synagogue homily design appears to have been an effort to interpret and render a judgement concerning the *Haftarot* text(s) in light of Torah understanding.

Actual knowledge of the form of synagogue preaching prior to 200 CE is primarily derived from the writings of Philo and Josephus, *as well as* the influence of the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue homily form on writers of NT texts. The epi-center of that research has looked at a purported example of the synagogue homily in Acts 13:16b-41. In vss. 14-15 we are told that on the Sabbath day Paul and his companions went to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. They sat with those in attendance and "After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation (λόγος παρακλήσεως) for the people, give it.'" The text of the sermon in 16b-41 provides a Lukan synopsis of the message that critics look to as a likely example of the Hellenistic synagogue homily form known as a "word of Exhortation." The writer of Hebrews uses this same term to describe Heb 1-12, stating, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22). Though a number of biblical critics have argued that the uses of the phrase "Word of Exhortation" (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεω) is too vague to suggest that the entirety of Hebrews should be considered a homily, the issue comes down to the question of form. Is there a common form to be observed between the homily in Acts 13:16b-41 and the development of the argument in Hebrews?

In the mid-1980s Lawrence Wills argued that a discernable form could be derived from the sermon in Acts 13 that was also observable in a variety of Christian and Jewish homiletic and epistolary literature during the late first- and early second-century. This included its use in the

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[134] See Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, *NovT* Supplement 10 (1965); reprints: Leiden: Brill, 1981 and Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017.

[135] See Borgen's discussion of the Jewish "Homiletic Pattern" in *Bread from Hea*ven, 28-58.

[136] William Richard Stegner, "The Ancient Jewish Synagogue Homily" in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, David E. Aune, ed., 51-70 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 58. However, the charge of methodological anachronism may be offset by the fact that Borgen also compares his research of synagogue homilies from the Amoraic period with Philo's first century strategies of interpretation.

Epistle to the Hebrews. He argues that the Christian use of this form of the homily appears to have been appropriated from the Hellenistic synagogue homily design. He identifies a homily form in the Acts 13 sermon that he views as paradigmatic and finds the same form used to develop a Word of Exhortation introduction to the argument of Hebrews:[137]

Acts 13:16b-41 Word of Exhortation Homily Form	Hebrews 1:1-2:2 Word of Exhortation Homily Form
An Introduction: 13:16b	An Introduction: 1:1-4
Scripture Reference *exempla*; 13:17-22	Scripture Reference *exempla*; 1:5-13
Exegetical Argument with *exempla*: 13:23-37	Exegetical Argument with *exempla*: 1:14
A Concluding Judgement; 13:38-39	
An Exhortation: 13:40-41	An Exhortation: 2:1-2

Wills claims that it was likely that Greek rhetorical theory from the 5th century BCE had influenced this Hellenistic synagogue design, with stylistic "techniques that have been passed over from Greek rhetoric into Jewish and Christian oratory." However, he maintains that the presentation of a concatenation of scriptural references cited after the Introduction is clearly a Semitic adaptation of this rhetorical design.[138] He finds similar patterns in other Christian literature, writing that, "In *1 Clement* we often find at the beginning of this pattern a "call to consider" the *exempla* that follow in the form of an imperative or hortatory subjunctive such as 'let us consider' (κατανοήσωμεν, 24.1; 37:2), 'let us reckon' (ἀναλογισμεθα, 38:3), or 'let us bring forth examples' (ὑποδείγματα ἐνέγκωμεν, 55:1; Lake, trans.)."[139]

Black was persuaded by Will's argument that pattern of the early Christian homily was informed by the Hellenistic synagogue homily design and that both were influenced by the rhetorical tradition. However, he argues that the sermon form in Acts hews more closely to the classical rhetorical norms of the first centuries BCE and CE than to Will's proposal of a 5th century Greek rhetoric. He indicates that some may believe he has succumbed to the "parallelomania" delusion of finding patterns where they do not exist, but he is keenly aware that linear patterns of developing strategies of reasoning was the essence of the preceptive rhetorical tradition.[140] "Once we are clear about this," he adds, "continued research could indeed delineate precise and creative modifications of Greco-Roman oratory by its Hellenistic Jewish and Christian practitioners. That possibility, at least, should not be prematurely foreclosed."[141]

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[137] Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 77, Nos. 3-4 (1984): 277-299. For his proposal for the homily form in Acts 13, see p. 279. For his proposal of the homily form of found at the outset of the Epistle to the Hebrews, see p. 283. Thyen had conducted similar research prior to that of Borgen and claimed that the Epistle to the Hebrews is formed by a series of carefully structured Hellenistic synagogue homilies; H. Thyen, *Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1955); cf. Swetnam's helpful summary of this research in J. Swetnam, "On the Literary Genre of the 'Epistle to the Hebrews,'" *NovT* 11 (1969): 261-269.

[138] Wills, "The Form of the Sermon," 299.

[139] Wills, "The Form of the Sermon," 279-280.

[140] C. Clifton Black, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 11.

[141] Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 132.

I affirm Black's conclusion. My suggested adjustment in continuing this research is to redirect attention to the part of the Pan-Hellenic rhetorical tradition that provides more useful explanations of format strategies that account for the pattern Wills identified. Rather than looking to the tradition's resources for developing rhetorical Proofs (which entails a determination of genre as well as identifying rhetorical Proofs and the *partes orationis* discourse divisions), I propose to examine the form of the Hellenistic homily form by way of the portion of the rhetorical tradition that provides a seven-fold "treatment" (*tractando*) of thematic Elaboration (*expolitio*). It was the form of topical reasoning used to practice declamation rather than the form of reasoning used to defend a Cause with Rhetorical Proofs (*epicheirema*). Both strategies of reasoning (an *epicheirema* and an *expolitio*) are found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. M. L. Clarke argues that *this* first century BCE rhetorical handbook, "best represents the traditional [Greek] rhetoric of the schools, the sort of thing that was taught by the ordinary rhetorician in Rome."[142] It depicts the Pan-Hellenic tradition that would have been the basis of any NT rhetoric.

Elaboration as a Reasoning Strategy in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*

The first treatment of rhetorical reasoning, the epicheireme form of argument, is found in the *Rhet Her* in Book Two. Unlike Cicero's model of argument which is conducted in a fashion that seeks to emulate a logical argument (*De Inv* 1.37.67), the *Rhet Her* version of the epicheireme argument makes its appeal to both head and heart. Instead of trying to convince an audience, it seeks to persuade them. Cicero's five-fold version of a rhetorical Proof stipulates the use of two major premises, each supported by a minor premises, that allow a speaker to arrive at a reasonable conclusion. The *Rhet Her* version of the epicheireme is based on the Aristotelian tri-fold enthymeme of rhetorical reasoning. It places the Conclusion at the outset as a Propositional Claim, offers a supporting Reason, which is then buttressed by a Proof of the Reason.[143] This basic rhetorical argument form is then Embellished stylistically to move the listener's "will" to give their assent and to the argument. This reasoning strategy concludes with a Résumé that briefly summarizes what has been proved (2.18.28). As George Kennedy observes, "*By the early first century BCE* [the] epikheirema *had come to refer to a five-part argument, consisting of a*

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[142] M. L. Clarke, *Rhetoric at Rome: A Historical Survey*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 24. For my use of the term Pan-Hellenist rhetoric see Enos, "The Art of Rhetoric at Rhodes," in *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*, edited by C. S. Lipson and R. A. Binkley, 183-196 (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), 194. The term Pan-Hellenism or *panhellenismos* is more a modern convenience of expression than a specific term that was in use by actual Hellenists of the era. It is applied to phenomenon that function as cultural norms of the era; See Lynette Mitchell, *Panhellenism and the Barbarian in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Swansea, UK: Classical Press of Wales, 2007), xv-xviii.

[143] For more than two millennia, Cicero's youthful compendium of rhetorical invention, *De Inventio* has been the culturally preferred way to think of argument in antiquity. For example, Gaines reflects this preference when comparing the *Rhet Her* version of argument with Cicero's *De Inv* version. He suggests that the *Rhet Her* version of the epicheirema represents "a kind of theoretical economy, one designed to provide only what is necessary to promote facility in speaking;" Robert N. Gaines, "Roman Rhetorical Handbooks," in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, edited by W. Dominik and J. Hall, 163-180 (West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) 175. However, Braet approaches the comparison less disposed to dismiss versions of reasoning that include appeals to emotion. He argues that the *Rhet Her* version of the rhetorical Proof was the cultural norm in the empire and finds that Cicero's *De Inv* version is too tied to Plato's Academy and its preference for use of inductive reasoning rather than reasoning that suggests an emotive appeal should play a role in rational reasoning. A. C. Braet, "Hermagoras and the Epicheireme," *Rhetorica* 22 (2004): 327-47; 340. Of course. Plato's student Aristotle disagreed with his teacher. He argued that effective *pathos* appeals must play a role along with *logos* and *ethos* appeals in any civic discourse seeking to affect persuasion.

proposition, supporting reason, proof of the reason, embellishment, and conclusion; cf. Rhetoric for Herennius 2.2."[144] Most genre-based discussions of the rhetorical tradition assume that the epicheireme is the format that must be employed to advance argument in support of a Cause.

But unlike Cicero's *De Inventione*, the *Rhet Her* compendium of a preceptive rhetoric offers a second treatment of rhetorical reasoning in Book IV. Unlike the *epicheirema*, this form of reasoning is essentially an extended form of Embellished reason—so much so, that the *Rhet Her* author argues that this seven-fold treatment of a topic should be used to develop the "Embellishment" portion of an epicheireme. The full use of an Elaborated Theme is meant to Refine (*expolitio*) a topic by "arousing" (*exsuscitationem*) the response of an audience through the use of multiple stylistic figures.[145] The *Rhet Her* author introduces it as one of two ways to Refine a matter both of which involve, "Dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something ever new" (4.42.54).[146] This second, sevenfold form of rhetorical reasoning, that the Loeb translator Harry Caplan called "Descanting on a Theme," is what it means to "Amplify" (*amplificare*) or what the Greeks called the "Elaboration" (ἐξεργασία) of a topic:

> "[W]hen we Descant upon the same Theme we shall use a great many variations. Indeed, after having expressed (*pronuntiarimus*) the theme simply we can subjoin the Reason (*ratio*), and then express the theme in another form (*dupliciter*), with or without the Reasons (*rationes*); next we can present the Contrary (*contrarium*)—all this I have discussed under the Figures of Diction; then a Comparison (*simile*) and an Example (*exemplum*); …and finally, the Conclusion (*conclusionem*)…. A Refinement (*expolitio*) of this sort, which consists of numerous figures of diction and of thought, can therefore be exceedingly ornate" (*Rhet Her* 4.43.56).

The *Rhet Her* author's choice to develop this second strategy of reasoning in his taxonomy of figures of speech is an artifact of how the ancient critics divided the design of persuasive appeals between rhetorical arguments meant to secure "conviction" and topical reasoning meant to secure "credence."[147] In addition, since the basis of engaging in topical reasoning was conducted by way of figurative amplification, the author could not have introduced this second form of reasoning until he had introduced, explained, and illustrated the figurative speech necessary to amplify a *topos*. And that was the task of his taxonomy of figures in his fourth and final book of the *Rhet Her*. He concludes his discussion of Amplification through Elaborative Refinement by adding that,

> I have been led to discuss it at rather great length because it not only gives force and distinction to a speech when we plead a Cause, but it is by far our most important means

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[144] Italics original to Kennedy; from Kennedy's prefatory commentary for Chapter Five on Epicheiremes in "On Invention" in George A. Kennedy, trans. and ed., *Invention and Method: Two Rhetorical Treatises from the Hermogenic Corpus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 85.

[145] For example, the US Supreme Court decision of Tinker vs. Des Moines is almost always cited by its singular use of a powerful metaphor, that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." A certain amount of eloquence used in aid of assent to rational discourse is the essence of good rhetoric.

[146] Refinement was conducted either by creating a sense of immediacy in shifting to first-person "Dialogue" (*sermocinatio*) or by Embellishing/Refining (*expolitio*) a topic through "Arousal" (*exsuscitationem*) by way of the figures of thought of Contrast, Comparison, and Example (or cited support). The idea of using figurative language to "arouse" the willingness of an audience to accept reasoned argument remains a hallmark of excellent reasoning to this day.

[147] Cicero distinguished these two types of rhetorical reasoning, noting that "amplification is a sort of forcible method of arguing, argument being aimed at effecting proof, amplification at exercising influence" (*De Part* 8.27; Rackham, trans.).

of training for skill in style. It will be advantageous therefore to practice the principles of Refining (*expolitio*) in exercises divorced from a real Cause [i.e. by declamation], and in actual pleading to put them to use in the Embellishment of an argument, which I discussed in Book II (*Rhet Her* 4.44.58; Caplan, trans.).

Note how he enlarges our understanding of the role of Refining (*expolitio*) as one of the two major strategies of reasoning. It was a means to Amplify the Embellishment of an epicheireme Proof[148] and was also the format to be used to develop Digressions (*digrediendi*) used after Proofs (*epicheirema*) in order to stylistically buttress the argument Cause (*causam*).[149] It was a form of reasoning orators used to declaim topics, i.e., reasoning "divorced from a real *causam*."[150] It was also the basic format that instructors varied to fit the maxim and *chreia* assignments in a student's progymnasmata training. Hock and O'Neil conclude that it is "clear that the *expolitio* as presented in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and ἐξεργασία [Elaboration] as outlined by [the progymnasmata training of] Hermogenes are fundamentally similar, if not identical."[151] Extensive research has been conducted to identify examples of *chreia* as well as the maxim Elaborations (i.e., Herm, *Ex* §3-4;) which should be considered adaptations of the basic thematic Elaboration form stipulated at *Rhet Her* 4.43.56.[152]

What should be clear is that ancient rhetoricians understood rhetorical reasoning as something that could be conducted in two ways: as a rhetorical Proof in reasoned argument (using *epicheirema*) or as thematic Elaborations conducted as topical reasoning (using *expolitio*). Most biblical critics like Wills and Black, who tried to discover the rhetorical influence that shaped the synagogue homily and its appropriation as a Christian homily form, would have been better served to consider the influence of the sevenfold format for engaging in topical reasoning rather than the fivefold format of conducting a genre-controlled argument. In addition, just as the progymnasmata teachers varied how a theme would be developed between the chreia and the maxim, we should consider the Hellenistic synagogue homily form as another adaptive example

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[148] The *Rhet Her* author states that an "Embellishment consists of similes, examples, amplifications, previous judgements (i.e., cited authorities), and other means which serve to expand and enrich the argument" (2.28.45; Caplan, trans.).

[149] Cicero states, "It is often useful to digress from the subject one has put forward and is dealing with, for the purpose of arousing emotion; and accordingly very often either a place is given to a Digression (*digrediendi*) devoted to exciting emotion after we have related the facts and stated our case, or this can rightly be done after we have established our own arguments of refuted those of our opponents, or in both places, or in all the parts of a speech, if the case is one of this importance and extent; and the cases that are the weightiest and fullest for amplification and embellishment are those that give the greatest number of openings for digression of this kind, so allowing the employment of the topics which stimulate or curb the emotions of the audience" (*De Orat* 2.76.312; Rackham, trans.). The Elaborated Theme was the form by which Digressions were to be conducted.

[150] The advanced forms of declamation—*controversiae* and *suasoriae*—were extended forms of a stylistically Refined topical theme. Learning to control these two thematic forms which combined both the Dialogue and the figurative Elaboration aspects of *expolitio* were the final rhetorical assignment in progymnasmata training; see Janet Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 243-303.

[151] Ronald F. Hock, and Edward N. O'Neil. The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises (Boston: Brill, 2002), 89. Mack and O'Neil had previously claimed that, "It is clear that the Rhet. Her. is the first reference to this form of topical reasoning in extant literature, but the handbook author appears to assume that what he describes was also part of the classroom training in rhetoric reported in later centuries as 'preliminary exercises' in progymnasmata training;" Mack and O'Neil, "The Chreia Discussion of Hermogenes of Tarsus" in Hock and O'Neil, eds., *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric: Volume 1- The Progymnasmata*, 153-182 (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1986), 161.

[152] A recent example of the latter is offered by Thomas D. Stegman, "Reading Luke 12:13-34 as an Elaboration of a Chreia: How Hermogenes of Tarsus Sheds Light on Luke's Gospel," *NovT* 49/4 (2007): 328-352. For extensive ancient examples of the chreia in rhetorical use see the literature cited in the previous note.

of the basic *Rhet Her* topical Elaboration strategy. It simply adds a "Call to Hear" and a "Recounting Holy History" interpretive concatenation of Hebrew scripture references as an initial meta-framing technique that situates the *topos* to be Refined.

The Hellenistic Jewish-Christian Word of Exhortation Homily Form

This synagogue Word of Exhortation style of topical preaching provided a preacher with a textually situated sacred topic, at least in its use by first century Christian *writers*. Once a topic was interpretively inferred from the cited authorities, the preacher would make a Topical Claim derived from "revelation." They would provide a Reason justifying consideration of this topic, and then Restate that Claim about it. An Amplifying exposition of that *topos* follows this, "Elaborating" by means of a Contrary,[153] by a Comparison,[154] and finally by way of one or more Examples.[155] The preacher would then close the homily by offering a Judgement, an Exhortation, or both.[156]

I add to Will's original proposal of the NT use of this form by demonstrating how Acts 13:16b-41 uses the Synagogue homily form combined with the preceptive tradition of a rhetorical Elaboration of a *topoi*. I compare the form I propose, in the same way Wills did, with the first topical argument of the Epistle to the Heb 1:1-3:6. In doing so I include Hermogenes' Greek terminology for each rhetorical unit of an Elaboration (ἐξεργασία; *Ex* 3.7-8) as the language Luke or the Writer of Hebrews would have used to invent their Word of Exhortation reasoning:

Acts 13:16b-41 *Topos: God Provides a Savior for Those Who Believe*	Hebrews 1:1-3:6 *Topos* – **Attend to the Gospel Message (Not Angels)**
Begins with a Call to Hear in 13:16b	Begins with a Call to Hear, 1:1-3a
Recounts Holy History with relevant texts (using memorable χρεία/χρείαις) in 13:17-22	Recounts Holy History with relevant texts in 1:3b-14
Makes a Topical Claim (an αἰτία) in 13:23	Makes a Topical Claim in 2:1

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[153] Reasoning by Contraries (*contrarium*) juxtaposes two opposing statements or ideas with the purpose of using one to disprove the other. When conducted as a figure of thought rather than a figure of diction, the oppositional dimension of the rhetorical unit is developed as a comparative antithesis (*contention*); see the discussion if the figure at *Rhet Her* 4.18.25-26 and 4.47.58.

[154] The figure of thought, Comparison "carries over the form of likeness from one thing to another." In diction it functions as a simile, but in its use in expolitio, it can be used to create either contrast or to provide a detailed parallel at *Rhet Her* 4.47.59-61; see Marsh H. McCall, Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[155] Exemplification (*exemplum*) "is the citing of something done or said in the past." It can be a cited authority source like scripture, a retelling of a historic occurrence, or recourse to an illustrative cultural instance or image that would be commonly accepted as true to the experience of the listeners (*Rhet Her* 4.47.62).

[156] This is not a specifically Semitic addition to give a Word of Exhortation since a Judgement is akin to a Conclusion and Hermogenes advises his students to also offer a concluding Exhortation. Hermogenes tells students concluding their presentation on a famous saying that "At the end you will put an exhortation to the effect that one must be persuaded by the person who has said or done this" (Herm, *Ex* 3.8); George A. Kennedy, trans. and ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 77.

Offers a Reason for the Claim (a πίστεις) in 13:24-25	Offers a Reason for the Claim in 2:3a
Restates the Claim (an επαναλαμβάνω) in 13:26	Restates Claim in 2:3b-4
Provides a Contrary/Contrast (an αντίθεση) in 13:27-31	Provides a Contrary in 2:5-9
Provides a Comparison that includes supporting scriptural citations (a παραβολλης with παράδείγματα) in 13:32-36	Provides a Comparison in 2:10-18
Provides the Example (a παράδειγμα) in 13:37	Provides an Example, in 3:1-4
Offers a concluding Judgement (a κρίσεως) in 13:38-39	Offers a concluding Judgement in 3:5-6
Exhorts (a παράκλησις) hearers to envision/implement the implications of the claim made in 13:40-41.	

The only substantive difference between how these two texts develop their *topos* is that the Hebrews author ends with a Judgement and does not include an Exhortation. However, Luke provides a synopsis of Paul's speech, while Heb 1:1-3:6 simply introduces this Word of Exhortation.

The opening portion of Hebrews actually develops a second example of the full Hellenistic Jewish synagogue homily pattern in the next division (Heb 3:7-4:13), but this inventional format does not occur after that. As the following outline suggests, the remaining portions of the sermon's argument are conducted according to the rhetorical tradition's principle of thematized Elaborations. The author moves his argument along, *topos* by *topos*, through eight additional topically reasoned Refined Amplifications with the exception of Heb 11:1-12:3 which is developed epideictically as an *encomium*:[157]

The Epistle to the Hebrews as a Word of Exhortation Homily
Topos – Attend to the Gospel Message, not Angels) – 1:1-3:6 (Call to Hear, 1:1-3a; Recounts Holy History, 1:3b-14; Topical Claim, 2:1; Reason, 2:3a; Restates Claim, 2:3b-4; Contrary, 2:5-9; Comparison, 2:10-13; Example, 2:14-18; Exhortation, 3:1-4; Judgement, 3:5-6).
Topos – Entering God's Rest - 3:7-4:13 (Call to Hear, 3:7a; Recounts Holy History, 3:7b-15; Topical Claim, 3:16-18; Reason, 3:19; Claim Restated, 4:1-2; Contrary, 4:3-5; Comparison, 4:6-8; Judgement, 4:9-10; Exhortation, 4:11-13).
Topos – Do Not Be Heart-Hardened - 3:7-4:13 (Topical Claim, 3:7-15; Reason, 3:12; Claim Restated, 3:13-15; Contrary, 3:15-4:2; Comparison w/Scriptural Examples, 4:3-8; Judgement, 4:9-10; Exhortation, 4:11-13).

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[157] For the encomiastic division between recounting "virtues" and recounting "deeds," see Burton L. Mack, *The Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 75-76. For a recent argument that the entire Epistle to the Hebrews should be considered an ancient synagogue homily see Gabriella Gelardini, *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insight* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 107-127.

Topos – Hold Fast Your Confession – 4:14-6:12 (Topical Claim, 4:14; Reason, 4:15; Claim Restated, 4:16; Comparison, 5:1-10; Contrary, 5:11-6:3; Example, 6:4-8; Judgement, 6:9-10; Exhortation, 6:11-12).
Topos – A New High Priest Hope – 6:13-7:28 (Topical Claim, 6:13-15; Reason, 6:16-18; Claim Restated, 6:19-20; Example, 7:1-7; Comparison, 7:8-10; Contrary, 7:11-24; Judgement, 7:25-28).
Topos – The Mediator of a New Covenant – 8:1-12 (Topical Claim, 8:1-2; Reason, 8:3, Claim Restated, 8:4-6; Contrary, 8:7-9; Comparison, 8:10-11; Judgement 8:12).
Topos – Not Without Shedding Blood – 8:13-9:22 (Topical Claim, 8:13; Reason, 9:1-7; Claim Restated, 9:8; Contrary, 9:9-12; Comparison, 9:13-15; Example, 9:16-21; Judgement, 9:22).
Topos – Christ Has Become Our Better Sacrifice - 9:23-10:18 (Topical Claim, 9:23; Reason, 9:24a, Claim Restated, 9:24b; Contrary, 9:25-28; Comparison, 10:1-4; Cited Examples, 10:5-17; Judgement, 10:18).
Topos – We Do Not Shrink Back - 10:19-39 (Topical Claim, 10:19-22; Reason, 10:23-25; Claim Restated, 10:26-27; Contrary 10:28-31; Comparison, 10:32-34; Exhortation, 10:35-38; Judgement, 10:39).
Encomium – An *Encomium* on Faith – 11:1-12:3 (Topical Claim 11:1; Reason, 11:2; Claim Restated, 11:3 *Encomium Exempla*— "the Admirable Virtues of Faith," 11: 4-28, and "the Fine Deeds of Faith," 11:29-38; Judgement 11:39-40; Exhortation 12:1-3).
Topos – Do Not Lose Heart – 12:4-29 (Topical Claim, 12:4-7, Reason, 12:8; Claim Restated, 12:9-11; Contrary 12:12-14; Comparison, 12:15-17; Example, 12:18-24; Exhortation, 12:25-27; Judgement, 12:28-29).
Closing Admonitions – 13:1-25 (Personal Faithfulness, 13:1-6; Communal Faithfulness, 13:7-17: Request for Prayer, 13:18-19, Benediction, 12:20-21; Final Exhortation and Encouragement, 13:22-25).

Lincoln concludes his discussion of the genre of Hebrews stating, "Hebrews is a word of exhortation, a Midrashic sermon based on Scripture, particularly Ps. 110:1, 4, sent in written form…"[158] Most recent commentary scholars agree that based on his control of the Greek language and syntax as well as his adept use of a variety of figures of speech, the author of Hebrews was clearly a trained rhetorician. This has led critics to assume that the author must have organized the sermon (*sermo*) by one of the three genres designed to advance the concern of a Cause by way of the *partes orationis* system. Most cite Übelacker's effort in this regard, though support of all of his suggested divisions is uneven.[159] And as is so often the case in

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[158] Andrew Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 14. Lincoln also finds that the author of Hebrews is rhetorically well-trained and examines a number of the authors use of stylistic techniques (e.g., synkrisis, amplification, anaphora, alliteration, inclusio, chiasm, exempla, and hyperbole); 19-21. The majority of modern critics, even those who are more conservative, consider that Hebrews was composed as a sermon; e.g., William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), Vol. 1: lxx-lxxv. Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 76-77; Johnson reviews efforts to analyze Hebrews rhetorically as a form of Deliberative rhetoric; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 12-15.

[159] See Walter Übelacker, *Der Hebräerbrief als Appell. I. Untersuchungen zu exordium, narratio, und postscriptum* (Hebr. 1-2 und 13:22-25 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989). Übelacker argues that Heb 1:1-4 is

rhetorical analysis of the epistles, the efforts to demonstrate this type of reading flounders in the effort to provide an account of the *probatio* argument As Lincoln observes with regard to reading Hebrews rhetorically, "no one has shown that the various elements of its major part, the *argumentatio*, conform more precisely to the divisions of a Graeco-Roman discourse."[160] This judgement makes sense when critics try to read what was a Word of Exhortation sermon as if it was organized by the *partes orationis* system. However, the sermon develops its argument *topos* by *topos*, with each rung of a ladder leading to the next rung. This format allows the listener to arrive at the "final rung" of the argument with a new understanding or insight. Rhetorically, Hebrews is composed as a *topically* reasoned Sermon, not as a *rationally* argued Cause.[161]

Although Hebrews only uses the full Jewish synagogue format in the first two Refinements of his sermon, it should not be assumed that this augmented *expolitio* format should only be used at the beginning of a discourse. A preacher or writer of a sermon may find reason to use this synagogue homily form at a later stage of discourse development as Paul does in Rom 9:14-33. In the example that follows, Paul uses two prophetic texts from Hosea and three texts from Isaiah to support his interpretative Elaboration of two Torah texts from Exodus. His homiletic intention is to topically Refine the argument that God is not being "unfair" to Jews by extending mercy to Gentiles whom God now includes in the Abrahamic covenant promise:[162]

A Word of Exhortation Homily – Rom 9:14-33
Call To Hear – 9:14 What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!
Recounts Holy History – 9:15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." [Ex 33:19]
Topical Claim – 9:16 So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.
Reason – 9:17 For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." [Ex 9:16]

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an *exordium*, 1:5-2:18 is a *narratio*, and 2:17 states the *propositio*, 3:1-12:29 is the *argumentatio* that includes the *probatio* Proofs, and that 13:1-21 is the *peroratio*.

[160] Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide*, 17.

[161] Olbricht argues that the genre of Hebrews is Demonstrative (epideictic), but adds that it is arranged by a series of Demonstrative arguments each of which is followed by a substantive unit of Exhortation; Thomas H. Olbricht, "Anticipating and Presenting the Case for Christ as High Priest in Hebrews," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference*, edited by Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 355–72. He had already argued for the importance of attending to the Aristotelian understanding of "amplification" in Hebrews in a previous essay; Olbricht, "Hebrews as Amplification," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 375-87.

[162] My use of the progressive parallelism notation (**1-2**, **1'-2'**) to visualize the relationship of a Semitic metrical *dichoree* in some of the rhetorical units of this Word of Exhortation is a version of Kugel's conception of the **1-2** form Semitic parallelism. Kugel describes this conceptual form of movement as offering a "For not only… but what's more…" structure of thought. Beyond its use in the Psalms and the prophets, this *noetic* sensibility of Semitic reasoning having been deeply shaped by the narrative poetics of its sacred literature, while Greek literate thought, shaped by literate reasoning conducted by its fifth century philosophers, became more adept at using literate syntax to hypotactically subordinate one idea to another. See James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1981), 57; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 36-41.

Claim Restated – 9:18 So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.	

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Contrary – Conducted as Diatribe – 9:19-20a</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Question</i>:</td><td>You will say to me then, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Answer</i>:</td><td>But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?</td></tr>
</table>

Comparison – 9:20b-24

   1   Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, 'Why have you made me like this?'"

       2   Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?

   1'   What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction;

       2'   and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Example – Rom 9:25-29

   1   As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'" and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" [Hosea 2:23]

       2   "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God." [Hosea 1:10]

   1'   And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively." [Isa 10:22]

       2'   And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah." [Isa 1:9]

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Judgment – Conducted as Diatribe– Rom 9:30-33</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Question:</i></td><td>What then are we to say?</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Answer</i>:</td><td>1 Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith;
    2 but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law.</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Question</i>:</td><td>Why not?</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Answer</i>:</td><td>1' Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works.
    2' they have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." [Isa 28:16]</td></tr>
</table>

When observing this shift in Paul's style of topical reasoning, the interesting hermeneutical question a contemporary preacher may wish to consider is *Why did Paul chose to make this portion of his case to Roman believers using the Hellenistic synagogue homily style of topical reasoning rather than continue with the use of the standard Pan-Hellenic Elaboration format he had been using?* What is there about this argument that is hermeneutically or strategically different than the preceding portions of his argument?

What should be clear by now is that both the Hellenistic synagogue homily format and the basic Pan-Hellenic thematic Elaboration treatment were used as a Christian version of the Jewish Word of Exhortation. In addition, as Black affirms, use of this form of reasoning should not be taken to mean that NT writers were "devoid of any interest in logical argument."[163] One need only look to excellent examples of *epicheirema* Proofs in Rom 1:18-32 (Proposition, 1:18; Reason, 1:19-20; Proof of the Reason, 1:21-23; Embellishment, 1:24-31; Résumé 1:32); Gal

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[163] Black, "The *Rhetorical* Form," 12.

2:15-21 (Proposition, 2:15-16; Reason, 2:17; Proof of the Reason, 2:18; Embellishment, 2:19-20; Résumé, 2:21); and Col 1:23b-2:5 (Proposition, 1:23b, Reason, 1:24, Proof of the Reason, 1:25-27, Embellishment, 1:28-2:3, Résumé -2:4-5).[164]

Demonstrating further use of this Synagogue homily form elsewhere in the NT and in non-canonical Christian literature from this era is beyond the limits of the essay form.[165] I simply conclude this brief demonstration of the intersection between the synagogue homily form and its adapted use of the norm of Pan-Hellenic topical reasoning by way of Refinement by noting that additional portions of NT epistolary discourse make inventional use of both of these sermonic ways of discursively amplifying topics.

Contemporary Homiletic Implications

Black argues that attention to how the rhetoric of Gospel parables functioned *then* should inform how we attempt to communicate gospel *now*. He finds that the indirection of parable's storied form of communication was a meant to, 1) "explode this world with the power of God,"[166] 2) "blind… as well as illuminate,"[167] 3) belie the ever-present preacherly temptation of trying to offer a sermonic "two-step to whatever ditty its ambient culture pipes,"[168] and 4) call preachers to imagine ways to "handle holy things" with sacred awareness that they are called to "administer God's relief for this world's cardiac sclerosis with grace-filled explosions that heal diseased hearts."[169] Since Craddock first embraced the Kierkegaardian principle of using indirection to help parishioners realize that their version of the gospel may need be recalibrated by the gospel in the NT texts, preachers have begun to discover the power of a narrative rather than a propositional approach to preaching.[170] We now possess homiletic strategies to perform "narrative indirection" when preaching scripture's narrative texts that permit the emulation of scripture's parabolic intention. However, preaching the epistles has always been more

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[164] Note that George Kennedy identified that Gal 2:15-21 "constitutes an epicheireme, or argument with the parts fully stated;" George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 148. The Epicheireme in the Rom 1:18-32 offers an example of a Proof with the Embellishment fully Elaborated by means of expolitio: the Rom 1:24-31 Embellishment (Topic, 1:24; Reason, 1:25; Topic Restated, 1:26a; Comparison, 1:26b-27; Contrary 1:28; Example, 1:29-31).

[165] Wills had suggested that *I Clem* clearly made use of the Hellenistic synagogue homily form that had been appropriated by Christian writers; Wills, ""The Form of the Sermon," 283. Examples of the form are readily observed in *1 Clem* 24:1-27:7 (Call to Hear, 24:1a; Topical Claim 24:1b, Exemplum-A, 24:2; Exemplum-B, 24:4-5; Exemplum-C, 25:1-5; Judgement, 26:1-3; Exhortation, 27:1-7); 1 Clem 37:1-38:4 (Call to Hear, 37:1-2; Topical Claim 37:3-4, Comparison, 37:5-38:2a; Contrary, 38:2a; Judgement, 38:2b; Exhortation, 38:3-4). He also makes use of the Pan-Hellenic Thematic Elaboration form as well. For example, at what might be the climax of his argument as to how the Corinthian congregation should proceed with their crisis he develops his response thus: 1 Clem 51:1-53:5 (Topical Claim, 51:1; Reason, 51:2; Claim Restated, 51:3a; Contrary, 51:3b-5; Comparison w/Scriptural Examples, 52:1-4; Example, 53:1-5; Judgement, 54:1-4).

[166] Black, *Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 138.

[167] Black, *Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 141.

[168] Black, *Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 146.

[169] Black, *Rhetoric of the Gospel*, 148-149.

[170] Craddock originally called his approach to preaching inductive rather than deductive, but that would have made his preaching logic more Socratic rather than thesis driven. His artful circling the central concept of grasping the actual gospel realization of a text was theoretically grounded in a Kierkegaardian indirection and the emerging shift to a narrative theology rather than continuing a propositional approach to theology; see Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons Who Have Heard It All Before* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978). Lowry's model of preaching in this mode was based in narrative theory, but it was committed more to the concept of emplotment than to implementing narrative indirection; Eugene L. Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

challenging because their rhetorical design is generally propositional or topical. When preaching an epistolary text, the contemporary preacher can still find ways to move hearers from an initial naiveté to a Ricoeurian second naiveté through some form of the Orient-Disorient-Reorient homiletic design. But that task is always a bit more difficult since epistolary intention is not inherently narrative like so much of the Hebrew scriptures, the Gospels and Acts. So, how might recognizing two versions of a Word of Exhortation homily form help NT preachers think about their own homily form when proclaiming the intention of an epistolary text?

One implication for a contemporary homiletic can be drawn from the ubiquity of the Word of Exhortation and the Pan-Hellenic Elaboration models of reasoning to be found in the epistolary literature of the NT. At a minimum it would be useful if preachers could learn to recognize portions of epistolary literature designed to move listeners rather than try to convince them. All epistolary reasoning should not be treated as if the original audiences assumed a flat horizon of the rhetorical intention in the nature of the appeal. This was no more true *then* than it would be *now*. What preacher today wonders whether listeners can distinguish the strategic difference between use of an illustration/image vs. a discussion of the conceptual content of a text? First century audiences were equally able to recognize how rhetorical Proofs differ from Elaborations. And if they could, perhaps the modern preacher aspiring to communicate a textual intention should recognize and reflect the difference as well.

A second implication is to rethink the limitations of our concept of "exhortation." The Word of Exhortation form of topical reasoning was reasoning just as much as rational argument offered in defense or refutation of a Cause. Appeals designed to move listeners were considered appeals to their will and not just their convictions, while Proofs were designed primarily as appeals to the latter. Exhortation was not merely a matter of paraenetic advice giving or, worse, a way of Torah "proof-texting" from the Hebrew scriptures. The Hellenistic synagogue may have used the art form of Word of Exhortation to interpret prophetic texts in light of Torah teaching, but the NT writers like Paul used this inventive strategy of reasoning to preach the message of a transformative vision of life lived *in* Christ as the power loosed by the preaching of the Gentile Mission Gospel. Hopefully, modern preachers grasp the limitations of the age-old binary distinction that separates appeals to the mind from appeals to volition.[171] And hopefully an increasing number of preachers will choose to take up the work of Dorothy rather than the Wizard in communicating Gospel intentions.[172] Helping listeners and readers discover new ways to think theologically was and should still be the gift of this kind of tradition of reasoning in preaching. Awareness of the original forms can only enhance that purpose.

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[171] This distinction was still maintained by John Broadus whose homiletics textbook written in 1860 was still being used as a primary textbook for preaching throughout the first half of the twentieth century and beyond. He urged preachers to engage in expository argument throughout the sermon in order to make appeals to the listener's mind (pp. 139-213), then conclude the sermon with a "persuasive" application of these ideas designed to make "appeals to the affections and the will" (282); John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Smith and English, 1871). Just as we would no longer separate appeals to the mind and the will, we hopefully also no longer consider reasoned argument to be somehow distinct from persuasive discourse.

[172] As always, I am immensely grateful for the power brilliant cultural metaphor of these two worldviews of communicating; See Brian McLaren's 2001 essay "Dorothy on Leadership" which was originally published in Rev Magazine (November/December 2000), but can now be readily "Googled" by this simple title.

Identity, Imagination & Narrative

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: RECLAIMING THE WITNESS AND WISDOM OF BLACK CONTEMPLATIVE PREACHERS[173]

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Abstract

In recent decades, scholars have challenged monolithic characterizations of African American or Black preaching. Still, an essentialist image of Black preaching is perpetuated in many contexts. This paper seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the diversity of Black preaching through exploring what Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas in their pioneering anthology *Preaching with Sacred Fire* call Black contemplative preaching. Unfortunately, though key aspects of Black contemplative preaching can be seen in the life and speech of some prominent Black preachers, it may be one of the most overlooked streams of preaching inside and outside of Black church contexts. This lack of awareness and acknowledgment of the Black contemplative preaching stream seems to suggest that it is a mode of proclamation that, like other contemplative practices in the Black church, is hidden in plain sight. Thus, this paper aims to increase the visibility of the witness and wisdom of Black contemplative preachers.

Introduction

Throughout the world, homiletical classrooms and houses of worship have perpetuated what Lisa Thompson has called the "ghostly image" of the Black preacher.[174] This stereotypical image of the Black preacher tends to be a particular masculine performance of proclamation characterized by rhetorical prowess, extroversion, and ecstatic celebration.[175] Of course, this image does reflect characteristics of some streams of Black preaching. Indeed, at its best, it reflects a rich folk heritage—a heritage that I respect, appreciate, and, at times, reflect in my own preaching.[176] Still, the dominance of this essentialist image of Black proclamation all too often

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[173] This paper is a revision and expansion of my forthcoming article entitled "Howard Thurman and the Black Contemplative Preaching Stream" in the *Black Theology Papers Project*.

[174] Lisa L. Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), 28-32. Of course, as Thompson and others note, this image is also perpetuated through various literary and cultural productions.

[175] Thompson, *Ingenuity*, 16-18, 28-32. Thompson builds on the work of Alisha L. Jones, "Are All the Choir Directors Gay? Black Men's Sexuality and Identity in Gospel Performance" in *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, and Representation*, ed. Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonee V. Burnim (New York: Routledge, 2017), 216-235. See also Jones's more recent work *Flaming?: The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[176] For classic works that offer an exploration of Black folk preaching, see James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: Penguin, [1927] 2008); Gerald L. Davis, *I got the Word in me and I can sing it, you know: A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Jon Michael Spencer, *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 1987); Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Can These Bones Live?: The Art of the American Folk Preacher, Revised Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990). It is worth noting that the homiletician O.C. Edwards helped to popularize the distinction between the Black folk and intellectual preaching streams. Drawing on William E. Montgomery's discussion of "elite" and "folk" Black worship traditions in *Under their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), Edwards articulated what he described as the "learned" and "folk" streams of African American preaching.

eclipses other valid and valuable streams in the broader river of Black proclamation. As a result, many would-be Black preachers experience immense pressure to suppress their unique voice to conform to this popular image. Congregations of all backgrounds miss out on the depth and nuance that comes from learning from a wider spectrum of approaches to Black preaching. And, among other reasons, an emerging generation leaves the Black church due to disgust at the phallocentrism, emotionalism, and anti-intellectualism that is sometimes associated with ecstatic, celebratory Black preachers.[177] Clearly, there is a need to affirm a more diverse array of Black preaching practices.

Thus, this paper gives special attention to what Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas in their pioneering anthology *Preaching with Sacred Fire* call Black contemplative preaching, a meditative mode of preaching that weds mystical and theological insights to promote social and spiritual transformation.[178] Unfortunately, though key aspects of Black contemplative preaching can be seen in the life and speech of some prominent Black preachers of the past, such as Gardner C. Taylor, Pauli Murray, and Bishop Barbara Harris, it may be one of the most overlooked streams of preaching inside and outside of Black church contexts today. This lack of awareness and acknowledgment of the Black contemplative preaching stream seems to suggest that it is a mode of proclamation that, like other contemplative practices in the Black church, is "hidden in plain sight."[179] Thus, this paper aims to increase the visibility of the witness and wisdom of Black contemplative preachers.

To begin, I consider some of the roots of Black contemplative preaching and delineate its three distinctives. The second section of the paper considers Howard Thurman as one of the clearest representatives of Black contemplative preaching in the twentieth century. The third section explores contemporary Black contemplative preachers. I highlight sermons from two particular preachers: Kelly Brown Douglas and Frank Thomas. The paper concludes with three ways that the wisdom of Black contemplative preachers can enrich the teaching and practice of preaching today.

The Roots of Black Contemplative Preaching

The Black church is known for many things, but contemplation is not one of them. In *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, Barbara Holmes aims to change this fact. Her groundbreaking work argues that Black contemplation consists of a constellation of holistic, personal, and communal practices that can be traced back to the spirituality of West African religious traditions, the often-forgotten African desert mothers and fathers, and the prayerful gazing upon God that emerged among Blacks on ships during the Middle Passage (Maafa), auction blocks, and hush arbors of American slavery. For Holmes, unlike Eurocentric

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See Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 531-553. Of course, there is much overlap between the streams and the terminology used to describe them is not without its problems.

[177] I only have anecdotal evidence to support this claim based on my conversations with Black millennials and Gen Z.

[178] Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas, eds., *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton), 491-492. A groundbreaking unpublished paper that explores contemplative preaching in the Black church is James Earl Massey's "Contemplative Preaching." I am indebted to Frank Thomas for graciously making the paper available to me for my research. Massey originally wrote it for publication in *Preaching with Sacred Fire*. Only a portion appears in the book. I build upon the work of Simmons, Thomas, and Massey.

[179] Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, *Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 75.

contemplation, Black contemplation consists of a constellation of diverse practices that may or may not be accompanied by silence and stillness as they foster attentiveness to the living God.[180] Moreover, with James Noel, she contends that practices of contemplation in the Black church are not easily divorced from the pursuit of social justice and transformation.[181] In this paper, building on Holmes's work, I focus particularly on the practice of Black contemplative preaching. I contend that Black contemplative preaching has at least five key historical and cultural precursors. These include an African traditional worldview, African orality, African monasticism, the tradition of African and European mystic preachers, and the emergence of the Black church. Unfortunately, space does not permit me to explore all of these precursors.[182]

However, I would like to note how Black contemplative preaching emerges from the broader history of preaching in the Black church. Specifically, it is critical to state there is a history of early African American preachers that have reflected a contemplative orientation in at least some of their life, thought, and/or preaching. I briefly note three early African American preachers. One of the earliest Black preachers who demonstrates a contemplative dimension in his preaching is Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), a bi-cultural Congregationalist minister and early advocate for human liberty. This is evident in Haynes's sermon entitled "The Presence of God" that called his listeners to live with reverence before the ubiquity of the divine presence.[183] A second example is found in Richard Allen (1760-1831), the founder of the AME Church and one-time Quaker affiliate.[184] Allen's profound prayers on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love in his autobiography reveal a deep contemplative spirituality that fueled his proclamation and fight against racial and economic oppression.[185] One final early Black preacher who reflects a contemplative orientation is Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795-1871), a Shaker eldress and mystic.[186] Though there are no extant sermons of Jackson available, her autobiographical writings explore her personal mystical experiences that contributed to her pioneering ministry of proclamation and activism in a patriarchal context. While none of these preachers should be

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[180] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 17-21. Drawing on Charles Long, Holmes is careful to note that there is a speech that emerges from the enforced silences that have come as a result of European colonization. She surmises that in Africana contexts "an ontological silence can occupy the heart of cacophony" in the midst of celebratory worship, 21. For Long's intriguing meditations on silence, see Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1995), 61-70.

[181] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 111, 114. See James A. Noel, "Contemplation and Social Action in African-American Spirituality," *Church & Society*, 83, no. 2 (Nov-Dec 1992): 55-67.

[182] I give in-depth attention to these in "Contemplation, Proclamation, and Social Transformation: Reclaiming the Homiletical Theology of Black Contemplative Preaching," (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2021), 33-53.

[183] Haynes is introduced as a representative of the Black contemplative preaching stream in Simmons and Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 56. See "The Presence of the Lord" in Richard Newman, ed., *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774-1833* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 143-147.

[184] I first heard Allen mentioned as a contemplative preacher in Dr. Teresa Fry Brown's 2019 address at the Academy of Homiletics on "challenging homiletical myopia." While Allen was exposed to the contemplative spiritual practices of the Quakers during his time with the Free African Society that he founded, he eventually departed from Quaker affiliation because it did fully suit his liturgical inclinations.

[185] See Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (N.p.: Hanse, [1793] 2020), 29-32.

[186] James Earl Massey makes a reference to Rebecca Jackson as part of the contemplative stream of Black preaching. See Massey, "Contemplative Preaching," 10. See Rebecca Jackson, *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress* ed. Jean McMahon Humez (Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). See also Joy Bostic's treatment of Jackson's mystical activism in *African American Female Mysticism: Nineteenth-Century Religious Activism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 95-117.

reduced to the label of contemplative preacher, I would argue that at least some of their life and ministry reflect traits of the Black contemplative preaching stream.

In light of this history,[187] I propose the following definition of Black contemplative preaching: *Black contemplative preaching is sermonic discourse that (1) emerges from a* habitus *or disposition of prayer, (2) employs a mystical hermeneutical lens, and (3) embodies a meditative homiletical style in order to lead listeners into an inner divine encounter that contributes to the outer flourishing of African Americans and all creation.* My definition highlights three distinctives of Black contemplative preaching. First, I proffer that Black contemplative preaching emerges from a disposition or *habitus* of prayer.[188] Almost all Black preaching emerges from prayer, but Black contemplative preaching flows from a contemplative way of life that is cultivated through stillness, introspection, and various forms of meditation alongside more expressive Africana embodied spiritual practices.

Second, Black contemplative preaching employs a mystical hermeneutical lens. At its most basic level, a mystical hermeneutic is not about the venerable tradition of seeking the *sensus plenior* of texts[189] nor is it simply about ecstatic mystical experiences, but rather it refers to reading and interpreting Scripture and other texts with a bias toward an emancipatory encounter with God.[190] Of course, all Black preaching is committed to seeking to encounter the living God in Scripture. However, the mystical hermeneutic of Black contemplative preaching is further characterized by three things that set it apart: a focus on certain biblical texts and/or themes related to divine encounter (especially in the Psalms and Gospels), incorporation of varied sources of spiritual wisdom and guidance to nurture interiority (e.g., ancestral wisdom, philosophy, poetry, hymns), and an inclusive vision for cultivating a life-giving and liberating relationship with God, self, neighbor, and creation.[191]

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[187] The definition and distinctives that follow emerge from an in-depth study of the roots of Black contemplative preaching. See Clark, "Contemplation, Proclamation, and Social Transformation," chapter one.

[188] I draw this phrase from James Keating, "Contemplative Homiletics: Being Carried into Reality" *Nova et Vetera* 17 No. 1 (2019): 5. Keating does not offer a clear definition of the term. In *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), Aristotle uses the term *hexis* (later translated into Latin as *habitus* by Aquinas) as he develops his understanding of moral virtue. According to Loïc Wacquant, for Aristotle, it is "an acquired yet entrenched state of moral character that orients our feelings and desires, and thence our conduct." See Loïc Wacquant, "A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus" in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu* eds. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 528. I use the term habitus of prayer to reference the cultivation of a contemplative way of being and seeing that is attentive to God and God's world.

[189] Origen (184-253 CE) was one of the first Christian theologians to propose a systematic way to read Scripture for its multiple senses with his three-fold allegorical method. See Origen, *On First Principles: A Reader's Edition* trans. John Behr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[190] For a helpful articulation of the importance of encounter for a mystical hermeneutic, see Celia Kourie, "Reading Scripture through a Mystical Lens," *Acta Theologica* 31, no. 15 (2011): 132-153. Kourie states: "A mystical hermeneutic of scripture is one in which a direct experience of God, or Ultimate Reality, or the One is the end result" (141). Future research should relate the mystical hermeneutic of Black contemplative preachers to Barbara Holmes's intriguing notion of "griosh," a contemplative reading of Scripture informed by the tradition of the African storyteller or griot and the practice of Jewish midrash. See Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 95.

[191] I sense there may be a kind of womanist impulse in much—though not all—Black contemplative preaching. For example, I am thinking of how Delores Williams's survival and quality of life ethic resonates with Black contemplative preaching's concern for life-giving encounters with God in the midst of structures and systems that remain oppressive. See Delores Williams, *Sister in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk, Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013). I explore this more in "Contemplation, Proclamation, and Social Transformation," 125, 174-212.

Third and finally, the most obvious distinctive of Black contemplative preaching is its meditative homiletical style. Though Black contemplative preaching has an expressive, and, at times, even celebrative dimension like most Black preaching, it more heavily incorporates silence, pauses, rhetorical questions, repetition, and almost never involves whooping.[192] In other words, my definition of Black contemplative preaching is fluid—not the least because I am speaking of something as slippery as contemplation. And, of course, all labels have their limits. Still, I argue that while the three distinctives of Black contemplative preaching—a habitus of prayer, a mystical hermeneutic, and a meditative homiletical style—partially appear in other expressions of Black preaching, together they reflect the unique Black contemplative preaching stream.

Howard Thurman as Black Contemplative Preacher

One of the earliest and clearest practitioners of Black contemplative preaching in the twentieth century was Howard Washington Thurman (1899-1981). Thurman was a pioneering African American mystic, theologian, and pastor who lived during tumultuous times of war, racism, and segregation. In the midst of the various personal and social crises he faced, he started one of the first interracial churches in the United States—The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, worked as the Dean of Chapel at Boston University and Howard University, and served as the Director of Religious Life at Morehouse College and Spelman College.[193] In *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas describe Thurman as one of the most notable exemplars of the understudied Black contemplative preaching stream.[194] I wholeheartedly agree. This complements the work of Luther Smith, the dean of Thurman studies, whose pioneering work *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet* argued that Thurman's "primary identity was that of mystic."[195] Of course, it is important to note that Thurman never explicitly described himself as a contemplative preacher. Moreover, he was resistant to labeling his religious experience.[196] Nevertheless, I would suggest that his life and ministry witness profoundly to the distinctives of Black contemplative preaching. In what follows, I highlight briefly some of the ways these distinctives were revealed in Thurman's practice of preaching.[197]

Habitus of Prayer

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[192] In *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2016), Frank A. Thomas defines whooping as a "rhetorical practice, traditionally at the end of the sermon, in which the preacher sings or chants in rhythmic cadence in the vernacular of call and response that raises the emotional intensity and impact of the sermon," 15.

[193] Space does not permit an overview of Thurman's life. However, for a recent well-researched, concise account of Thurman's life, see Paul Harvey, *Howard Thurman and the Disinherited: A Religious Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2020). The most extensive biography of Thurman is Peter Eisenstadt's recent work *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Life of Howard Thurman* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2021). Of course, the best place to learn about Thurman's life is his autobiography, Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979).

[194] Simmons and Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire*, 492.

[195] Luther Smith, *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet, Third Edition* (Richmond: Friends United, 2007), 15.

[196] See *Mysticism and Social Action: Lawrence Lecture and Discussions with Dr Howard Thurman* (International Association for Religious Freedom, 2015, Kindle edition), location 358.

[197] I have given in-depth attention to how these distinctives are present in Thurman's life, thought, and formation as a preacher. See Clark, "Contemplation, Proclamation, and Social Transformation," 91-113.

Reflecting the religious worldview of his African ancestors, for Thurman, all of life was sacred.[198] Thus, his habitus or disposition of prayer was not segmented into one part of life. Rather, prayer was a way of being in the world. Thurman once stated that "[w]hen a man prays he is not merely performing an act, he is *being* something."[199] In other words, for Thurman, prayer is cultivating a way of being out of which a preaching ministry should emerge. Indeed, he once told an audience in a lecture on preaching that "the sermon is the distillation of the thinking, reading, observation, brooding, and meditation of the preacher."[200] Contemplation is the context for proclamation.

Thurman's sermons often called others to develop a habitus of prayer. For example, he was known for offering readings of meditations and prayers before his sermons. "Their primary purpose," Thurman said, "is to aid the listeners in bringing their minds into focus upon some searching insight and to make available the centered spirits."[201] Sometimes these meditations were excerpts from books, poems, and prayers that Thurman found valuable in his personal and ministerial life, but they also were, at times, from Thurman's own private musings before the presence of God. Thurman's sermon content also focused on encouraging a life of prayerful attentiveness to God and God's world. In his sermon entitled "The Mood to Linger," reflecting on his experience of becoming alert to previous unknown sounds while walking at night, Thurman states: "There are things of which you cannot become aware, things you cannot sense until at last all of the surface of confusion and chaos and noise of your life is somehow quieted. And it is then that your ears pick up sounds that come from the deeper regions of your life."[202] For Thurman, stillness was crucial to cultivating a prayerful attentiveness to God and God's world.

Many people were deeply impacted through hearing Thurman preach. As one student reportedly said, "Some men talk about God, which is of value if it inspires devotion to him. But, when Howard Thurman speaks, you somehow experience God. He seems to take God with him; or rather, he seems propelled by God."[203] Thurman was one who did not just say prayers but he lived prayer.

Mystical Hermeneutic

The second distinctive of Black contemplative preaching that is seen in Thurman is a mystical hermeneutic. For example, some of his sermons encouraged the contemplation of spiritual exemplars and mystics in history as seen in his sermon series entitled "Men Who've Walked with God," which explored the spiritual wisdom of figures such as Buddha, St. Francis, and Meister Eckhart. Given Thurman's wide-learning, his sermons were also populated with references from literature, philosophy, personal stories, poetry, and poignant observations from

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[198] Patrick Clayborn also recognizes the African religious and philosophical roots of Thurman's emphasis on the indivisibility of life. See Patrick Clayborn, "A Homiletic of Spirituality: An Analysis of Howard Thurman's Theory and Praxis of Preaching" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2009), 108.

[199] Howard Thurman, *The Centering Moment* (Richmond: Friends United, 1969), 11, author's italics. Though I prefer gender-inclusive language and realize its absence is deeply offensive for many, I have not altered Thurman's usage in this paper recognizing he was a product of his place and time.

[200] Howard Thurman, "Worship and Word: A View of the Liberal Congregation and Its Sermons" in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Volume 4: The Soundless Passion of a Single Mind, June 1949-December 1962* ed. Walter Earl Fluker (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 331.

[201] Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Richmond: Friends United, 1956), ix.

[202] Howard Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables* ed. David B. Gowler and Kipton E. Jensen (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018), 122.

[203] Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (New York: Friendship, 1936), 153.

everyday life and nature.[204] Of course, at times, Thurman specifically addressed matters of prayer and contemplation. This is seen, for example, in his sermons "Prayer and Silence," "Prayer and Pressure," and others.[205] However, to cite Mozella Mitchell, even when Thurman is not explicitly speaking of prayer and divine encounter, he is almost always seeking to encourage "closer communion with God and with all of life."[206]

Thurman's mystical hermeneutic united spirituality and social engagement.[207] Indeed, Thurman's life-long pursuit was "the search for common ground," that is, the search for community.[208] As Gary Dorrien writes, Thurman's "sermons expounded a mystical vision of spiritual unity and an ethical-spiritual commitment to nonviolence, urging that all forms of violence, oppression, and prejudice offend against the divine good."[209] Thurman's mystical hermeneutic also led him to engage the more-than-human creation in his sermons. A few months after the first Earth Day in 1970, Thurman preached a sermon entitled "Jesus and the Natural Order."[210] His words are worth quoting at length: "In our power over nature, and in our radical unremembering of the fact that we are a part of nature, we feel that we can ab-use nature….But in truth we are of the essence of the ebb and flow of the heartbeat of nature, so that we cannot do violence to nature without there being an echo of agony moving through all the corridors of the spirit, of the mind, of the psyche that makes for derangement of all kinds which will increase as the ravaging continues."[211]

Here we see Thurman calls for a new way of relating to a creation groaning in travail. Or, in the words of Douglas Christie, we might say he evinces "a contemplative ecological vision" in his sermon, that is, a vision that calls for a different way of seeing and being that supports creation's flourishing.[212] Thurman's mystical hermeneutic, then, was not one that was

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[204] James Earl Massey, "Thurman's Preaching: Substance and Style," in Henry J. Young, ed., *God and Human Freedom: A Festschrift in Honor of Howard Thurman* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1983), 112. See, for example, the range of references in his sermons included in Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Richmond: Friends United, 1956).

[205] See, for example, Thurman, *The Growing Edge*, 29-53 and Thurman, *Sermons on the Parables*, 116-123.

[206] Mitchell's words emerge in the context of her intriguing exploration of Thurman as a shaman, particularly in relationship to his view of conversion. Mozella G. Mitchell, *Spiritual Dynamics of Howard Thurman's Theology* (Bristol: Wyndham Hall, 1985), 90.

[207] For a thorough study of how Thurman saw mysticism and social transformation as inseparable, see Alton B. Pollard, *Mysticism and Social Change: The Social Witness of Howard Thurman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

[208] See Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community* (Richmond: Friends United, 1971). See also Walter E. Fluker, *They Looked for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 3-77.

[209] Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 169.

[210] Howard Thurman, "What Shall I Do with My Life?: The Natural Order," Howard Thurman Virtual Listening Room, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, http://archives.bu.edu/web/howard-thurman/virtual-listening-room/detail?id=358566. Thurman introduces the sermon's title as "Jesus and the Natural Order or The Great Delusion." It is important to assert that Thurman demonstrated environmental concern as part of his spirituality early on. See Howard Thurman, "Man and the World of Nature," *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Volume 2: Christian, Who Calls Me Christian?, April 1936-August 1943* ed. Walter Earl Fluker (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 101-106.

[211] Thurman, "What Shall I Do with My Life?"

[212] Douglas Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 51. For further reflection on Thurman's understanding of spirituality and nature, see

disengaged from the world. His contemplation of Scripture and other sources was a means of nourishing the spirits of listeners that they might foster a life-giving and liberating relationship with God, self, others, and all creation.

Meditative Homiletical Style

The final distinctive of Black contemplative preaching that I would like to consider is Thurman's meditative homiletical style. Thurman was not a whooper. His sermons were more meditative and reflective than ecstatic or extroverted. Among other reasons, he learned early on to merge head and heart from the examples around him. Recalling the sermons he heard growing up, he said: "The preachers in my church were not "whoopers"….At the core of their preaching was solid religious instruction and guidance which augmented rather than diminished the emotional intensity of their words."[213] Their example impacted him.

Later in life, he deepened his meditative approach through insights he learned from other teachers. Echoing his homiletics instructor, Thurman opined that a "preacher is never under obligation to preach a great sermon, but he is always under obligation to wrestle with a great idea."[214] In other words, for Thurman, the sermon was an opportunity to contemplate a glorious insight or idea like a diamond from a variety of angles. This was often facilitated through Thurman's skillful use of silence. The late Evans Crawford argued that Thurman was a master of using "the sermon pause" to cultivate a shared silence.[215] For Thurman, this was not a technique or trick. Rather, it flowed from the prayerful disposition that he had cultivated over time. For, as Thurman once stated, "God speaks loudest in silence."[216]

Along with his penchant for silence, Thurman was known for his exaggerated gestures, energy, and animation. His proclamation was one of controlled passion. It was through this that he led his listeners to an emancipatory encounter with the living God. This is perhaps best seen in the testimony of Francis Hall, a noted Quaker author, reflecting back on the impact of Thurman's preaching on his life in his younger years at a conference: "He had held me entranced each day by his deeply meditative style of speaking. You felt the creative spirit at work; indeed it was the Spirit of Christ that was speaking through him….Toward the end of his sharing he once more spoke…and suddenly the words were no longer transmitted by Howard Thurman. They were the living words of Christ and they sank deep into my being, where they exploded and infused me and gripped me."[217]

Ultimately, Thurman's contemplative preaching was not about Thurman. He was a channel through whom the Spirit worked in a particular way to bear witness to the living God. Thurman's habitus of prayer, mystical hermeneutic, and meditative homiletical style all reflect his insistence on leading people to an inner encounter with the divine that they might be

Timothy Robinson, "He Talked to Trees!: 'Thinking Differently' About Nature with Howard Thurman," *Spiritus* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1-19.

[213] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 17.

[214] Thurman, *The Growing Edge*, x.

[215] Evans Crawford with Thomas Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 25-35.

[216] Howard Thurman, "Dilemmas of the Religious Professional," Hester Lectures III, Side A, (Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, CA, February 11, 1971), transcript from The Howard Thurman Digital Archive, Pitts Theology Library at Emory University, Atlanta, GA, accessed October 18 2021, https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/258.

[217] Francis B. Hall, *Practical Spirituality: Selected Writings of Francis B. Hall* eds. Howard Alexander, Wilmer Cooper, and James Newby (Dublin: Prinit, 1984), 13, quoted in Pollard, *Mysticism and Social Change*, 96-97.

transformed to contribute to the outward flourishing of African Americans and all creation. For, as Thurman himself stated, "The core of my preaching has always concerned itself with the development of the inner resources needed for the creation of a friendly world of friendly men."[218] Thus, he is a profound example of the witness and wisdom of Black contemplative preaching.

Black Contemplative Preachers Today

While Howard Thurman is one of the most notable practitioners of the Black contemplative preaching stream in the twentieth century, there are numerous other preachers today that continue in this tradition. Some of these include Jay Williams, Ineda Adesanya, Willie Jennings, Veronica Goines, William Lamar IV, Luke Powery, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Frank Thomas. To be clear, I am not suggesting that all these preachers describe themselves as contemplative preachers—although Thomas has explicitly done so.[219] Nor do I contend that they follow Thurman's particular embodiment of contemplative preaching or that all of their sermons are contemplative. However, I would suggest that in different ways *at least some* of their sermons reflect the distinctives of Black contemplative preaching.

To further increase the visibility of Black contemplative preaching today, let me briefly highlight sermons from two of these preachers: Kelly Brown Douglas and Frank Thomas.[220] Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas is an ordained Episcopal priest, inaugural Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Seminary, and Canon Theologian at the Washington National Cathedral.[221] On Christ the King Sunday in November 2020, during a worship service at the Washington National Cathedral, Douglas preached a moving meditative sermon about how the Christ who breaks into history invites us to partner with him in pursuing justice through the story of our lives.[222] Amid all the polarization surrounding the aftermath of the presidential election, Douglas drew on the story of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 as well as various contemporary and personal stories to paint a beautiful vision of the kind of radical and expansive inclusion and justice that is at the heart of God. However, she contended that if the story of our life is to be one that promotes the justice of God, then, above all it must be one marked by devotion to prayer. She states: "Of all of the images that run through my mind when I think of Jesus, the one that always stands out to me the most is that of Jesus going off to a lonely place to pray. The Jesus that is Christ the King, invites us to write a story with our lives that is marked by prayer….for it is through prayer that we can actually reach beyond ourselves to the mystery that is God's transforming power."[223] Douglas ends her reflective sermon calling for her audience to participate with God in pursuing justice through the story of their lives.

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[218] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 160.

[219] While Thomas is well-known for his contributions to celebratory preaching and identifies as a narrative preacher, he has also stated that he sees himself as a contemplative preacher. See "A Conversation with Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas hosted by Dr. Gina M. Stewart," Frank Thomas, December 4, 2019, YouTube Video, 1:00:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCYkICe-Ick&t=1692s. Thomas's discussion of his preaching style begins at the 9:15 mark.

[220] Space does not permit a more in-depth engagement with the various themes of their sermons. For a slightly deeper engagement, see Clark, "Contemplation, Proclamation, and Social Transformation," 222-226, 229-232.

[221] For example, see Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas's sermon at Washington National Cathedral, November 22, 2020, YouTube video, 18:57, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p-y-Zeg1LY&t=37s.

[222] Douglas, "Sunday Sermon."

[223] Ibid.

A second notable contemporary Black contemplative preacher is the Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas. Thomas is the Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics and Director of the PhD program in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric at Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) and the current president of the Academy of Homiletics. An example of Thomas's contemplative proclamation is a message entitled "Why 'Not'?"[224] that was preached virtually on January 27, 2021 to Phillips Theological Seminary on the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Riots, a tumultuous time in which Black businesses and other properties were destroyed due to white supremacist violence. Drawing on Hebrews 11, Thomas considers why some of the faithful people of God seem to be "conquered bodies and destroyed lives" that did not receive the fulfillment of God's promise in their lifetime.[225] This leads him to consider the injustice that led to the destroyed lives of Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evans, Emmett Till, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, and others. In the face of such injustice, he concludes that it is "the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus that gives us power and authority."[226] For him, "even though it looks like conquered bodies and destroyed lives," this is ultimately not what the people of God "are looking at."[227] In other words, his celebrative yet contemplative sermon reframes our perspective through calling us to contemplate the hope of Christ's resurrection—not as a way of dismissing injustice and evil but rather as a way to deepen our strength to address injustice and evil.

Conclusion

In this paper, I sought to increase the visibility of the witness and wisdom of Black contemplative preachers. Of course, there are many important issues that I have not been able to explore, such as (1) the extent to which Black contemplative preaching reflects a quest for a kind of Eurocentric homiletical respectability and (2) the relationship between Black contemplative preaching and what Kenyatta Gilbert calls the trivocal nature of Black preaching.[228] These and other topics are critical for future research. However, I would like to conclude by gesturing at some of the wisdom that Black contemplative preachers offer for the teaching and practice of preaching today. Firstly, Black contemplative preaching reminds us that there are many different preaching voices and styles within any cultural group. Just as there is no singular white, Asian American, or Latinx preaching style, there is no singular Black preaching style. While appreciating the wisdom and insight of the prevalent practice of ecstatic, celebratory Black preaching in the past and present, the reclamation of the Black contemplative preaching stream helps to honor the multiplicity of expressions of Black agency, creativity, and personhood. Through introducing students to the Black contemplative preaching stream, teachers of preaching can help students find their own unique voice rather than feeling forced to fit any given cultural or gendered stereotype. Or, to put it in the words of Howard Thurman, they can help preachers of all backgrounds to "follow the grain in [their] own wood."[229]

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[224] Frank Thomas, "Why 'Not?'" Hebrews 11:13 Dr. Frank A. Thomas," Frank Thomas, January 27, 2021, YouTube video, 30:27, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQGKw8MX5J8&t=627s.

[225] Thomas, "Why 'Not?'"

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Kenyatta Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 10-15.

[229] Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise*, 19. I have been unable to find the original source for this popular quote.

Secondly, Black contemplative preaching can help preachers to reclaim Augustine's insistence that the preacher "be a pray-er before being a speaker.[230] This is especially urgent because, as Luke Powery has noted, prayer is often tangential in homiletical classrooms despite its importance in the life of preaching.[231] In a culture full of noise and distractions, prayer as a way of being and seeing is desperately needed no matter a preacher's background. Attention to the lived practices of Black contemplative preachers may serve as a helpful resource in this endeavor.

Lastly, Black contemplative preaching challenges proclaimers of the gospel to hold in tension lament and hope, pain and beauty, loss and longing. This is especially urgent in the contemporary moment with our myriad national and global crises. While other forms of proclamation hold lament and hope in tension, Black contemplative preaching seems to naturally do this well because it reflects a non-dual mindset due to its mystical hermeneutic. As such, in an age of superficiality, it can serve as a resource to expand the homiletical imagination of preachers of diverse backgrounds. To echo Howard Thurman, Black contemplative preaching can remind teachers and students of preaching that we are not called to preach "great sermons" but rather to wrestle with glorious truths in ways that are faithful to both the full story of Scripture and the full story of the human experience.[232]

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[230] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, in *The Works of Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., ed. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1996), 4.15.32.

[231] Sally A. Brown and Luke A. Powery, *Ways of the Word: Learning to Preach for Your Time and Place* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 53-54.

[232] Thurman, *The Growing Edge*, x.

PREACHING THE IMPOSSIBLE IN THE FACE OF THE UNTHINKABLE
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ABSTRACT
Almost five years ago, on Palm Sunday 2016, there were two suicide bombings in Coptic churches in Egypt. Forty-four were killed and more than one hundred were seriously injured. The next day, on Holy Monday, Fr. Boules George a senior Coptic Orthodox Christian preacher, delivered a sermon in a church packed with worshippers that was simultaneously broadcast to a wide audience. In the sermon the preacher offered two messages to "those who are killing us:" thank you, your violence allows us to follow Jesus' commandment to lay down our life for our neighbor; and we love you. This essay explores how this impossibly radical message of forgiveness and love reframes the persecution and helplessness of the Coptic minority and offers a narrative of agency, witness and spiritual empowerment.

On Palm Sunday, in 2017 suicide bombers attacked St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Tanta and St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Alexandria, Egypt. Forty-four people were killed and more than one hundred were injured.[233] The next day, on Holy Monday, Fr. Boules George, a senior priest at St. Mark Church in Cairo preached a twenty-minute sermon to Coptic Orthodox worshippers that filled the church to capacity, and to the wider Coptic Orthodox community in Egypt and throughout the world through live video broadcast. In the sermon the preacher makes two radical statements. First, addressing "those who are killing us," he says "thank you" for the opportunity to die as Christ died, for "this is the greatest honor that we could have." Fr. Boules concludes the sermon by saying "we love you…for Christ said that if you love those who love you, you have no profit or reward with me… But I say to you, 'Love your enemies.'"[234] While such radical expression of Christian faith might seem insensitive to the grieving, and possibly even reckless in light of the ongoing violence against the Coptic community, this essay will argue how this almost impossibly radical message reframes the persecution and helplessness of the persecuted Coptic minority in terms of agency, witness and spiritual empowerment.

Coptic Christians have lived as a minority community in Egypt for more than a thousand years and this has deeply affected their spirituality and self-identity. Martin Mosebach, in his book *The 21: A Journey into the Land of Coptic Martyrs*, explores the faith and spirituality of the Coptic community through the lens of the twenty-one martyrs who were killed in 2015 by members of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Mosebach summarizes the situation in this way, "The fate of Coptic Christians in Egypt does not look bright, and it doesn't take an oracle to predict rough times ahead. But we mustn't forget that the Copts have fared badly or very badly ever since the Islamic conquest of the country in the seventh century, meaning that

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[233] Arwa Gaballa and Ahmed Tolba, "Palm Sunday bombings of Egyptian Coptic churches kill 44," *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-violence/palm-sunday-bombings-of-egyptian-coptic-churches-kill-44-idUSKBN17B06U.

[234] I am immensely grateful to Fr. Philopateer Younan, Laura Michael and Archdeacon Hedra Faltas who provided me with an English translation of the entire sermon.

they have had it hard for the last fourteen hundred years or so. Our present day marks just one more instance in a long series of scourges."[235] The spirituality and self-identity of the Coptic Christian community has been shaped by oppression: to be a Coptic Christian in Egypt is to live as a member of a minority community that often faces persecution and marginalization. Here it is important to note that there are, and have been, countless Egyptian Muslims who have shown respect, kindness and good-will towards their Coptic neighbors. One cannot characterize the entire majority Muslim population in Egypt as being overtly hostile to the Coptic Christians, and it is unequivocally not the intention of this essay to cast all Muslims in a negative light. Nevertheless, in order to properly understand the function of the arguments in the Palm Sunday Sermon, it is important to realize that the self-identity and spirituality of Coptic Christians has been, and continues to be, shaped by the experience of a persecuted minority community. This perspective is substantially different from that of most Christians in the West, whose spirituality and self-identity are still largely informed by the legacy of "Christendom" where being a Christian meant that one was part of the majority.

There have been, and continue to be, minority Christian communities in the West, and these communities have experienced marginalization and oppression, such as the racial discrimination and violence perpetrated by the majority against people of color. It is also important to note that racism and religion have had, and continue to have, a long and troubling relationship in the West. However, Western Christians, especially Western Christians of European descent, tend to self-identify as members of a majority religion, and not so much as members of an oppressed minority. This majority identity has profoundly affected the spirituality of those communities and at some level, this may predispose hearers from these traditions to question, or even reject, Christian spirituality that embraces radical forgiveness and love of the enemy. However, the radical call to non-violence in the face of oppression and persecution can be uniquely empowering to minority communities.

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a detailed comparison between Coptic Christian spirituality and the Christian spirituality that undergirded the late twentieth-century Civil Rights movement in the U.S., it is interesting to note that the two share an emphasis on nonviolence. However, this sermon makes no reference to politics of any sort. To North Americans or Europeans, where free speech is protected, one might have imagined that in such a moment the preacher might have appealed to social reform, demanded justice from the broader community, or called on the faithful to mobilize in political activism. However, the Palm Sunday Sermon is remarkable for its political silence. This is largely because Coptic Christians in Egypt, do not enjoy many of the freedoms Western preachers do, and many Copts remember days when speaking out against the government resulted in arrest, or worse.[236] This political silence is a striking contrast to many of the best-known speeches and sermons delivered by leaders of the Civil Rights movement of in the U.S. which explicitly combine theological and political themes and ideas. While Coptic Christians have been, and continue to be, active in Egyptian politics, Coptic preachers assiduously keep their sermons free from any political messages and Coptic bishops in Egypt and abroad explicitly instruct their priests to avoid mentioning politics in their preaching.[237] While greater research would be required to argue for a causal relationship, there is an interesting correlation between the political disadvantage of the Coptic community and the

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[235] Martin Mosebach, *The 21: A Journey into the Land of the Coptic Martyrs* (Plough Publishing House: Walden, NY 2020), 14-5.

[236] Fr. Philopateer Younan, phone interview by author, October 15, 2021.

[237] Ibid.

theological message of the Palm Sunday Sermon. Having no feasible recourse to political activism, and with little or no hope in a governmental solution for their oppression, the preacher delivered a stunning message that called the hearers to a different kind of action: to forgive, to love and to pray for the enemy.

The Palm Sunday suicide bombings were a stunningly provocative act of violence against the Coptic community, so there may have been a desire to by some in the community to respond with some show of force, or at least with a heightened adversarial posture towards the majority Muslim community. It is possible that Fr. Boules George, a senior leader in the community, perceived the terrorist attacks as an attempt by extremists to provoke the Coptic community into a violent reaction, which would then lead to even more anti-Coptic sentiment among the Muslim majority. In this case the shockingly a-political, non-violent message of the sermon was a shrewd calculation on the part of the preacher, redirecting the intense emotions of grief and anger away from thoughts of violence and vengeance, and instead directing the community towards mercy and love of the enemy. Yet, the message is far from a capitulation. It is in fact a message that reframes the narrative of victimization as an opportunity for the community to actualize their Christian identity through Christ-like non-violence. Instead of responding to anger with anger, or responding to violence with violence, the community is given a narrative that defines a loving, merciful, non-violent response as a kind of subversive agency that possesses eternal value in the eyes of God.

The week between Palm Sunday and Easter is the most solemn week for Coptic Christians, in which the faithful gather in church for lengthy services every day in an extended celebration of the Paschal mystery. For Fr. Boules and the Coptic faithful in Egypt on Holy Monday 2017, some of their neighbors were actively seeking to do them harm, and so the connection between their suffering and the suffering of Jesus was never more obvious. The Easter services of the Coptic Church celebrate the Paschal mystery in terms of the horrible suffering of Jesus, which is an opportunity—for those with eyes to see—to behold the profound beauty of God's love expressed to the world through Jesus' response to those who betrayed, abused and crucified him. Similarly, the Palm Sunday sermon defines the contemporary crisis with its concomitant grief and suffering as an opportunity for the faithful to encounter and bear witness to the transformative power and heartbreaking beauty of God's love and mercy in the midst of unspeakable suffering. This is not to say that persecution, suffering and violence are in any way beautiful: they are not beautiful, they are horrific and ugly. However, if it can be said that Jesus' response to suffering, persecution and violence is beautiful—and I believe such a claim can be made—then the sermon invites the faithful to frame their experience of persecution and suffering as a participation in the heartbreaking beauty of the Paschal mystery.

The sermon begins with a quote from one of the lectionary texts read during the services of Holy Monday "The Hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified." (Jn 12:23) The preacher notes that Jesus does not say that the hour has come for him to be beaten, whipped or crucified, but glorified. Then he creatively speaks from the perspective of Jesus, "So, He wants to say, that our pain is the glory." From the very beginning Fr. Boules is redefining the tragedy in positive terms, linking the suffering of the community to the suffering of Jesus, and in the same way that the Paschal mystery redefines the violence against Jesus in terms of God's glory, the preacher redefines the violence suffered by the community as an opportunity to glorify God. He directly defines the violence of the bombings in terms of glory, "I want to talk about the glory that happened in our Church today through three messages. The first message is directed to the community, the parents of the wounded and the dead, and to the entire Church. The second

message will be for those who went before us to heaven today. The third message is to those who kill us."

Speaking to the community, the preacher does not attempt to deny or minimize the grief and anguish of the community, he acknowledges that the pain and suffering of the community is real, and profound. Quoting Jesus' words, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Mt 26:28) Fr. Boules stresses that the community cannot ignore the pain that is being experienced. Here, the preacher offers a brief, yet poignant word of consolation, "Christ consoles us and if we deny sorrow then we are not human, because sorrow is a component of human beings. May God console you." For some hearers, the brevity of this consolation might be startling, particularly in a time of such powerful grief. However, words of consolation per se (i.e. "I'm sorry for your loss.") often are less consoling than the speaker might hope, because words of consolation rarely do much to reframe the powerful emotions of grief. Instead, they describe the speaker's compassionate relationship to the one who is grieving. Words of consolation establish the ethos of authenticity for the speaker: they inform the hearers that speaker appreciates and recognizes the suffering of those who are grieving. From this perspective of compassion, the preacher begins to offer a narrative that radically redefines the situation.

Fr. Boules tells two brief stories that redefine death. First, he tells a story about a man who compared the white baptismal garment that each Coptic Christian receives at baptism to a burial shroud. The man says, "The Copt leaves baptism carrying his shroud. What does this mean? Don't we die with Christ in baptism? …I am going to Christ carrying my shroud." The second story is about a family who asks local clergy to intervene on their behalf with a family member who kept his coffin in his house. When the clergy speak with him and ask him to reconsider his practice for the sake of his family who feel uneasy about seeing the coffin, the man reflects on the capricious nature of his emotions. He notes how he easily feels inspired and faithful during Holy Week, Pascha and other feasts, but also how he is quickly distracted by earthly cares. Then he says that he keeps his coffin in his apartment, and every day, before he goes to sleep, he says to it, "I don't know if tomorrow I will be inside you or on my bed." The man says that this practice allows him to maintain a spiritual sobriety through a constant remembrance of his own death. These illustrations define death as a reality that is not to be feared, which, in the broader context of the sermon, serves to address the fear that the community is naturally feeling in light of the recent attacks.

The final message addressed explicitly to the community involves the Synaxarion, which is the generic name given to hagiographic collections: narratives of the lives of the saints. The preacher notes that unlike the closed canon of the Bible, the Synaxarion is an open canon, and every day more stories are added, more of the faithful are added to the ranks of the saints. Here, he briefly notes other recent murders of Coptic Christians including the beheading of the twenty-one Christians in Libya.[238] This reference to the Synaxarion is a clear implication that those Christians who have died in the recent attacks are martyrs, saints, which is not only a potentially consoling word to the grieving, but also an effective transition to the next section.

Fr. Boules then speaks directly to the martyrs, those who have just died. By speaking to members of the community who are not physically present, the preacher employs a rhetorical strategy with powerful theological and spiritual impact. Speaking to the dead makes them present. This is not to say that the preacher has achieved some sort of metaphysical connection with departed souls, but speaking to the departed implies their presence, which has a powerful spiritual and psychological implication for the hearers. The first message that the preacher offers

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[238] These events are chronicled in detail by Mosebach in, *The 21*.

to the departed is: welcome home, God embraces you as children and you enter wearing a crown of glory. Then, in a bold rhetorical turn, the preacher says that the martyrs are the fortunate ones. He says to them:

> I don't know why God has not chosen me…could it be because of
> my sins? Could it be because I have not yet repented? Trust me,
> none of us can beat anyone else, because if we were ready, then
> God would not have kept from us the crown of martyrdom… You
> martyrs are the grain of wheat that produces much fruit.

The rhetoric is shocking: those who have died a violent death are defined as having better fortune than those who are still alive. This is one of the first places in the sermon where the preacher directly inverts conventional wisdom with the "foolishness" of the word of the cross. (1 Cor 1:18) It is certainly a bold approach, and it may have been shocking to some hearers, but it unequivocally defines tragedy as victory, and gives victims an opportunity to embrace a narrative of agency.

Then Fr. Boules reflects on an event from earlier in the year, when terrorist threats against Christians began to be broadcast on the Internet during the season of advent. At that time, many people thought that Christians might stay home and watch Christmas services on TV, but then Fr. Boules notes that the churches were full. This section concludes with a reference to the previous image of the baptismal garment/burial shroud,

> [E]veryone is carrying his shroud in his hand and saying, 'we have
> come to die for Christ.' This is the best death, death inside His
> house. That is why we tell [the martyrs] you are the grain of wheat.
> The grain of wheat that brought many people." We also tell you
> that your blood cries out to the Lord, "I saw under the altar the
> souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the
> testimony which they held… Then a white robe was given to each
> of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while
> longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their
> brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Rev
> 6:9-11) Every Christian who has died for the sake of Christ, during
> every persecution throughout history, was numbered—known—by
> God, and you martyrs continue in the chain. You are fortunate.

Here, it is interesting to note that the Palm Sunday Sermon was delivered inside a church that was packed with the faithful, so the community would have made a particularly strong connection between their situation and previous times when people responded to threats and fear by acts of defiant faith. Speaking to the "martyrs" (not to the "dead") defines those who have been killed as Christian heroes, saints whose tragic death is not a mere tragedy, but is actually a victory of the Gospel.

The final section of the sermon is addressed, "to those who kill us." Rhetorically, this functions in at least four different ways. First, since the sermon was broadcast, and made available on streaming media, it is possible that some of those who were seeking to harm the Coptic Christians may have actually heard the message. Second, in the same way that speaking to the martyrs makes present those who have died, speaking to "those who kill us" reminds the hearers of their call to love the enemy. The message does not isolate the hearer from the enemy, but instead, makes the enemy present so that he might be forgiven, and loved. Third, the hearers were quite likely afraid that suicide attacks would continue, so despite heightened security

measures, some of the hearers may have been aware of the possibility that suicide bombers were literally standing in their midst. It is important to note that the preacher did not say, "Look out, be afraid, terrorists might be among you!" Rather, the rhetorical strategy of speaking to "those who kill us," might have served to redefine the fear of the hearers at that moment to reframe their feeling of helplessness into an experience of agency and Christian witness. Finally, the suicide bombers who actually carried out the Palm Sunday attacks were just as "distant" from the hearers as the new martyrs: they were also dead. This is possibly a stretch, but if the hearers identify "those who kill us" as the bombers who died in the attacks, then speaking to them functions similarly to the previous section that was addressed to the martyrs. However, by speaking to the dead terrorists—by rhetorically making them present—the message is that not even death can prevent the Christian from expressing mercy and love to the enemy.

Speaking to "those who kill us" the sermon concludes with the boldest, and at some level the most shocking message:

> The first thing we will say is "Thank you very, very much," and you won't believe us when we say it. You know why we thank you? I'll tell you. You won't get it, but please believe us. You gave us to die the same death as Christ—and this is the biggest honor we could have. Christ was crucified—and this is our faith. He died and was slaughtered—and this is our faith. You gave us, and you gave them to die. Thank you for shortening our journey home. We thank you because you gave to us to fulfill what Christ said to us: 'Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves' (Luke 10:3). We were lambs; our only weapons: our faith and the church we pray in. I carry no weapon in my hand. We are so grateful that you helped us fulfill this saying of Christ. You are helping us and you don't even know it. There are people whom the clergy visit three, four five times, asking them to pray, to repent, to come to church, and they don't. What you're doing here—you're bringing to church the people who never come…. You're filling up our churches! Usually, few people come to service today, because they are tired from Palm Sunday celebrations, but look, the church is entirely full. Thank you for all you have done for us without even noticing. We also want to say, "We love you." This may be hard for you to believe, but it is the teaching of Christ, and I want to tell you how wonderful he is. Christ says that loving those who love us profits us nothing, but we are to love our enemies. (Matt 5) We Christians don't have enemies. We don't have enemies; others make enmity with us. The Christian doesn't make enemies because we are commanded to love everyone. And so, we love you because this is the teaching of our God--that I'm to love you--no matter what you do to me. I love you very much. And I want to say one last thing to you: we're praying for you. Because the One who told us to love you told us to "bless those who curse you... and PRAY for those who spitefully use you" (Mt 5:44). So, my instructions from my loving God make it my duty to pray for you.

This section of the sermon is perhaps the most difficult part of the message, and for some hearers it might simply be unacceptable, it may be just too radical. Thanking those who do violence to you stands in stark, almost ridiculous contrast to messages like, "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay."[239] Yet, a leader who can order military drone strikes against people in a country on the other side of the world speaks from a profoundly different perspective than a Coptic Orthodox Christian priest in Cairo. Here, it is important to note that the preacher was an insider, he was just as weak, just as vulnerable, just as much affected by the tragedy as the rest of the community. And, since he was a prominent clergyman, he may have been at even greater risk of violence than others. Fr. Boules was not an objective outsider; he was not someone with the power and authority to physically prevent violence saying to an oppressed people, "Jesus is telling you just to bear your suffering patiently." Indeed, such a message is absolutely unacceptable for many reasons. However, when Western Christians hear a Coptic Christian say, "thank you" to those who are killing his people, it is important to remember that Fr. Boules George has no military to back him up, no army or militia to go out and do his bidding. Rather he speaks from a position of profound physical weakness, yet what he does possess is the power of the Word and in this instance the preacher uses the word to offer a narrative that provides his community with a profound identity of agency.

The final message to "those who kill us" is, "We love you." The preacher offers a prophetic narrative to provide an image of the kind of radical Christian love that he's advocating:

> In one of our dioceses there's a man who regularly broadcasts
> horrible things about Christians, unheard of things. So, the
> servants[240] of the community came to the bishop and told him
> about the man. The bishop says, "Are you upset by what this man
> says?" And they say, "Of course! We are so upset! What's he doing
> to us!"
> The bishop gets quiet and his face darkens with sorrow. The
> servants say to him, "You have a right to be upset from what he
> says, Your Grace. You have a right."
> "I'm not upset with him," the bishop says, "I'm upset with you!
> You are servants—you? How many of you pray for him every
> day? Because if he tasted of the love of God, if he knew who our
> Lord is, he could never hate again because God is love. How many
> of you are praying for him? Aren't you servants! Aren't you
> Christians! So you are a servant teaching in the Sunday School
> here, and you've broken the commandment of Christ to pray for
> this person?!"

By sharing the story of the lay-leaders who were offended by the derogatory statements against Christians by the "man," the preacher identifies with the outrage and anger felt by the community against those who threaten them. (Note, that the preacher does not identify him as a Muslim.) Then, the reaction of the bishop and the comments by the leaders that he has every right to be upset with the man, is a clear setup, leading the hearers to think, "OK, now we're going to hear someone blast our enemies." But, then in a remarkable twist, it is the Christian lay-

[239] From President Joe Biden's speech following the suicide bombings in Kabul, quoted by Esau McCaulley, "The Dangerous Politics of 'We Will Not Forgive,'" *The New York Times*, September 19, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/19/opinion/revenge-forgiveness-terrorism-biden.html

[240] The name in the Coptic church for lay-leaders in the parish.

leaders who are in trouble for failing to obey Christ's command to love the enemy and pray for him. This story functions similarly to the encounter between King David and Nathan the Prophet, which concludes with the prophetic twist of Nathan telling David, "You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7)

Fr. Boules George concludes the sermon by exhorting the faithful to the kind of love that for some might seem absolutely impossible:

> So what do you think? How about we make a commitment to pray for them? Pray that they know the God of love? Pray that they experience the love of God? Because if they knew that God is love and experienced His love, they could not do these things--never, never, never. We must pray for them so they can sleep at night, because someone so filled with hate can never sleep. We are being slaughtered and the King of Peace gives us peace to sleep. And the one who slaughters, all night he can't sleep… Pray for them. Take it as a command. Take it as a duty. Take it as the application of Christ's instructions. We must ALL pray for them today that God opens their eyes and open their hearts to His love. Because if they knew Him, they could NEVER do this…. God comfort us. God give us understanding. God give us JOY because Christ's promise is truth. He said, "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy NO ONE will take from you" (Jn 16:22) Some forty martyrs were called by God, and there are many in the hospital who will also be called. All of them are wearing crowns. They will celebrate Pascha in the Kingdom. They are praying for us. The rest is on us. O, you lucky, lucky, lucky ones! And until it is our turn. To our God be the glory now and forever. Amen.

These are words that may sound entirely unacceptable to Christians whose spirituality is informed by imperial Christendom, by a Christianity whose truth has been "demonstrated" by the victory of armies and the expenditure of ostentatious wealth. According to Fr. Philopateer Younan, a Coptic Orthodox priest, who grew up in Egypt and now serves a parish in the U.S., the response to the sermon was largely positive. He said that there were a few Coptic Christians who reacted negatively, concerned that thanking those who seek to harm the Coptic community might invite further violence. But Fr. Philopateer noted that for those with little spiritual background, thanking the enemy is a difficult message. Yet, this was a minority opinion.[241]

Whether one is offended or inspired by it, the Palm Sunday Sermon of Fr. Boules George is profoundly and unapologetically biblical and it boldly embraces the scandal of Jesus' teaching, crucifixion and death. Echoing Paul's words or encouragement to the Christians in Rome, "As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Rom 836-7) The radical message gives the community a word they can speak to their departed loved ones, "In your death you fulfill Christ's commandment and you inspire us to do the same." The sermon also proposes a message to those who persecute them: "Your violence does not weaken us, nor does it weaken our faith. In fact, it strengthens our resolve to follow Christ, and in the name of he who died for us on the Cross and was raised from the dead on the third day, we say, 'Thank you and we love you.'" The Palm Sunday sermon is a message in which the victim

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[241] Fr. Philopateer Younan, phone interview by author, October 15, 2021.

defiantly rejects the tactics of the oppressor, and allows those who are persecuted to claim agency. It is a message that powerfully, and with scriptural genius, offers a message to a community that has every reason to despair. It is a message that subverts and transcends the narrative of "might makes right" providing a narrative that defines forgiveness, mercy and love as an identity of agency, hope and divine power.

Performance
Studies I:

Performance
&

Trauma

Revelation in Conversation:
Call and Response as a Practice of Congregational Empowerment
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Abstract
This paper briefly explores the history, theology and complexities of call and response in Black preaching and argues that, more than encouragement alone, call and response is an active practice of communal revelation and liberation. Call and response is described here as a practice that addresses and elevates the congregation from those being addressed, to active participants in *co-revealing* God's word. Centered in communal listening and justice, this work argues that call and response is an "otherwise" practice of the Black church that allows both preacher and those in the pew to embody the word, empowering the church to action.

While the stylistic depth, rhythmic nuance, use of posture and invocation of breath in Black preaching is referenced across academia, literature, and popular culture alike, what is often under analyzed in the practice of Black preaching is the 'second person' present and critical to the Black preaching moment — the congregation. Scholars in homiletics, sociology, and communication studies have named these collective instances call and response, the enunciated vocal and non-vocal communications between orator and audience that familiarly punctuate sermons in Black church traditions. But while widely recognized and regularly cited, there is yet more to be said about the underlying theological assumptions that subtend and make possible call and response as well as the complexity of this practice. Descriptions of call and response often fall beneath the purview of the stylistic choices of the (well-critiqued) charismatic, central Black preaching figure.[242] At worst, call and response is thought to be superfluous soundings by the congregation manipulated by the preacher and at best it is described as part of the chaotic but beautiful tonal dynamic of Black preaching. However, in this paper I argue that call and response is not simply an aesthetic practice of performance but that it is a practice that addresses and elevates the congregation from those being addressed, to active participants in engaging God's word — call and response is the cultural driver that moves listeners from simply "hearers" of the Word to "doers" of the Word, by inviting the audience to co-create, co-discern, and what I term co-reveal along with the preacher the delivered Word of God. Call and response is both a technology and a theology centered in communal listening and justice, an "otherwise" practice of the Black church that allows both preacher and those in the pew to embody the word, empowering the church to action. This spirit filled practice within the practice of Black preaching must be acknowledged and rethought as a critical apparatus, a framework for a larger theological pedagogy committed to social justice that can inspire similar practice in other contexts.

A Grammar of Call and Response

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[242] This critique can be found in *For the Souls of Black Folk: Reimagining Black Preaching for 21st Century Liberation* by Cari Jackson.

Call and response in Black preaching is a complex communal practice that consists of verbal and non-verbal interaction between the preacher and the congregation during a sermon. This seemingly ubiquitous practice within Black preaching is what gives Black preaching much of its dynamism. To the unacquainted eye it can appear to be spontaneous and involuntary emotional reactions, but the call and response between a skilled Black preacher and the congregation during a Black sermon is a beautifully orchestrated harmony of word, song, rhythm, and gesture.

Mitchell says that "the dialogue between preacher and congregation has been viewed as at best a quaint overreaction of superstitious simple folk, or an exuberant, childish expression of a beautiful, childlike faith such as could never occur in truly sophisticated Christian worship."[243] Beyond the more than subtle racist undertones of such descriptions, that minimization of call and response blinds observers to the generative nature of call and response. The response from the congregation, and that call from the congregation is not only a part of the preached word, but the actual proclamation of the preacher changes because of this conversation. Said another way, call and response is not only encouragement; it is a dialogue between preacher and pew that shapes and helps create the preached word. Mitchell says it succinctly here, "when content and imaginative delivery grips a congregation, the ensuing dialogue between preacher and people is the epitome of creative worship."[244] Important to note here is the dialogical description of call and response, and the implication that it is a continual and layered practice within a sermonic event.

The very experience of God's revelation to the people of God is shaped by the interaction, verbal and non-verbal, that takes place between the preacher and the congregation. It is fair then to describe the congregation as co-revelators of the word, co-laborers with the preacher is bringing forth the preached word for the community. What is ultimately revealed through the sermon is not the sole result of the interaction between the preacher and God in the preparation of the sermon. God's revelation of the word for that particular time and community is shaped by the congregation. The term *co-revelator* is meant to identify the fact that what comes from the preacher changes because of the congregation's responses and that the congregation's verbal call and response is important to the full revelation of God during the sermonic event. The "amens," "hallelujahs," "take your times," and other responses from the congregation are all part of God's revelation for the community.

Acknowledging the congregation's role in the preaching moment does not demean the work of the preacher, but instead illumines the ways that congregations participate in that process. Black preachers are called not only to be creative and sometimes dramatic performers of God's word, but also to be facilitators of a broader conversation with the congregation that allows God's word to come forth through divinely inspired, performative conversation. Grace Sims Holt describes it this way, "the preacher must constantly evaluate the feedback from the congregation and revise and create new, additional, or already frozen responses to that feedback."[245] Holt goes on to suggest that the preacher "does not deliver a message to his audience, he involves the

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[243] Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 95-96.

[244] Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 98.

[245] Grace Sims Holt, "Stylin' Outta the Black Pulpit," in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin & Slam Dunking: a Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Caponi-Tabery (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 337.

audience in the message," relying on the movement of the Spirit to guide both call and response.[246]

The most comprehensive and specific work on the theology and homiletical impact of call and response in the Black Church tradition is Evans Crawford's *The Hum*. Crawford both quantifies different kinds of feedback that come from any given congregation and describes what he sees as the theological underpinnings of this practice. For Crawford, congregants serve as participant-observers of the sermon by nudging preachers through the various movements of their sermon and guiding its development from beginning to end. Crawford sees the congregation participants as midwives of the sermon, hearers tasked with guiding the preacher from a beginning stage of "Help em Lord" to a resounding "Glory Hallelujah."[247] This assistance from the congregation is predicated on there being a connection between the preacher and the congregation. Crawford suggests that the amount of feedback that a preacher receives is often an indicator of how connected she or he is to the congregation.[248] As Crawford writes, "the sermon belongs not only to the preacher, but also to the entire congregation, which joins in with their oral responses."[249] In my estimation, there are limits to the midwife metaphor that was used earlier. The congregation does not simply help get the preached word proclaimed, but also shapes the actual content of the sermon. Crawford certainly understands call and response to be a complex and deeply theological practice, but he still situates it as primarily a practice of encouragement. I believe that call and response, or more specifically the response from the congregation, does more than move the sermon along but that it actually shapes the content of the sermon.

Leslie Similie writes in *Make it Plain Preacha* that, "the preacher or speaker [takes] cues from the audience as to how to proceed with his or her oration. This interaction and verbal, visual, and intuitive interplay catalyze the sermon."[250] Call and response is not always a call from the preacher that elicits a response from the congregation. Oftentimes, preachers are responding to the call of the congregation. It may even be more accurate to describe call and response as a complex, semi-continuous feedback interaction loop between the preacher and the congregation.[251] Calls from the preacher elicit responses from the congregation which end up serving as calls back to the preacher. In a real sense there is a conversation taking place between the preacher and the congregation and the recording of this conversation is the preached word; there is *revelation in conversation*. That conversation modifies what the preacher says and the

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[246] Holt, *Stylin' Outta the Black Pulpit,* 343.

[247] Evans E. Crawford and Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[248] However, Crawford also suggest that "that the presence of oral response does not automatically mean the congregation is participating in proclamation. 'Amen' and 'Glory Hallelujahs' can be as perfunctory as any other liturgical expression." Crawford, *The Hum,* 39.

[249] Crawford, *The Hum,* 37.

[250] Leslie Similie, "Make in Plain, Preacha: African American Rhetorical License, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and a Modern Rendering of Epidietic Rhetoric" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, 2012), 56.

[251] The space limitations of this paper do not allow for a robust description of the complexities of the practice but call and response has been studied researchers outside of homiletics literature. Scholars of language, communication and sociology have analyzed call and response in Black preaching, to catalogue the specifics of the linguistic and social interaction between the preacher and the congregation. Such research has produced in-depth analysis of the rhetorical complexities of the practice. See my dissertation, *Revelation in Conversation* for a summary of this research.

congregational feedback is itself part of the sermonic revelation. Floyd-Thomas describes this feedback loop as *reflection in action.* In *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, she argues that "the worshipers' response of 'talking back' to the preacher is action based on the worshipers' listening both to what is said and to the self. This method of involvement of Black worshippers reveals that they are not passive listeners who fail to recognize the flow of language, thought, and the feelings of the pastor, self and others."[252] On the contrary, the congregation is actively involved in reflection and offering feedback which becomes part of the preaching event.

The research that has been mentioned up to this point described call and response in very general terms, but there are a few studies that offer direct research on the specifics of call and response in a particular congregation. One such study, using both conversation analysis and ethnographic study on Black preaching, was done by two British researchers, Callender and Cameron. They studied several weeks' worth of recordings from two different Pentecostal assemblies in London and performed an in-depth analysis of the recorded sermons.[253] They note, much like Mitchell does, that "to the outside observer, a recording of Pentecostal worship gives the impression at times of almost chaotic, random speech."[254] They found instead that what actually takes place during the sermon is a collaborative work between the preacher and the congregation. One of the pastors whom they studied said that the sermon is "'a good way of inspiring people to action,'" meaning not simply action in the outside world, but actual participation in the preaching of the sermon.[255] While this study further affirms the complexities of call and response, it goes a step beyond that by attempting to judge more specifically the effect that congregational interventions have on the progress of the speech event (sermon).[256]

Callender and Cameron argue that preaching is akin to political speech in that the congregation looks for opportunities to provide "affiliative responses" throughout the sermon.[257] Competent political orators provide rhetorical cues for when the audience should respond with signs of affirmation, typically applause in the political arena.[258] This study shows that there are rhetorical cues that preachers use in order to provide an opportunity for the congregation to respond. But the comparisons to political oratory were only somewhat useful as Callender and Cameron found the relationship between the congregation and the preacher to be much more nuanced than the relationship between a politician and his or her audience.[259]
In this study they recognize that there is something particular about the Black Church congregation that allows for a greater complexity of interaction between preacher and congregation. The study continues to show that the kind of orderly pattern of turn-taking that is often found in political speeches is disrupted in preaching environments. The Black congregation has a much wider range of responses to the sermon than is typically found at political rallies, and they found that the congregations use much more diverse and complex interaction strategies than

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[252] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 192.

[253] Chistine Callender and Deborah Cameron, "Responsive listening as part of religious rhetoric: the case of Black Pentecostal preaching," in *Reception and Response: Hearer Creativity and the Analysis of Spoken and Written Texts*, ed. Graham McGregor and R.S. White (New York: Routledge Press, 1990), 206.

[254] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening,* 207.

[255] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening,* 207.

[256] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening*, 209.

[257] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening*, 210.

[258] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening*, 210.

[259] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening*, 213.

those typically used to describe political rhetoric.[260] The researchers conclude that the interactivity found during the sermonic event "reflects the importance of collectivity and mutual solidarity" amongst Black congregations.[261]

A Theology of Call and Response

In *The Hum* Crawford argues that call and response is an example of what he calls "participant proclamation" and that it is a tangible manifestation of the theological concept of the "priesthood of all believers."[262] He argues that since all have access to God through Jesus Christ, both the priest and those in the pew, all also have a part to play in the revelation of God's word. The responsibility of being a part of the royal priesthood and holy nation is *to proclaim* the mighty acts of God in this world. The community has been established to proclaim communally. Crawford's choice of descriptor for members of the congregation is telling; by describing *call and response* as "participant proclamation" he is naming those in the pew as participants in the proclamation of God's word. Crawford is not alone in his use of this theological tenet as a way of understanding call and response.

Lisa Thompson offers another way of thinking about preaching emerging from the fellowship of the community. She posits that "our understanding of preaching is derived in community and by the community."[263] The fellowship of the community is responsible for defining what is or is not a valid expression of preaching.[264] Thompson here even names call and response as a practice within the larger practice of Black preaching that gives an example of what it looks like for the community to set the parameters for preaching.[265] In reference to the different kinds of shouts of affirmation found in call and response, Thompson says that these responses "not only urge the preacher to forge ahead in her immediate practice of preaching but also somehow act as an indicator of what preaching should be, how it should function, and its shape within the community."[266] Call and response, according to Thompson, also sets limits as some responses let the preacher know that something is missing from the message and that they need to go in a different direction.[267] Thompson describes the way that call and response creates meta and particular boundaries. In a meta sense, over time, call and response shapes what preaching looks like in a community; certain styles, rhythms, theological tenets and rhetorical choices are affirmed or denied. In a more particular sense, call and response shapes the revelation of the word for the community in that specific moment of preaching. Revelation emerges through the conversation of call and response, and the fellowship between the preacher and the congregation.

In Crawford's reflection on call and response, and Black preaching more broadly, he calls preachers to a Spirit-led "sounding" of the word so that people "can not only 'hear' it but also 'see' it."[268] He is describing preaching that resonates with the congregation in such a way that

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[260] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening,* 215.
[261] Callender and Cameron, *Responsive Listening,* 217.
[262] Crawford, *The Hum,* 39.
[263] Lisa L. Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 24.
[264] Thompson, *Ingenuity,* 24.
[265] Thompson, *Ingenuity,* 24.
[266] Thompson, *Ingenuity*, 24-25.
[267] Thompson, *Ingenuity,* 25.
[268] Crawford, *The Hum*, 52.

their response is a Spirit-led expression of their own spiritual perceptiveness. Very much a student of Howard Thurman, Crawford's mystic-like description of preaching and call and response imagines the preacher and congregation moving together in harmony during the message, in a kind of constant feedback loop of sound and spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in this construction of the preaching moment to maintain the integrity of the revelation. He says that "the integrity of hum thought requires the same theological integrity as any other homiletic: The Spirit that we feel inspires us both to pray and preach, is a tested Spirit, true to Pauline requirements, and wilderness tested in a way to yield not to temptation."[269] With excitement that comes through the words on the page, Crawford exclaims that Black preaching is communal and that "all members of the congregation are given a place in the sermon to respond as the Spirit moves them, whether aloud or in silence, whether with a gesture or by sitting still."[270]

For Crawford call and response is a practice guided by the Spirit and a practice that demonstrates the presence of the Spirit. In *Spirit Speech* Luke Powery offers more language around naming the presence of the spirit in homiletical practice. He suggests that "it is vital for the experience of the Spirit to be appropriated personally if the power of the Spirit is to be known."[271] He picks up an argument found in Costen's work that Black worship is more experiential than rational.[272] Black worship must be felt, and it is this feeling of the Spirit, this experience that is the "sustaining source in the midst of suffering."[273] Powery states that "feeling the Spirit demonstrates that the Spirit is a divine reality moving within human beings."[274] As Powery develops his pneumatology for preaching, he describes three key manifestations of the Spirit and each of these manifestations is present in call and response. Call and response fits Powery's description of a practice that demonstrates the work of the Spirit in worship.

According to Powery's first manifestation of the Spirit, the Black human body is not only sacred but also a location for the Spirit's presence and activity in Black religious expression.275 Spirit possession is one of the primary ways that the Spirit interacts with the Black human body. Being "caught up in the Spirit," or "in the Spirit" are ways of trying to describe what happens when the Holy Spirit has taken control of one's body such that one is "completely subject to a force outside of himself or herself."[276] Related to Spirit possession is the notion of "the shout." The shout is what happens when "the Holy Spirit fills a person to such an extent that he or she cannot remain still." This is embodied religious ecstasy or what some would call "getting happy."[277] As Powery continues to describe the shout, he elaborates that though the Spirit operates within individuals, it is still a community expression. He says specifically, "the bodies of entire communities become free vessels of the Spirit at praise."[278] He continues beautifully to say that "the Spirit, who plays melodies through human bodily instruments, aims to manifest through everyone."[279]

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[269] Crawford, *The Hum*, 52.

[270] Crawford, *The Hum*, 70.

[271] Luke A. Powery, *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 9.

[272] Costen, *African American Christian Worship,* 301.

[273] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 10.

[274] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 10.

[275] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 11.

[276] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 11.

[277] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 11.

[278] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 12.

[279] Powery, *Spirit Speech,* 12.

Call and response is a communal, embodied experience that demonstrates this kind of manifestation of the Spirit. The call and response from both the congregation and the preacher is an embodied act, that is, in addition to the language used which Powery talks about separately, both preacher and congregation use their bodies to initiate both call and response. The preacher leans forward, turns their body around, motions with their hand telling the people to speak back to her, and uses a grand diversity of other bodily movements to garner a response from the congregation. In turn, participants in the congregation will stand up, wave their hands, run around the sanctuary, slap their neighbor's hand, tap their neighbor on the shoulder, clap their hands, close their eyes, wink their eyes and will respond in ways too numerable to list. The embodied actions entailed in call and response in the Black human body demonstrates that the Black human body is a ritual space primed for creative activity.[280]

Powery states that "through the Spirit, the body 'speaks' a word and becomes a 'text' that one can 'read.'"[281] He goes on to say that the field of homiletics then must be open to reading "preaching bodies" as sermonic texts in addition to the sermon manuscripts.[282] It stands to reason then that this development in what is recognized as meaningful in homiletics should also include the preaching *bodies* of the entire congregation. This complex and Spirit-empowered process of call and response in Black preaching presents a homiletic event where the bodies of the entire congregation become sermonic texts. Understood this way, the spoken words from preacher and congregation, as well as the embodied expression from the preacher and congregation, become the very revelation of God through the Spirit. The preacher and congregation through their words and their embodiment are thus co-revelators of God's word for that time and space. Call and response as a Spirit-led embodied experience, empowers the congregation to act in the world.

Call and Response as *Otherwise* Congregational Empowerment

The preacher has the power to shape the preaching culture and can guide the congregation to more involvement through call and response. The congregation, if trained and familiar with call and response, also has the power to help shape the preaching moment through call and response, allowing for a more communal power dynamic in the congregation. This kind of power shift, or power sharing, makes call and response an empowering practice and allows it to create a different kind of *otherwise* sensibility in the preaching moment. In *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Ashon Crawley argues that Blackpentecostalism is an *otherwise* practice that opens possibilities for liberation within a restrictive ecclesial condition.[283] *Otherwise* for Crawley does not mean that others are centered, instead he's focused on the notion of alternatives, of practices or ways of being that are *otherwise.* He puts it this way, "otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what is."[284] Later he says that *otherwise* is "a word that names plurality as its core operation, otherwise bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped."[285]

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[280] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 13.
[281] Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 12.
[282] Powery, *Spirit Speech,* 12.
[283] Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: the Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
[284] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 2.
[285] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 24.

Call and response allows for sermons to be *otherwise,* to fit into a notion of infinite possibilities. Every time any sermon is preached it is different than any other time it was preached and there are infinite possibilities within the preaching of that sermon because of the ways that the congregation can respond. Crawley suggests that, "imagination is necessary for thinking and breathing into the capacities of infinite alternatives."[286] But more than simply naming potential alternatives to oppressive practices, Crawley is describing practices that are currently present within traditions that have the ability to carve out liberative space within oppressive structures. Crawley states that, "using otherwise, I seek to underscore the ways alternative modes, alternative strategies, alternative ways of life already exist..."[287] Here he is describing a practice within a practice that creates room for engagement, room to engage with the problems inherent to a tradition. Naming a practice *otherwise* is in effect a designation of hope, a yearning for safe space within an already established tradition, a "thinking and desiring more than what we have, knowing we already have enough to produce flourishing in the world."[288]

Call and response is *otherwise*, as Crawley would describe it because it offers infinite possibilities for communal engagement and models an alternative way of revealing God's word to community. Where Crawley resonates so deeply with the way that call and response has been examined in this paper, is the notion of a practice within a practice, an aspect of a broader practice that can craft its own space. Call and response is just that, it is its own practice, with a logic, history and tradition, that is nestled within the larger practice of Black preaching. Call and response, as an *otherwise* practice, creates a liberative space for communal engagement within a practice, that is sometimes limited and univocal in nature.

Call and Response as a Practice of Congregational Empowerment

This kind of communal revelation demonstrates a more inclusive way of experiencing God together in community call and response is a practice that involves the congregation in the very revelation of God's word. Call and response is a cycle of conversation between preacher and the pew and that the congregation exerts its own agency in the process. This activity by the congregation is not limited to the preaching moment, as call and response empowers the congregation to be living examples of the preached word.

Melva Costen describes it this way, "the word elicits holistic responses that may begin in the gathered community and will continue with worshippers as they move into the world."[289] Call and response then can serve as a model for what ministry looks like in the world. Calling the congregation into the work of co-revelation then becomes an act of empowerment, as it also calls the congregation into the work of doing ministry in the world. The recognition that God can and does move through the entire community in the preaching moment should inspire the community to participate in the sharing of God's revelation to the world. Call and response is a prophetic practice within a practice, one that encourages the congregation to push back against a world of hierarchies to perform a different way of being.

Call and response empowers the congregation by offering the space for them to participate in the revelation of God's word as a means of preparing for carrying God's word into the world. It is the naming of God's actions in the world, that transforms the world. By

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[286] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 3.
[287] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 6-7.
[288] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 9.
[289] Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 92.

participating in the revelation of God's word in the preaching moment, both preacher and congregation are preparing for the act of revealing God's word in the world. The dialogical practice of call and response then empowers the congregation to speak a new word of a new reality to the world. In this dialogical revelation, the hierarchical distinction between preacher and congregation becomes blurred as both participate in revelation. This empowering practice of revelation is analogous to the dialogical pedagogy of the oppressed as described by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire argues that "dialogue [is] indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality,"[290] call and response is an indispensable aspect of Black preaching that unveils God's word for God's people. Freire suggests in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that dialogue is an encounter between individuals that names the world and that by naming it, transforms it.[291]

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* calls for an end to the hierarchal sharing of knowledge, that situates the teacher as the repository of knowledge and the students as the receiver of this knowledge. Freire describes this as the banking concept of education, a method that he understands as "necrophilic."[292] This type of pedagogical method, which Freire says is the method of the oppressor, "transforms students into receiving objects" and "attempts to control thinking and action, lead[ing] women and men to adjust to the world, [inhibiting] their creative power."[293] The alternative is a *problem-posing education* that creates a dialogical relationship between teacher and student.[294] Call and response allows for a kind of "problem-posing homiletic" that is also empowering for the preacher and the congregation based on the description of a problem-posing pedagogy that Freire imagined in his writings: dialogical, blurred lines of authority, and praxis in the world. Call and response is an act not of education, conventionally understood, but of co-revelation, as the preacher and the congregation jointly experience the word together through the dialogue that takes place during the sermon. Yet, with explicit training, this ubiquitous practice can become even more empowering.

What congregants know about call and response comes from observation, from watching call and response in practice over the years and by following the instructions of the preacher during the sermon. However, similarly to the way that preachers learn to become better preachers, congregations, regardless of ethnic background, can learn to become better co-revelators as well. Intentional training from pastors and an invitation to respond in more intentional ways during the sermon would lead to an even more empowering kind of call and response. Congregations receiving rhetorical training for their role as co-revelators would be able to respond to the sermon as it is being preached and in ways that would signal to the preacher that they need to change pace, or language, or need to repeat a point. Intentional training would allow for intentional responses from the congregation, that take some of the discernment work away from the preachers. If the congregation has been given both the training and the permission to respond in pre-determined ways, they would have even greater influence over the message. The preaching process would then be closer to what Freire describes as problem posing, and the congregation would be more empowered to do the work of ministry in the world.

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[290] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 83.

[291] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88

[292] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 77.

[293] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 77.

[294] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

Concluding Thoughts

More than merely random, encouraging noise from the congregation, call and response is a complex practice within the practice of Black preaching, which allows the congregation to be an integral part of the sermon. I have argued that the congregation operates as co-revelators of the word, meaning that they help reveal God's word to God's people at a particular point in time and to a particular group of people. If the congregation is invited before the preaching event, to participate in the preaching of the sermon, they will feel empowered during that moment and beyond. This kind of intentional training could happen in any ecclesial context. The specifics of what response would look like, and just how much the preacher could handle could be determined by each congregation. This work would not only include and thus empower the congregation in the preaching moment, but it would also mitigate some of the attention span issues that exist today. The more that the congregation is engaged, actively engaged, in the sermon, the greater likelihood that people will maintain their attention throughout. The unveiling of God's word for God's people is a communal process, and as we communally participate in the telling of the story our churches will be empowered to tell our story to the world.

Justice, Ethics, & Preaching

THIS IS OUR VOICE: REVITALIZING *REN* AS A HOMILETICAL CONCEPT FOR RESISTANCE TO ANTI-ASIAN HATE CRIMES

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Abstract

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asians have been otherized in American society due to racism and xenophobia because some view them as responsible (as individuals or as a community) for causing and spreading the virus. In response to the nationwide surge of anti-Asian hate crimes, the author suggests a revitalization of *ren* (仁), the foundational concept of the collectivist culture of East (Southeast) Asian society and also the essence of Confucianism, as an indigenous homiletical voice. The paper explores the distinctive otherness—in particular, the heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*) and righteousness (義, *yi*)—in *ren* as an alternative concept for mitigating the controversial features of Levinas's ethical project. Further, the author proposes preaching as *ren* so that the praxis of compassion and resistance combines with the dynamic of biblical lament as a homiletical strategy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been traumatizing and transforming the entire world in various ways for over a year. The rapid global spread of the virus has raised people's fear and anxiety, and this has resulted in the stigmatization and otherization of minority communities based on racism, fear of foreigners, and general xenophobia. Since the virus emerged in Wuhan, China, and as the pandemic has spread across the United States, in particular, Asian Americans have reported a surge in racially motivated hate crimes, both physical violence and harassment.

Such crimes noticeably increased beginning in March 2020 after President Trump, at a press conference, deliberately referred to the virus as the "Chinese virus" or "China virus" rather than using the official World Health Organization term "COVID-19."[295] In late March, therefore, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued a warning that anti-Asian hate crimes would surge during the pandemic and that law enforcement agencies should be on heightened alert for such incidents. A spike in various types of anti-Asian hate crime has occurred in various places in the nation, not just the Atlanta murders—on March 16, 2020, a twenty-one-year-old white male opened fire inside three massage parlors in metro Atlanta, killing eight people, six of whom were Asian women—but

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[295] President Trump repeatedly used these terms, justifying his usage by stating, "It's from China. That's why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate." Other governmental authorities presented a similar attitude. For example, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo preferred the term "Wuhan virus," and White House staff used the term "kung flu." Katie Rogers, "Politicians' Use of 'Wuhan Virus' Starts a Debate Health Experts Wanted to Avoid," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2020; Dave Boyer, "Trump Spars with Reporter Over Accusation That Staffer Called Coronavirus 'Kung Flu,'" *The Washington Times*, March 18, 2020; James Fallows, "A Reporter's Notebook: A 2020 Time Capsule," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2020.

also the recent attacks on Asian people in San Francisco and New York City.[296] Thus, during the pandemic, the racial positioning of Asian Americans has become that of the *Other* in society, and this destructive designation has threatened their physical and psychological well-being.

Ren: A Distinctive Otherness of Asians

Otherization is performed when a dominant group has prejudice and fear toward a nondominant group based on the notion that the latter is different.[297] This thinking strengths the marginalization, disempowerment, and social exclusion of the minority group while the dominant group positions themselves as normal. In American society, this phenomenon presents as racism and xenophobia by the dominant group—in particular, white people—who believe that they have "civic belonging"[298] in society, resulting in the otherization of individuals who are racially different. Since Asians first arrived in America in the late 1700s, they have been exposed to the hate crimes of physical violence and harassment. This is a type of racism and xenophobia because they were labeled as the *Other*, a nondominant group who did not fully belong, from the dominant group's perspective.[299] The term "yellow peril" reinforces a marginalizing stereotype that has long been used to label Asians within American society as a threat. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the reappearance of the yellow peril in society, thereby, leading to an increase in anti-Asian hate crime while targeting Asians as solely responsible for causing and spreading the virus. Thus, Asians have been perceived as a monolithic *Other* during this social crisis. Nevertheless, unlike the otherization imposed by the dominant group, Asians—in particular, East (and Southeast) Asians, who have been the major victims of hate crime in American society during the COVID-19 pandemic—have a distinctive otherness in their fundamental thinking, which is the concept of *ren* (仁). *Ren* is the foundational concept of the collectivist culture of East Asian society and is also the essence of Confucianism, which has strongly influenced East Asian sociopolitical and sociocultural systems for centuries.[300]

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[296] From January 1 to June 27, 2021, bias crimes against Asian Americans in San Francisco had more than doubled, from 43 to 89, and in New York City they had increased fivefold, from 21 to 105, compared to the same period in 2020. Ali Watkins and Jonah E. Bromwich, "No Vaccine for Racism': Asian New Yorkers Still Live in Fear of Attacks," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2021; Thomas Fuller, "Fear, and Discord, Among Asian Americans Over Attacks in San Francisco," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2021.

According to a report by Stop AAPI Hate, nationwide, 9,081 hate incidents (4,548 in 2020 and 4,533 in 2021) were reported to the center between March 19, 2020 and June 30, 2021. The report indicates that the incidents involved verbal harassment (63.7%), avoidance (16.5%), physical assault (13.7%), and online harassment (8.3%). These acts of discrimination occurred primarily in public spaces: on the street, on public transit, and in parks (48.2%), businesses (30.1%), private residences (9.4%), and online (8.8%). The ethnicity of the victims was Chinese (43.8%), Korean (16.8%), Filipinx (9.1%), Japanese (8.6%), and Vietnamese (8.2%). Stop AAPI Hate, "Stop AAPI Hate National Report," accessed September 1, 2021, https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Stop-AAPI-Hate-Report-National-v2-210830.pdf.

[297] Lois Weis, "Identity Formation and the Process of 'Othering': Unravelling Sexual Threads," *Educational Foundations* 9, no. 1 (1995): 17–33.

[298] Ronald R. Sundstrom and David H. Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 1 (2014), 21; Barbara Perry, *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82.

[299] Terri Y. Chen, "Hate Violence as Border Patrol: An Asian American Theory of Hate Violence," *Asian Law Journal* 7, no. 1, 80–85.

[300] Confucianism was initiated by Confucius (孔子, 551–479 BCE), and it spread throughout East and Southeast Asia as an important element of cultural/political systems and social ethics. The influence of

Origin of ren

The equivocal nature of *ren* has resulted in various understandings of the concept, in particular within the Western context. Wing-tsit Chan summarizes the various translations of *ren* in Western academia as "benevolence, love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity, perfect virtue, goodness, true manhood, manhood at its best, human-heartedness, humanness, humanity, hominity, man-to-manness."[301] Xu Shen (許慎, ca. 58–147), a Chinese scholar who was interested in the etymology of primordial Chinese characters, notes that "*ren* (仁) is a compound word from 人 (human) and 二 (two) and it connotates the affinity and inclusive love . . . relationship between two persons."[302] Tu Wei-ming claims that "*ren* consists of the sign for man [人] and the sign for two [二], designating the primordial form of human-relatedness."[303] In other words, the pictographic concept of *ren* asserts that an individual human (人) needs to live with others—within a communal context—and have interpersonal relationships that are able to embody and achieve *ren* (仁). These are general understandings in academia of the origin of *ren*, which emphasizes the existence of human beings in a society that includes the characteristics of relationality and ontology.[304] Therefore, the relationality of "I" and "other" in *ren* is neither opposition nor separation but rather represents the mutuality in which "I" orients to the "other" and operates based on reciprocity.

Otherness in ren

Confucius (孔子, 551–479 BCE) regarded *ren* as the universal ethical nature of every human being. He defined *ren* simply as loving others, a vital virtue people must embrace as an aspect of the innate nature that is shared by every human being.[305] For instance, he asserts, "Humaneness [仁, *ren*] is more vital to the people than water or fire. I have seen people die from treading on water or fire, but I have never seen the person who died from treading the path of

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Confucianism reached societies populated by Han people, including China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, that share a common language, tradition, and history. It has affected Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, which have the largest numbers of the Han people's (Chinese) diaspora and are more exposed to Confucian culture. Lastly, it also influenced non-Han regions such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, which all have geographical proximity to China. Tu Wei-ming, "Implications of the Rise of "Confucian" East Asia, *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 195–218; Min-Hua Huang and Shu-Hsien Chang, "Similarities and Differences in East Asian Confucian Culture: A Comparative Analysis," *OMNES: The Journal of Multicultural Society* 7, no. 2 (2017): 1–40; Katarzyna A. Nawrot, "Does Confucianism Promote Cooperation and Integration in East Asia?" *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1–30.

[301] Wing-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of *Jen*," *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 4 (1955): 295.

[302] Xu Shen (許慎), *Shuowen Jiezi Zhu* 說文解字注 [The annotated *Shuowen Jiezi*], annotated by Duan Yucai (段玉裁) (Hangzhou, China: Zhejiang Guji Chubanshe, 2006), s.v. "Ren."

[303] Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Boston: Chen & Tsui Co., 1999), 18.

[304] Nicholas F. Gier, "The Dancing Ru: A Confucian Aesthetics of Virtue," *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 2 (2001): 282; Hebert Fingarette, "The Music of Humanity in the Conversations of Confucius," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 10, no. 4 (1983): 340.

[305] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* 12:22, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University

Press, 2007). Peter Boodberg, states that the concept of *ren* in *The Analects* includes a creative synthesis of both love or care for others and being fully human. Peter A. Boodberg, "The Semasiology of Some Primary Confucian Concepts," *Philosophy East and West* 2, no. 4 (1953): 317–32.

humaneness [仁, *ren*]."[306] For Confucius, *ren* is a holistic manifestation of humanity in its commonest expression among human beings; he constantly highlights its practice rather than proposing an exact definition. Rather, he chooses to illuminate its meaning only partially to allow his followers to practice *ren* in their normal lives.[307] Confucius has confidence that anyone who is a human being is able to practice and achieve *ren* by following their own will. Therefore, *ren* is the motivation and criterion for people and a society pursuing the good. In this regard, people who are ethical beings should have reciprocity with openness; practicing *ren* leads to a move toward the external because *ren* reveals its nature as it breaks down the relationship between "I" and "other" as subject and object. These are reminders that the relationality and ontology of "I" and "other" within the community is the origin of *ren*. Therefore, Tu argues, "The task of [*ren*], far from being an internal, subjectivistic search for one's own individuality, depends as much on meaningful communal inquiry as on self-scrutiny."[308]

Mencius (孟子, 372–289 BCE), who systematized the philosophical thought of Confucius, extends the core meaning of *ren*: "To dedicate oneself in all earnestness to reciprocity [恕, *shu*]—there can be no closer approach to humaneness [*ren*]."[309] He asserts that the realization of *ren* in one's human nature is a process of actualizing one's authentic self, which follows the law of reciprocity (恕, *shu*) that requires the existence of others. The otherness in *ren* is oriented toward living "in definite ethical relations with others in the actual world, practicing the morality of doing one's duty to others but not asking them to do their duties, reciprocally,"[310] which is similar to the Golden Rule in Christianity. In a narrow sense, *ren* pursues a specific virtue, which is loving others, while in a broad sense it refers to the summation of human virtues. Therefore, *ren* is a process of "qualitative transformation of the person and achievement of authoritative humanity"[311] as the way to become *Junzi* (君子, a wise person or a moral exemplar). Confucian philosophers underline the fact that the concept of *ren*—otherness—must be practiced in one's given situation but can also be treated as a metaphysical concept. *Ren* is connected to a social context as an externalization, such as *li* (禮, ritual or propriety). Thus, the characteristics of *ren*—reciprocity and propriety—that are attained by the process of self-cultivation become the foundation of social relations with others.

The dynamic of compassion and resistance within ren

The significance of otherness within *ren* manifests as the practice of compassion and resistance in reality. First, the heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*) is the foundation of *ren*, meaning that human nature is good so its moral potential does not allow a person to bear to see the suffering of others.[312] Mencius proposes an example of how the heart of compassion could arise in the human mind:

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[306] Confucius, *The Analects*, 15:35.

[307] Examples of practicing *ren* in *The Analects* are as follows: 4:3, 4:4, 7:29, 12:1, 12:2, 13:19, and 13:27.

[308] Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 86.

[309] Mencius, *Mencius* 7A4, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[310] Tang Chun-I, "The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy," in *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), 192.

[311] David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York

Press, 1987), 115.

[312] Mencius, *Mencius* 2A6, 6A6.

> [I]f anyone were suddenly to see a child about to fall into a well, his mind would be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion........The mind's feeling of pity and compassion [惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*] is the sprout of humaneness [仁, *ren*].[313]

Mencius notes that any human would spontaneously respond to the suffering of others because of the heart of compassion, not because of any ulterior motives or a calculation of self-interest. He believes that this immediate reaction is an authentic expression of the nature of human beings. Mencius, therefore, states that the heart of compassion is the beginning of *ren*—"the sprout or tip" (端, *duan*) of *ren*—which means it is the initial step toward achieving *ren*.[314]

Bryan Van Norden summarizes Mencius's *ren* as follows: "to be benevolent [*ren*] is to be pained by the suffering of others and to take joy in the happiness of others .... Benevolence involves an emotional response (such as compassion) to the perception of a property (such as the suffering of another person)."[315] Consequently, Mencius underscores moral self-cultivation and the recognition of the heart of compassion that is oriented toward the supreme virtue of *ren.*

Cheng Hao (程顥), one of the founders of Neo-Confucianism, notes, "The benevolent who follows *ren* recognizes the world as oneself. *Ren* means the unity of other and self which means it recognizes the other as oneself."[316] In this respect, therefore, otherization of minorities in a society, their disempowerment and exclusion by the dominant group based on a specific bias and/or prejudice—including race, color, religion, nationality, country of origin, disability, gender, or sexual orientation—is not acceptable in the Confucian tradition. Rather, the wall between the subject (the person belonging to civic society) and the *Other* (the person who does not belong) is broken down; the community is not divided when human beings practice the heart of compassion to those experiencing unjust social suffering, such as hate crimes, as the core of *ren* in society.

Second, *ren* is manifested by the heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*) as the love of others and is revealed by anger toward *bu ren* (不仁, not *ren*) in the form of resistance. The anger is not deeply rooted in the emotions but is a moral decision in the face of unrighteousness. In *Analects* 4:3, Confucius notes, "Only the humane person is able to like others and is able to hate others."[317] Feelings of like and dislike are basic instincts within human beings, but these feelings are transformed into moral emotions that learn to like what is good and dislike what is evil. Moral anger, therefore, enables one to have compassion for the suffering of

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[313] Mencius, *Mencius* 2A6.

[314] Bryan W. Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217–18. The heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*) is addressed five times in *Mencius*—three times in *Mencius* 2A6 and two times in *Mencius* 6A6—which state that it is the sprout of the virtue of *ren* (2A6) or even that it is the virtue of *ren* (6A6). In *Mencius*, moreover, Mencius sometimes uses *ren* to connote one's affection for family members (6A4) or serving one's parents (4A27). Meyong-seok Kim is a representative scholar who asserts that the heart of compassion as the foundation of the virtue of *ren* has elements of both familial affection and general sympathy. Meyong-seok Kim, "What *Ceyin xhi xin* (Compassion/Familial Affection) Really Is," *Dao* 9 (2010): 407–25.

[315] Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics*, 249. Furthermore, Wai-Ying Wong asserts that the heart of compassion is equivalent to the concept of Michael Slote's empathy in that it plays a crucial role in enabling the development of a heart that cares for others. Wai-Ying Wong, "*Ren*, Empathy and the Agent-Relative Approach in Confucian Ethics," *Asian Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2012): 13; Slote contends that empathy is important to moral motivation, such as the motivation to care for others. Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 15.

[316] "仁者以天地萬物爲一體 莫非己也." 程顥 (Cheng Hao), 二程遺書 [Remnant books of the two Cheng

brothers], 卷2上, 17.

317 Confucius, *The Analects* 4:3.

others and to establish a community of *ren* that resists unrighteous factors through solidarity. Mencius describes the feature of resistance embedded in *ren* as the concept of *yi* (義, righteousness). This is disclosed in *Mencius* 1B8, which is the dialogue with King Xuan of Qi in which the king asks about the alleged banishment of two tyrannical rulers in Chinese antiquity by the sage kings Tang and Wu, who were previously feudal lords of these tyrants.

> [King Xuan of Qi asked,] "Can a minister be allowed to slay his ruler?" [Mencius replied,] "One who offends against humaneness [*ren*, 仁] is called a brigand; one who offends against rightness [*yi*, 義] is called an outlaw. Someone who is a brigand and an outlaw is called a mere fellow."[318]

Mencius justifies dethroning a king as a righteous action because people suffered under the tyrants; he does not condone regicide or mutiny but views banishing the kings as the appropriate punishment by the will of the people of someone who damaged *ren* (賊仁者, *zeirenzhe*).[319] This punitive response underscores the need for humanitarian intervention to save people out of compassion and to punish the ruler when the ruler refuses to accomplish *ren*.[320]

Consequently, to be a truly moral person, that is, a person with *ren* and *yi*, one must be motivated by genuine compassion. The compassion toward the *Other* who is suffering under an unjust situation, such as when minorities are exposed to physical violence/hate crimes and harassment due to people's fear and anxiety, establishes the community of *ren*, and this transforms the dynamic of *yi* in terms of resistance and moral anger toward the unjust social phenomenon of anti-Asian hatred. Therefore, in the Confucian tradition, the *Junzi* (君子, a wise person or a moral exemplar) who practices *ren* is regarded as an moral person who helps to realize a just society. Thus, compassion and resistance are proposed as manifestations of the distinctive notion of otherness in *ren* that has been the core value of the sociopolitical and sociocultural foundation of East Asians' thought for centuries.

Otherness in Homiletics

The influence of Confucian values has been decreasing in East Asian countries due to a deliberate reinterpretation that highlight a specific virtue and rites and rapid transformation of their society.[321] In contemporary society, therefore, Confucianism has been regarded as premodern thinking or as feudalistic conventions that need to be eliminated.[322] Nevertheless, the

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[318] Mencius, *Mencius* 1B8.

[319] See Sumner B. Twiss, "A Constructive Framework for Discussing Confucianism and Human Rights" and Chung-ying Cheng, "Transforming Confucian Virtues into Human Rights: A Study of Human Agency and Potency in Confucian Ethics," both in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Tu Wei-ming (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[320] A. T. Nuyen, "The "Mandate of Heaven": Mencius and the Divine Command Theory of Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy East & West* 63, no. 2 (2013): 115–16.

[321] For instance, the drastic industrialization of Korean society after Korean war in the 1960s and '70s diminished the influence of Confucianism. China has discarded the Confucian tradition in its modern-era process of communization—in particular, the cultural revolution in the 1960s—and Japan has been faced a similar phenomenon as other East Asian countries. Yet Confucian ideologies and values are still alive and are practiced in people's lives in terms of the essence of collectivist culture and thinking. Yohan Bae, *Sinhakjaga Pureo Sseun Yugyo Iyagi* [Confucianism from the perspective of a theologian] (Seoul: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 33; Carolyn Francis and John Masaaki Nakajima, *Christians in Japan* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991), 19.

[322] One example of this thinking is the ritual hierarchy of agnates (persons descended from the same male ancestor) in both the domestic and public arenas, such as in the paternalistic concepts of the king of Korea as the national father and of the father of the family as the elder who has the authority and power to control other family

members. This has encouraged authoritarian, factional, gerontocratic, patriarchal, and male-oriented ideas and

revitalization of *ren*'s significance in the midst of the contemporary era of bias against the *Other* offers a homiletical voice to Asians who are experiencing otherization.

Levinasian otherness in homiletics

        Otherness has been a significant theme in North American homiletics. The phenomenology of the other developed by Emmanuel Levinas has significantly influenced the development of otherness in the homiletic strategy. Notably, Levinas interprets the human condition of suffering based on an interhuman perspective that is not grounded in an intentional self-consciousness of human relationship but rather holds the I in a hostage situation for the other, which is "substitution."[323] As a result, a human relationship is not reciprocal for Levinas; it is asymmetrical, meaning that self (ipseity) is manifested by the ethical responsibility to otherness (alterity). He claims that the understanding of humanity in late modern Western philosophy is jeopardized by the ontological priority of subjectivity to the other, which is related to totalitarianism. Otherness, therefore, is a more radical agenda for him than reciprocity. This is the core of Levinas's otherness that he proposes as the new beginning of ethics—the first philosophy. Thus, the asymmetrical, intersubjective human relationship is revealed as unconditional responsibility to the other by the epiphany of the face.

        The concept of the *Other* in Levinas's thought strongly influenced the otherness of homiletics that was adopted by representative homileticians Ronald J. Allen and John S. McClure.[324] For instance, McClure claims to deconstruct the *habitus*—the authority of the Bible, tradition, experience, and reason—through Levinas's criticism of the totality through which human beings reduce the distinctiveness of others into sameness with themselves, thus violating the integrity of others. Deconstruction, McClure claims, helpfully exposes for preaching the harmful binaries that give rise to oppression and suffering as well as the therapeutic veneer that protects the problematic term in a binary from being sentenced to "erasure" and replaced with its other.[325] Therefore, he suggests "other-wise" preaching "to reorient preaching toward the 'Other,' to situate preaching as a compassionate act of radical responsibility."[326] Other-oriented preaching has been developed as a philosophical ethic of preaching and a practical model of

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practices in society that are in direct contrast with the genuine meaning of otherness in *ren*. Moreover, the male-labor-dominated industrial structure of society during the modernization and industrialization of East and Southeast Asian society has maintained the status of the male-dominated household among family members. Also, this factor has conserved the hierarchical and authoritarian familism based on paternalism in the transformation of the family system.[322] For these reasons, the enclosed family-oriented community has critically distorted the genuine perspective of otherness. Further, it has recognized different groups as one community but limited them to relation-based networks that draw primarily on existing kinship-, university/school-, and regional origin-based ties. Byong-Ik Koh, "Confucianism in Contemporary Korea," in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*, ed. Tu Wei-ming (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 188; Yong-Hyek, Kwon, "Liberalism and Communitarianism: A Study on the Reconstruction of Relation between Individuals and Community," *Korean Society for Social Philosophy* 28 (2014): 106–14.

    [323] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 100; Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 146.

    [324] John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001); Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009).

    [325] McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 2.

    [326] McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 7.

preaching.[327] An other-oriented homiletics advocates the significance of the others who have not received attention in either the sacred or secular arena—those who are invisible or are suffered in the practice of preaching.

The otherness of Levinas, however, omits one critical factor. None of the various communal narratives of self and other are considered in his ethic of responsibility. Levinas emphasized the singularity of the *Other*; his notion of the other was sharply limited to specific groups. For this reason, Levinas's sense of otherness—responsibility to the other who accuses and obligates without prior measure—has been criticized from the postcolonial perspective as Eurocentric, racist, and xenophobic. John Drabinski argues that the geographical, cultural, and historical limitations that stalled in the European context were a dominant influence on Levinas's notion that ethics is the first philosophy.[328] He notes that Levinas's thoughts are strongly rooted in the tensions and unities between the ancient and modern world, Judaism and Christianity, and the religious and the secular, and he quotes Levinas: "What is Europe? It is Bible and the Greeks."[329]

The religious background of Levinas enhanced sameness rather than otherness because Hellenic features are absorbed into sameness and Hebraic characteristics are set free in otherness. Drabinski, therefore, asserts that "[for Levinas] Other is a Jewish Other, oppressed and exploited by the same Same, which is always a Greek Same. That is, Europe is not just for Europeans. Europe is for the whole world, in the (wholly colonial) sense that Europe is the measure of every Other and every ethical demand."[330] Sonia Sikka, for the same reason, argues that "[Levinas's] account of the ethical relation does not work well when presented to those who are disempowered."[331] The rapidly transformed society in the postmodern and globalization era has produced a great diversity in the *Other* who is the stranger or the neighbor and is not limited to a single sociocultural context. Thereby, the ethical project of Levinas has been accused of decolonizing from the meaning of otherness based on Eurocentrism and universalism.

Preaching about Hate Crimes as *Ren*

The otherness of *ren* proposes a way to cover the diverse others who have not been adequately included in the Levinasian ethics of otherness. The Confucian tradition values otherness and human relations based on the philosophical journey toward *ren* that leads to a sense of equilibrium. For this reason, the other is neither in an asymmetrical relationship with the self nor in a deontological relationship as a being who holds an ethical responsibility for the self as well as Levinas's concept of hostage, substitution, and heteronomy. Rather, the

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[327] Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen criticizes McClure's other-wise preaching because it omits two elements that constitute the middle ground between philosophy and practice—namely, a model of communication and a theology of communication. She therefore suggests an alternative homiletic with a "communication theology" based on the theory of Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Notably, "carnivalization" enables a reconsideration of the traditional practice of preaching, such as regarding the congregation as coauthors and God as the loophole addressee of preaching. Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

[328] John E. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 2–3.

[329] Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial*, 4.

[330] Theis intellectual background of Levinas enables him to create an opposition between insider and outsider that permits the xenophobia associated with outsiders to grow and fester. Drabinski argues, "[W]e could say that there is something presupposed in Levinas' concept of Europe that not only makes such racist and xenophobic utterances possible, but even makes them necessary." Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial*, 7.

[331] Sonia Sikka, "How Not to Read the Other," *Philosophy Today* 43, no. 2 (1999): 200.

intersubjectivity of Confucianism requires the self-cultivation of each individual so the individual is able to flourish within the community in harmonious human relationships that are established upon *ren*. This feature of *ren* is able to complement the weakness in the otherness that is described in Levinas's philosophy.

Preaching as ren *for the praxis of compassion and resistance*

The significance of *ren* suggests an alternative otherness as Asians' homiletical voice to lead the praxis that presents as both compassion and resistance to those who are suffering from hate crimes. This characteristic corresponds well with the dynamic of biblical lament; it also strengthens the nature of both compassion and resistance in the practice of *ren*.[332]

Ren is initiated by expressing the heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*) as it relates to the suffering of the sufferers. The prompt response of compassion arises as a spontaneous act from a state of mind (heart) that cannot bear to see others' suffering.[333] That response is more than the state of a hostaged mind led by heteronomous duty. Mencius believes that the good nature of human beings enables them to demonstrate their true compassion to others. First, therefore, preaching as *ren* begins with the pastoral role, which enables a compassionate God who suffers as the *Other.* The concept of the heart of compassion in *ren* is prevalent in the Bible as the divine character of God. In particular, it is revealed in the behavior of Jesus when faced with human suffering.[334] In fact, Jesus has shown us that the characteristic of compassion is not limited to his divine nature but rather is a shared nature that we all possess (as stated in *Mencius*) because we are "the body of Christ."[335] At this moment, preaching as *ren* therefore discloses "not a disappearance of scars, or an absence of tears, but rather their acknowledgment in the presence and purposes of God and wiping away of tears that have really been cried."[336] Further, the preaching moves sufferers out from the cathartic ground of expressing their anguish to God, enabling persons to experience a compassionate God who walks along with them in the midst of their hated reality.[337] This feature corresponds with the ontological concept of *ren* in that the relationality of "I" and "other" is neither one of opposition

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[332] The biblical lament simultaneously contains compassion and resistance as undivided characteristics. First, lament enables sufferers to speak and allows them to express their emotions while it breaks the silence. Further, lament invites sufferers to bring their sorrow and rage before God and also awakens them to the awareness that God always listens and can be trusted to help in the midst of the horrible experience. Therefore, the lament makes space for the experience of the compassionate God who is crucified as divine and fully human. Second, lament represents a resistant voice that is a profound expression of people's desire for God's justice and liberation. In the public arena, the lament not only brings individuals and communities into a closer view of the reality of the society to which they belong but also proposes an alternative consciousness, one in which people can see their history in the light of God's justice. Thus, biblical lament establishes the hermeneutic dynamic of compassion and resistance within its praxis. The worth and value of the sufferers are not invalidated by the compassionate God; instead, the divine experience leads them to act with courage and claim justice in God's fierce resistance to the evil and suffering in their reality. Jeremy Kangsan Kim, "When Will We Proclaim Lament from the Pulpit? Preaching to a Traumatized Society in the Korean Context," *Homiletic* 46, no. 1 (2021): 15–27.

[333] Mencius, *Mencius* 2A6, 6A6.

[334] Andrew Purves notes that "God's compassion requires us to understand God now in terms of God's vulnerability and willingness to suffer with us." Andrew Purves, *The Search for Compassion: Spirituality and Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 17–18.

[335] John 15:1–11, 1 Corinthians. 12:12–31.

[336] David S. Jacobsen, "Promise and Cross: Homiletical Theology, the Vocative Word Extra Nos, and the Task of a Revisionist Eschatology," in *Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching*, ed. David S. Jacobsen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 123.

[337] Luke A. Powery, "Lament: Homiletical Groans in the Spirit," *Homiletics* 34, no. 1 (2009): 33.

nor separation when encountering suffering; rather, the mutuality of "I" and "other" reflects one community. However, unlike the Confucian tradition, compassion in the biblical lament establishes the collective consciousness of the victims of hate crimes within the internal relationship between the Holy Trinity and the others.

Preaching as *ren*, therefore, establishes genuine solidarity within a community that shares the same ontological nature as the body of Christ. This is fundamentally different from the general notion of solidarity that is established upon the communal distinctive experience of systemic suppression and oppression based on racism and xenophobia, which creates a willingness to connect with the other to overcome injustice.[338] As noted by Wendy Farley, this genuine solidarity expressed in compassion proposes "the resuscitation of the capacity to recognize another person as human, possible even in the midst of a tragically structured environment. Human beings are intersubjective and social creatures."[339] Preaching with *ren* proposes a form of love that includes recognizing the human value of those who are otherized as nondominant beings in the society and respecting them.[340] Thus, communal solidarity turns into the agency to resist the dehumanizing factors of suffering due to hate, and preaching is not limited to sacred places but reaches out to secular arenas.

Second, preaching as *ren* is not confined to the pastoral role; rather, it is enlarged to incorporate a prophetic role that establishes solidarity with the *Other* (the victims of hate crimes) who are experiencing God's compassion in the midst of their suffering. Solidarity with the *Other* makes it possible to identify the reality of *bu ren* (不仁, not *ren*) as the cause of structural evil.

The true heart of compassion for others in *ren* leads to the action of *yi* (義, righteousness), which resists unjust structural factors as the fundamental cause of anti-Asian hate crimes. Preaching as *ren*, therefore, raises the prophetic voice to achieve righteousness in this world. The task that should have true priority is that of establishing genuine solidarity as one community, thus creating a secure space for experiencing God's compassion, even for those who are in the midst of suffering. True *yi* (義, righteousness) that arises from virtuous anger does not hold grudges and bitterness because it cannot bear *bu ren* (不仁, not *ren*), which is the fundamental cause of the suffering of the *Other*. In other words, the heart of compassion for the other has no choice but to lead to righteousness. Jesus' lamentation on the cross not only disclosed God's gratuitous and excessive love and God's compassion toward others but also a radical form of public criticism of the unjust sociopolitical structure and religious institutions under the violent Roman Empire that had produced so much suffering.[341]

The compassionate heart of lament for others is not an individual practice but is transformed into a public voice of resistance within today's injustice. This is the dynamic of lament that simultaneously contains compassion and resistance. Preaching as *ren* provides the homiletical force to practice the dynamic of lament. The message is not limited to the sacred place as a pastoral voice in a specific community of others but expands the community of others into the secular environment as a prophetic voice while proclaiming God's justice in society to eliminate evil and suffering in today's structures, such as those that lead to anti-Asian hate

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[338] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 95.

[339] Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 38.

[340] Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 79.

[341] Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids,

MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 120.

crimes. Preaching as *ren*, therefore, enables people to participate in and proclaim God's compassion within their reality as well as to seek God's justice and peace in our world within the practice of raising their voice of resistance. Preaching as *ren*, finally, builds a true community of *ren* that consists of others who experience God's compassion as one body of Christ. Then, the voice of the community raises a united voice of resistance against the unjust structures that are the fundamental cause of racism.

The surge of anti-Asian hate crime in American society asks us to raise our voice against unjust social structures that view Asians as the *Other*. The revitalization of *ren* proposes an indigenous homiletical voice to recover the social community as the primary task in creating an appropriate space for the practice of the dynamic of lament that does not otherize minorities but rather offers compassionate action to them, even calls for resistance as the united voice of the victims of hate crimes against social evil and violence in American society. Consequently, in preaching as *ren*, the dynamic of lament—compassion and resistance—draws on the distinctive otherness of the Confucian tradition without being divided into the two different tasks of offering pastoral care and raising a prophetic voice.

FOR WHOM IS THE PREACHING RENAISSANCE?
LAMENT AS A HERMENEUTICS AND PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY BASED ON
THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EXCLUDED
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ABSTRACT: The challenging act of hatred and isolation committed against race, gender, and class that is associated with the spread of Covid-19 suggests that preaching needs to serve as an opportunity to promote hospitality. The multi-layered hatred and isolation, especially experienced by groups that have been excluded from society, clearly show where the power of preaching needs to be directed for a revival of preaching. Ethical studies of hospitality and African American women's practice of hospitality may conceivably offer an insight: bringing a sense of hospitality to preaching. Lament will be presented as a hermeneutics and practice of hospitality based on the perspective of the excluded. This study finds a virtuous cycle of effort, related to a knowledge/perception of community, the sensitivity of interconnection, and the devotion to continual participation in hospitality.

Hospitality Matters for Dreaming Again the 花樣年華 of Preaching

The power of preaching becomes visible when the power of the gospel is revealed, embodied, and practiced at the moment of preaching and in every day of lives by those who preach and those who listen. The power extends beyond the Christian community to the whole of society. In particular, the power of preaching has been revealed more splendidly in difficult times. Preaching has been devoted to comforting the listeners in times of trouble, giving them a direction, envisioning the future, and bringing hope amid suffering. When we are reminded of the preachers who led the suffrage movement in North America and the congregations that responded to the sermons, we can easily imagine the power of preaching. During the Japanese colonial period and on the ruins after the Korean war, the same was true of the Korean church and its preaching. Each memory of the *Hwa Yang Yeon Hwa* (花樣年華, The Most Beautiful Days in Life) of preaching continuously encourages preachers and Christians to participate in the power of preaching for the brokenness of our lives and the world.

The disruption of our lives has become intense with Covid-19. In that period of disruption of ordinary life and the loss of precious things, the world has witnessed a shattering; however, disruption has either been less than outstanding, or it has been ignored. Hatred and isolation we face are the challenges that threaten the community in our deep brokenness which has widened and revealed the distrust between individuals while the anger over the loss has been directed towards those who are more marginalized, excluded, and deprived of their rights. Many people have created boundaries of safety, dividing communities into "we" and "others." These have worsened a fear of "otherness" that has been increasingly expressed in society. Thus, churches and preachers face the challenge of recognizing and undoing the negative sense of otherness.

"Difference" has been socially constructed in relation to race, gender, class, disability, age, etc., and "other" or "otherness" has been treated as a topic for theological discourse and a subject

of ethical practice. Scholars have discovered that socially vulnerable groups are "being othered."[342] Hearing the experiences of non-mainstream and unidentified voices has become a shared struggle to resist, influence, and transform mainstream narratives.[343] In particular, womanist theology has committed to it, recognizing the fragmentation of experience.[344] Delores S. Williams argues that the theological task given us is not to identify dominant experiences and follow them, but to "connect the facts and fragments of the vision" shaped by and heard from those who have been excluded and silenced.[345] Experiences can be varied, transitory, and imperfect, but we need to embrace diversity and ambiguity, listening carefully to others and speaking out about what has been done to us. In this sense, considering hospitality in preaching may contribute to contemplating the role of preaching as a response to the brokenness that is apparent in the hatred and isolation that are prevalent in the world. This preaching enables further insight into how to build a community while embracing "difference." This is because hospitality can be a key to healing that hatred and isolation by embracing the context of "difference."

In homiletics, hospitality is a relatively underdeveloped subject, especially as a practice for dealing with those who have been excluded from discourses on gender, race, class, politics, economics, religion, and power. Scholars such as Christin Smith, Lucy Rose, John McClure, Ronald Allen, James R. Nieman, Thomas G. Rogers, Eunjoo Mary Kim, and HyeRan Kim-Cragg have tried to listen to the excluded and to respect their life experiences. These scholars have made efforts to value the instability of the preacher's authority to meet the marginalized within the main discourse of a sermon.[346] Some discourses related to hospitality in homiletics have been linked to ethical notions and social justice, contributing to diverse and challenging contemporary sermons. Nonetheless, the hatred and isolation we face today call for a more multifaceted study of hospitality in preaching. Among the ways to practice and apply hospitality to preaching, this study will suggest lament as a hermeneutics and practice of hospitality based on the consideration of the excluded. Dare I say *lament can be hospitality itself and the precondition of hospitality in relation to the discourse of the excluded*.

Understanding Lament as a Hermeneutics of Hospitality
1. Ethical Approach to Hospitality

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[342] Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounter: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[343] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, eds. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 226.

[344] Joerg Rieger. *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blind spots in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 104; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), xi, xii.

[345] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 12.

[346] Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insight* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2014); John McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001); John McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership & Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995); James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001); Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); in HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "Home, Hospitality, and Preaching" in *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Hospitality, Agency and Vulnerability*, eds. Andrea Bieler, et al. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019).

Hospitality was a command given to the Israelites in the Bible to welcome strangers. (Ex 22:21, 23:9; Deut 10:19, 24:19; Ez 22:7, 29) Hospitality was valued as a moral obligation, given that everyone experiences being a stranger in some circumstances. These days, however, not everyone is equally invited to the place of hospitality. In the North American context, for example, immigrants are often invited without speaking power in relation to the realities of social oppression. Furthermore, migrants have frequently remained strangers even after being welcomed.[347] Although the United States has seen an explosion of immigrants since the 1990s—in number that approached 44.9 million in 2019—immigrants are deprived of social power for various reasons, such as language, visa status, economic situation, education, etc.[348] Due to the international situation, refugees come to the West through the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). Refugees have been forced to leave their homes to escape persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations, but are again exposed to isolation and hatred in relation to difficulties related to language, status, and anxiety in their new homes.[349] While awareness of the "stranger" can be used as a tool to address the need for hospitality and to understand the other, it can also be used for reasons of demotion, exclusion, silence, or repression.[350] "Other" has also been used to suggest inferiority in comparison with mainstream society.[351] Despite efforts to make discriminatory communities more inclusive, the hospitality frame has often set boundaries for strangers or created a host-guest dichotomy.

Thomas Reynolds ponders the dangers of sharing basic vulnerabilities in an exchange ethic based on the recognition of the host-guest relationship.[352] He criticizes the one-sided, top-down approach that stems from the abundance of giving because of patriarchically implementing the host-guest dichotomy.[353] He calls attention to four versions of insecure hospitality[354]: 1) a level at which one is willing to put up with others without taking any risks; 2) a way that denies the agency and freedom of others, from a high position and without consent, one can draw others into hospitality and take the initiative as a host; 3) a way to reach out to the marginalized and invite others inside to share the affluence, but only if the host retains the initiative and the guest follows the host's way will the guest be included in the invitation; and 4) a means of producing strangers by itself. Reynolds considers these cases as hermeneutic violence in which the stranger is already determined by the sovereign subject, the family or the communal state.[355] From this understanding, he argues that hospitality needs to be understood as "a relation of mutual giving

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[347] Hanbyul Park, "Welcoming Beyond Recognizing: The Significance of Encounter in Understanding Christian Hospitality in the Multicultural Context," *Asian American Theological Forum* 6, no 2 (2019). https://aatfweb.org/2019/11/16/welcoming-beyond-recognizing-the-significance-of-encounter-in-understanding-christian-hospitality-in-the-multicultural-context/

[348] Jeanne Batalova, Mary Hanna, and Christopher Levesque, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute* (February 11, 2021). https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states?gclid=Cj0KCQjw1ouKBhC5ARIsAHXNMI9s7cSe0oAFJ38HCsY0uj6jUVUrXWAtJO5Gm2GH7CmjUkIV937gQnsaAiAqEALw_wcB

[349] Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill, *Healing Our Broken Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2018), 117.

[350] Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 31.

[351] Ibid.

[352] Thomas E. Reynolds, "Beyond Hospitality? Unsettling Theology and Migration in Canada," in *Migration and Religion*, 115.

[353] Ibid., 115.

[354] Ibid., 115-16.

[355] Ibid., 116.

and receiving, a collaborative reciprocity of compassionate regard and concern for justice, of proximity and distance."[356]

In recent ethical discourses, attempts have been made to overcome the power risk and dichotomy in the host-guest relationship. Letty Russell identifies hospitality as a Christian tradition of how to move towards interdependence without destroying others.[357] Russell believes that hospitality is a two-way street of reciprocal ministry where we swap roles and learn most from people who are different or that we think of as others.[358] She has shifted the thinking from a dualistic hermeneutics of distancing away from the other with "the language of otherness" to thinking of "a hermeneutics of hospitality," in response to the fact that marginalized and excluded are often labeled "others" and are alienated.[359] Facing the challenges of a world where experiences of discrimination and suffering are often rooted in contempt for others, Russell argues, feminist hermeneutics of hospitality can make it clear that no one is an "other" in God's sight.[360] In this regard, Russell argues that the capacity for hospitality involves the ability to overcome injustice and division within the fabric of society.[361]

Postcolonial feminist interpretation laid the foundation for 'host-guest' to be viewed as "Partnership" or "Cohost and Coguest." The host-guest paradigm distinguishes between I and another-I in a dichotomous way.[362] It is to give I the only right to be treated in a position of superiority, and to make others the object of treatment in a position of inferiority.[363] Choi Hee An argues that both the host/guest disintegration is necessary to break free from the isolation of me and others and become part of each other.[364] She envisions radical hospitality of belonging to each other by becoming cohost and coguest, extending the other/other's existence to one of us.[365] Choi claims that "practicing mutuality of sharing in the form of radical hospitality…can fashion strong interdependence and interconnectedness between individuals and communities simultaneously, beyond their comfort zone."[366]

2. African American Women's Hospitality

From the recent ethical discourses, the act of hospitality is not an attempt to find universal common ground, but an attempt to discern an important part of moral truth among strangers.[367] This effort aims to form an ethical relationship that is harvested in the constant dynamic of host-guest.[368] In this challenge, the self is not removed, but redefined through relationships with others.[369] It helps to develop a community that is constantly open to new encounters.[370] In the

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[356] Ibid., 117.

[357] Russell, *Just Hospitality,* 42-43.

[358] Ibid., 15.

[359] Ibid., 24.

[360] Ibid., 43.

[361] Ibid., 1.

[362] Choi Hee An, *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church* (New York: Suny Press, 2015),140.

[363] Ibid., 140.

[364] Ibid., 141.

[365] Ibid., 141.

[366] Ibid., 152.

[367] John S. McClure, *Ethical Approaches to Preaching: Choosing the Best Way to Preach About Difficult Issues* (Eugene, OT: Cascade Books, 2021), 89.

[368] Ibid.

[369] Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 107.

[370] Ibid., 125.

discourse of hospitality based on the eyes of the excluded, not only correct or critical awareness of the self and moral agency but also interdependence in relationships with others are important.

African American Women's practice of hospitality has shown a good example of having agency and interdependency from the perspective of the excluded. Black women have been portrayed as others in a multi-layered relationship to race, gender, and class discrimination. The otherness has promoted a lack of self-esteem and self-attachment while projecting and internalizing negative images of black women that has persisted through countless cultural experiences.[371] African American women's lives and religious experiences have long been ignored by the church.[372] However, black women opened up the possibility of viewing vulnerable people who were only perceived as guests (because of being otherized) as moral agents. Also, since black women's experiences are closely related to diverse ways of suffering, their hermeneutics of hospitality as a way to interdependency has often been performed in a way to deal with the suffering of the excluded.

Phillips Isabella Sheppard analyzes how African American women shape and develop their selves in interconnection with others, reflecting the personal and communal experiences of African American women.[373] This is closely related to lament. In the cultural and religious suffering experience, Sheppard thinks lament is needed because it is "a process toward self-enhancing cultural selfobject experiences."[374] For her, lament is "a requisite act in the moving toward prayer for restoration—for relationships, the faith community, and self."[375] She also asserts that suffering is not an isolated and participatory process, but rather "messy, social, and potentially transformative."[376] Sheppard argues that a practical theology that emerges from the reality of the experience of black women must be embodied as a practice of transformation through communal mourning over the personal and social dimensions that link gender, race, religion, and trauma.[377] In addition, because lament allows a transformed view of the world and the self, it allows a new way of looking at the individual self in a beautiful, complex, and positive way without unifying the individual into a group.[378] Lament has been used as a way of expressing and respecting one's own thoughts, inter-confession, and mutual inspiration.

N. Lynne Westfield defines hospitality as an experience of sharing intimacy that is not binding.[379] Westfield understood the concept of hospitality as a basic practice of resilience for African American women who have been excluded in society.[380] Black women do not deny problems with their lives, but do not let their despair shape their lives. Black women found a

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[371] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The Loves and Troubles of African American Women's Bodies," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 234-36. 235, 238.

[372] N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 45.

[373] Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[374] Ibid., 139-141.

[375] Ibid., 139.

[376] Ibid., 140.

[377] Phillis Isabella Sheppard, "Mourning the Loss of Cultural Selfobjects: Black Embodiment and Religious Experience After Trauma," *Practical Theology* 1, no. 2 (2008): 255.

[378] Martha R. Fowlkes, "The Morality of Loss—The Social Construction of Mourning and Melancholia," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 27 (1991): 529.

[379] Westfield, *Dear Sisters*, 55-56.

[380] Ibid., 12.

place to speak with their rejected, distorted, denounced, and denied wounded voices.[381] As an example, Westfield introduces a concealed gathering. This gathering was a place to speak out and lament the forbidden truth in front of white and black men. For African American women and their gathering, to pursue resilience, hospitality includes lament as an act of liberty and a gesture of resistance.[382] African American women's hospitality offers a place for free cultural expression where who you are and where every point of view matters. Ultimately, "a womanist aims not to merely *make a place* for hospitality, but looks to see how, as a host, her hospitality *makes a place*."[383]

African American women's understanding of hospitality shows that lament is an effort by which the excluded are respected for their language and identity and give each other their place, rather than being controlled by power. It has to do with acknowledging each other's vulnerabilities, listening carefully to each other's brokenness, and seeking a respectful and loving relationship. Lament secures this place and eventually invites them to participate in each other's mourning. Lament's language has the power to open up one's own story and open space to listen to others. Lament is a way of being loved and respected in this respect, and a way of walking together while accepting others' experiences and histories as they are. Therefore, lament can be redefined as a power to becoming a moral agent and boosting interdependency based on the hermeneutics of hospitality.

3. Hospitality in Lament for Community Building

In terms of agency and interdependency, especially, for welcoming those who are excluded, lament as listening and sharing each other's suffering can become an important practice to build a community. Jesus is portrayed as a stranger who is unwelcomed in many New Testament stories. Jesus himself said that he was a stranger (Mt 25:35), and he was born without a place to lay his head (Mt 8:20), but he was welcomed by those who were rejected. Zacchaeus, who was hated by the people, invited Jesus to his house (Lk 19: 6), and the Samaritan woman who was filling her jar with water avoiding the eyes of people from the well welcomed Jesus (Jn 4: 7-42). Jesus accepted the hospitality of those who were rejected. Jesus gave them life-giving hospitality. The mutual hospitality allowed Zacchaeus to have the opportunity to share his own possessions with others and to correct his errors. The Samaritan woman left her water jar and went into the town, and she testified to what Jesus did as a Jew. Jesus stayed with many Samaritans. Christ's hospitality was to receive and give, and his hospitality was to benefit the community beyond the one-to-one relationship. Two things stand out in this process of Jesus' hospitality: one is that Jesus not only accepted the invitations of those who were rejected, and showed interdependency with them, and the other is that Jesus became involved in their suffering. Tax collectors were treated like sinners in Jesus' day (Mt 9:10-11, 11:19; Lk 7:34, 18:11) The Jews did not eat with them and did not come close to them. The Jews treated the Samaritans in the same way. Jesus saw and cared of the loneliness, suffering, hurt, and rejection that were hidden in their lives and souls and that perhaps they did not want to show.

Hospitality in lament is also found in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987), an American novelist and the muse of many womanists. When slavery was still active in America, Sethe, a slave on the Sweet Home farm, ran away from home when she was pregnant. Bluestone 124

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[381] Ibid., 96.

[382] Ibid., 40.

[383] Arthur M. Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 52.

gave Sethe 28 days of freedom, but the Fugitive Slave Law forced her previous white farmer to pursue her, and Sethe was unwilling to hand over her daughter to slavery. So, Sethe killed her two-year-old daughter.[384] As Baby Suggs says, "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief."[385] Black women's bodies were abused with murderous labor, while at the same time being used to accumulate capital by white planters as a reproductive tool that ensured the next generation of continuous slavery.[386] Sethe felt unable to break free from the harsh chains of fate, so she paradoxically killed her daughter to protect her from the pain. After the murder of her daughter, Seth's family was disbanded, and she was ostracized by the villagers. At the end of the story, however, the village women heard from Sethe's daughter, Denver, about Sethe whom they have turned away from and isolated and the women headed to Bluestone 124 to face Sethe's suffering. They sang there. It was Denver's telling the truth about Sethe's suffering that led the women to gather and sing. They began to rewrite "Cry, Laugh and Dance," a sermon ritual in Deep in the Woods by Baby Suggs, who led the black community by resonating with their voices.[387] Through the process of facing Sethe's pain and lamenting it, the women accepted Sethe's own life. Through singing together, the women achieved interconnection through the experience of shared suffering.[388] Thus, lament not only speaks for survival and restoration of identity, but also serves as a bridge that brings resilience to the community. Furthermore, this story demonstrates that hospitality is about "the creation of community."[389] The relationship of the black community can be understood as a partnership that is nurtured through a continued commitment to each other and a common struggle in the context of a community.[390] Thus, lament is not concerning "others" but welcoming each other and building a community.

Preaching Lament as a Practice of Hospitality

According to the understanding of lament as a way of hospitality for individuals' agency and interdependency, practicing hospitality in sermons requires a virtuous cycle of several efforts: 1) knowledge—mutual agreement in a community what is a sense of hospitality at the time of isolation and hatred; 2) strategy—evoking lament as a hermeneutics and practice of hospitality in preaching and as a dynamic between individuals and communities; 3) practice—devotion to lament as hospitality, activating the attitude of lament in everyday life for hospitality as a practice of life.

1. Sharing Community: The Priori Knowledge/Perception for Lament as Hospitality

Practicing hospitality in preaching needs to be based on community consensus. It is not enough for an individual preacher to draw the experience of the excluded into the dialogue of the sermon. This is because the voices of the excluded who are unilaterally heard without community awareness and consent remain as guests according to the power structure, making it

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[384] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1998), 200.

[385] Ibid., 5.

[386] Jihye Hwang, "The 'Han' Ethos and Releasing of '*Han*': Toni Morrison's Beloved," *The Journal of East-West Comparative Literature* 40, no.2 (2017): 296.

[387] Morrison, *Beloved*, 88.

[388] Hwang, "The 'Han' Ethos and Releasing of '*Han*'," 305. In relation to those who are excluded, the critique and sense about the self can be alerted, by gaining an external view of the self. Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 106

[389] Russell, *Just Hospitality,* 84.

[390] Ibid., 84.

difficult to have agency. Conversely, rather than unconditionally giving priority to only the voices of the excluded or forming a dominant voice with the excluded, all sermon participants can participate in the dynamics of dialogue while respecting each other with partnership based on co-hostship and co-guestship. By reflecting and critically analyzing their experiences of difference together and encouraging biblical and theological discussions related to a particular topic, the community can contribute to community.[391] Preachers can generate emotional and social forces by creating a conversational tension between the crying voices of an individual and the emergence of a collective voice.[392] Persistent interactions, especially with other lamenters, can accompany powerful recollections and form a "collective construction of subjectivity."[393]

"Hospitality is about creating a space for others to breathe, find their own voice, sing their own songs, and dance their own dances."[394] Hospitality is to let one be oneself. Congregations can share and agree together to respect differences and the values their partners and cultivate openness of hospitality with humility and vulnerability.[395] It is the practice of hospitality based on the gifts of each in a community. [396] Lament makes each other become opened and transformed by sharing each other's pain. Lament may also be is a good practice and hermeneutic method for hospitality to bring to the excluded partner in this common creation. The space of lament is necessary to respect the experiences and suffering of the excluded and to provide them with a space to speak out. Lament listens to individual voices, but interconnection occurs through the process of hearing, participating, and crying together. This is because the pain felt by someone and the various experiences of life are not integrated into one lament, but at the same time they bring about community participation and response. Lamenting can be initiated by the person who shows one's vulnerability, but due to other participants, the lament returns to the person who started the story. Those who cry together are connected as co-host and co-guest while listening to the polyphony of lament heard from everywhere.

2.   The Tool for the Sensitivity of Interconnection in Preaching: Language of Lament

Having sensitivity to experiences is not just about attaching importance to experience, it is about taking into account the diversity of experiences and starting a new listening for the voices that have been excluded and silenced. Alice Walker argues that experiences of pain and oppression can be a resource for liberated vision and spiritual growth, and that the voices of poor colored women can make a difference.[397] This is done from a sincere engagement in the "difference" that begins with listening seriously to the experiences of others. Lucy Rose suggests conversational preaching. Conversational sermons enjoy partnership in conversation and hospitality with the dining table community.[398] Building on the strong bonds, trust, and security of communities of faith, she stresses the importance of continuing dialogue with other members

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[391] Russell, *Just Hospitality,* 32.

[392] Charles L. Briggs, "Personal Sentiments and Polyphonic Voices in Warao Women's Ritual Wailing: Music and Poetics in a Critical and Collective Discourse," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 4 (1993): 930.

[393] Ibid., 945.

[394] Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Burning Center, Porous Borders: The Church in a Globalized World* (Eugene, OR, 2011), 228.

[395] Reynolds, "Beyond Hospitality? 118.

[396] Ibid., 118.

[397] Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 187,

[398] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 121

of the community of faith and with the marginalized, the broken, the silent and the shunned.[399] She also emphasizes in her sermons personal engagement, including participation in the testimony of the voice of those who have been excluded and silenced.[400] Rose says that when personal experiences are acknowledged and encouraged, worshipers begin to risk hearing and articulating the echoes and even memories of abuse and pain deep within their hearts.[401]

Despite recognizing that the center of hospitality is God and that partnerships are essential, preachers may too easily become attached to power as a host and speaking subject in the conversation. For example, preachers may have a great influence on those whose experiences will be included or whose voices will be allowed to join the conversation. Sometimes, for preachers, the pain of the excluded can be an uncomfortable and complex discourse. This can make it tempting to consider these experiences exclusively, or to ignore, or bypass them. It is also not easy for the participants who have trauma to open up their suffering in public. Moreover, it is important to recognize that even a well-meaning attempt for community solidarity can lead to taming and exclusion.[402] Nonetheless, participation in the dialogue is a task for the excluded to find their own subjectivity out of the dominant voice's control, and an opportunity for other participants to critically examine their egos and listen to and respond to their partners, and an opportunity for preachers to have an encounter with the excluded in the conversation of preaching in a way that does not deny the importance of the individual selves and experiences of the excluded. Participants of the conversation, including the preacher, need to accept their limitations of not being able to fully understand others, signaling that individuals' thoughts and feelings are important and will be considered important.[403] For this real and emotional encounter and active participation in it, the language of lament will play an important role. This is because lament can be a language to deal with suffering and embrace the suffering of God. It is a rhetoric to respect suffering experiences, to witness the suffering, to resist the evil and social injustice, and to nurture hope amid suffering without blaming and judging someone. It is clearly difficult and complex to consistently include the excluded in sermons. However, preachers need to be encouraged by themselves not to give up on this struggle because "glimpses of truth occur where they are least expected, where one's own relativity is acknowledged in the midst of brokenness, in the lives of actual communities."[404]

3. Open the Continual Encountering: The Attitude of Lament as Everyday Hospitality

In order to recognize each other's differences, the conversation in preaching needs to be based on sincerity and trust. When the participants feel safe, they are more likely to start conversing about their situations or experiences. To be specific, the excluded will be driven into silence when they are criticized, ignored, treated as unimportant, or seen outside the participants' attention. The excluded may be invited to a temporary welcome as a guest, but they will not be able to have a continuous partnership. At this point, lament allows a confessional way of conversation not only in preaching but also in everyday life to have constant encounters with a variety of voices, including those who are excluded. The confessional way is to make a preacher and all participants vulnerable to each other's own language and experiences, and to expose their

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[399] Ibid., 122

[400] Ibid., 126.

[401] Ibid., 127.

[402] Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 111.

[403] McClure, *Ethical Approaches to Preaching*, 92.

[404] Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 115.

own perception of the possibility of change. It is to acknowledge and remember that a certain absoluteness of a preacher or a participant can silence anyone who wants to speak. Also, it needs to be borne in mind that the way in which the experience of any particular person is considered within an ethical subject may not be determined by the preacher.[405] As McClure says, it is also necessary to remind preachers that alternative directions of thinking may exist, even if they need to limit the scope of their preaching.[406] This attitude of the interlocutors is an important basis for continuing to listen to and tell the truth.

The practice of preaching in hospitality presupposes the acknowledgment and acceptance of differences toward building a community, but at the same time does not mean a temporary stay. Lament, as an act of hospitality, is not only for encountering the vulnerability of each person but also for accepting the weaknesses and hesitations of others, and genuinely accepting and respecting something different such as circumstances, cultures, languages, customs, thoughts, and values of life. The time of mourning is the time of waiting. It is a time of waiting for encountering, starting a conversation, and opening a newness.

Conclusion: For True-hearted Hospitality

To practice hospitality in preaching, there will be certain considerations. In order not to romanticize other people's experiences—particularly painful experiences—participants need to be specific about who the speaker is.[407] In order to broaden and reshape the theological perspective, interlocutors need to perceive from the speaker's view, not from one's own. In other words, hospitality not only liberates the oppressed, but also liberates oneself, already isolated from the imaginary of dominant perspectives.[408] Lament is not romantic. Practicing hospitality also challenges the urge to understand and treat completely different human beings the same. Misuse of solidarity or unity has probably created invisible oppression and violence in platforms such as religion, race, and politics. The many historical tragedies prove it, caused by the desire to control the marginalized others and the desire not to shake the stability of the mainstream.

The World Council of Churches equates the extent to which the church practices radical hospitality in relation to the marginalized of society with evidence of its commitment to embodying the values of God's rule. (Isa 58:6).[409] Also, WCC states that God's hospitality calls us to go beyond the binary option of viewing culturally dominant groups as hosts and immigrants and minorities as guests, with God the host in hospitality and humility and interconnection in God's mission.[410] Lament does not pursue generalness or unity but aims to harvest the tension and dynamics between individual agency and community, rejecting a dominant or stable voice. Lament may work as a tool for community building through connecting individual voices in a community. Thus, lament can be a hermeneutics and practice of hospitality and hospitality itself because lament is about giving people space to speak out and trying to find a connecting narrative, not losing individual voices.

The community listens to each other's fears, losses, hopes, needs, and anger through lament in preaching, to develop individuals' self-understanding, to acknowledge the worldview of their community partners, to acknowledge their power, to acknowledge their powerlessness, and is

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[405] McClure, *Ethical Approaches to Preaching,* 93.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Rieger, *God and the Excluded*, 120.

[408] Ibid., 121.

[409] Jooseop Keum ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 18, no. 47.

[410] Ibid.*,* 26, no. 71.

invited to acknowledge the full humanity of the partners. Through that burdensome and arduous process, preachers and congregations give up being self-centered and open themselves up to partners for true-hearted hospitality where preachers' hearts and eyes are headed to for dreaming again the 花樣年華of preaching in the time of hatred and isolation.

Rhetoric

A Womanist Pastoral Homiletic

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Abstract

While homiletical scholarship has offered homiletical theories from varied perspectives, this scholarship has been negligent in its inclusion Black women's voices. Therefore, this paper articulates my homiletical theory: a *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* which approaches preaching through a womanist and pastoral lens. This discourse explicates the ways in which a *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* is theological and rhetorical, allowing the sermon to moving from trouble to grace through womanist sensitivities to the challenges inherent in the Black women's experiences. Its pastoral attributes are examined through its attentiveness to the specific contextual concerns and need for message continuity within ongoing congregational faith formation. In developing a heuristic framework for a *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* its relationship to existing homiletical theories, its place in the topography of African American homiletical scholarship, and its departures from other homiletical theories are explored.
Key Words: theology of preaching, womanist, prophetic, pastoral, rhetoric, African American preaching.

In his *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine)* Augustine began to systematize homiletical theory. Nearly 1700 years since Augustine wrote this first homiletical textbook, the field of homiletics has experienced a continuous stream of homiletical theories. Yet as James Kay notes, preaching has no universal discourse. Kay posits the "fixed stars," of theology, rhetoric, and poetics around which to orient oneself in preaching.[411] Although most homiletical scholarship points toward these three fixed stars, the homiletical theories that have emerged out of them overwhelmingly represent an Anglo-androcentric perspective. Presently very little womanist homiletical scholarship exists. While there has been an escalating proliferation of homiletical theories from a feminist perspective, these feminist theories fail to address the existential realities of Black women's experiences in preaching. Likewise, although there has been an increase in the study of the Black preaching tradition, by in large that study has not included womanist orientations towards preaching. Katie Cannon noted that "until recently Black preaching has not asked questions about womanist interpretations and womanist theological studies have not included homiletic."[412] Cannon further articulated the significant gap in scholarship based upon the powerful influence preachers possess in the Black church and the reality that Black females represent the overwhelming majority of hearers of Black sermons.[413] I would add that the increase in Black female pastors has spawned a need for homiletical theories that view preaching through the lens of Black women's experiences as both orators and auditors of divine proclamation.

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[411] James Kay, *Preaching and Theology* (St Louis: Chalise Press, 2007), 2.

[412] Katie G. Cannon, "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community,* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 113.

[413] Cannon, 113–16.

Based upon the aforementioned needs, in this paper; I set forth to articulate my homiletical theory: A Womanist Pastoral Homiletic. A *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* approaches the preaching task through a lens that is both womanist and pastoral. In this discourse, I will clarify the ways in which a *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* is both theological and rhetorical in nature, allowing the sermon to move from trouble to grace based upon womanist sensitivities to the challenges inherent in the Black women's experiences. However, it is also pastoral in its attentiveness for the specific contextual concerns of the community and need for continuity of the message with the ongoing faith formation of the congregation. In developing a heuristic framework for a Womanist Pastoral Homiletic, I will explore its relationship to existing homiletical theories, its place in the topography of African American homiletical scholarship, and some of its departures from other homiletical theories. Borrowing from the insights of Katie Cannon, the goal of Womanist Pastoral Homiletics as a homiletical theory is to curate sermons that "allow Black preachers to rise to their responsibility to satisfy the whole congregation's spiritual hunger."[414]

What is Preaching?

In developing a homiletical theory, we must first develop a clear understanding of what it means to preach, since preaching is the central task of homiletics. The earliest formal definition of preaching was put forth by Alan of Lille in the twelfth century. In *Ars* Alan describes preaching as "an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of [persons]; it derives from the path of reason and from the fountainhead of the authorities."[415] Alan's notion of public communication with a purpose of faith formation and an appeal to reason can be found in varied forms in modern homiletics. Since Womanist Pastoral Homiletics derives from the African American preaching tradition, I turn to preaching as defined within that tradition.

Isaac Rufus Clark provides a comprehensive definition of preaching. Clark defines preaching as, "divine activity wherein the Word of God is proclaimed or announced on contemporary issues for an ultimate response to our God."[416] Clark's definition views preaching as God-initiated proclamation grounded in the Word of God that makes a connection with contemporary concerns. Teresa Fry Brown also sees preaching as God-initiated proclamation. Brown states, "proclamation is a moment-by-moment, God-breathed, God-anointed, God-appointed, God-led, God-sanctioned, and God-controlled activity.'[417] She emphasizes the notion that it is God who speaks through the preacher and not the preacher speaking their own thoughts. Accordingly for Brown, "Black preaching is a dialogical process. The call of God through the preacher to the people of faith and the response channeled back to God through the preacher is the essence of the preaching moment."[418]

Samuel DeWitt Proctor provides a detailed definition of the sermon that emphasizes the centrality of Scripture.

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[414] Cannon, 114.

[415] Alanus de Insulis, "Praedication Est, Manifesta et Publica Instructio Morum et Fidei, Informationi, Hominum Deserviens, Ex Rationum Sernita, et Auctoritatum Fonte Provenien," in *Ars Preedicandi*, vol. PL210, n.d., cols. 109-35 in Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching*, 178.

[416] Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 41.

[417] Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 18.

[418] Brown, 9.

"The sermon is still uniquely a religious statement... It is a summon to reflect on God and human destiny in a relevant fashion, given the restraints of time and the context of the audience the sermon also traditionally recognizes the centrality of the Scriptures… the sermon must address all of the issues of life in the context of today's realities, understanding that there was a God before there ever was a Bible, and that the same God is alive and involved in all creation now.[419]

Lisa Thompson adds to this conversation by calling attention to the communal nature of preaching. She describes the communal affirmation of preaching stating, "when something more than the compilation of word, images, ideas, and their structures pushes through and past the sermon, the community recognizes it as proclamation or as truth proclaimed."[420] I understand preaching as divine proclamation manifested through the explication of biblical texts. The preacher is an instrument used by God to deliver God's divine message. The purpose of preaching is to employ lessons from the Word of God in contemporary contexts and upon contemporary situations such that it assists listeners in finding meaning, hope, or empowerment for life's experiences. The intended result of preaching is to produce God-inspired hope, inspiration, justice praxis, liberative identity, spiritual authority, healing, personal empowerment or agency among the hearers.

Central to my understanding of preaching is divine proclamation that is theologically grounded in Scripture also referred to as the Word of God. The concept of the biblical text as the "Word of God" has earned significant attention in homiletical scholarship. Written in 1566, Bullinger's Helvetic Confession in its marginal heading declares, "The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God [*praedication verbi Dei est verbum Dei*]."[421] While reformers like Luther and Calvin suggested the spoken word of good news proclamation to be the "word of God" that the Bible testified of, Barth argued that "the written word of God is the sole content of proclamation and that the gospel is what we distill from that scriptural witness."[422] Barth believed preaching was meant to be an exposition of scripture *only* because revelation has occurred and ended.[423] While I hold a high doctrine of scripture that views the Bible as authoritative, my theology of preaching leans toward the reformist tradition. From this perspective the Bible is the "word of God" but not *the only* "word of God" because "God's word is alive" (Heb 4:12). Thus, in preaching the still-speaking God transforms the *written word* into a relevant *living "word of God"* through the gospel. I further posit that if the revelatory good news that we preach is the resurrection of Jesus the Living Word, then the word is alive, and revelation continues. It continues through God-inspired preaching. Proctor's definition of preaching further supports our understanding of this concept of the "word of God." He explains that "the sermon must address all of the issues of life in the context of today's realities, understanding that there was a God before there ever was a Bible, and that the same God is alive and involved in all creation now."[424] Thus I agree with Susan Bond that the Bible is authoritative and foundational for preaching for its ability to disclose "a particular kind of God, a particular kind of faithfulness, and the power of faith language that inspires and nurtures

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[419] Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 8.

[420] Lisa L Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 24.

[421] Kay, *Preaching and Theology*, 7.

[422] L. Susan. Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2003), 9–10.

[423] Bond, 9.

[424] Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*, 8.

believers. We turn to the Bible, not as an instruction manual, but as a revelation of God within real human drama."[425]

Also central to my definition of preaching is the application of the text upon contemporary situations. This is also noted in Clark, Brown, and Proctor's definitions of preaching. Each homiletician identifies the imperative for preaching to bring the text to bear upon the current realities of the audience. It is therefore the task of the preacher to bring the ancient biblical text into the contemporary context such that it resonates with the listener. Womanist pastoral preaching as a genre of African American preaching uses rhetoric as a tool to connect the ancient text to the hearer's present context. Consequently, I view preaching, particularly within the African American preaching tradition, as a balance of theology and rhetoric.

African American Christianity was birthed out of enslaved African's survival strategy of finding hope amid their existential reality of the intense evil and darkness found in chattel slavery. Through the African tradition of storytelling enslaved Africans identified with biblical narratives of God as liberator. This identification was facilitated by the enslaved preacher who served as the griot, bringing the narrative to life such that it found resonance with the audience. This pursuit of resonance or identification is rhetorical. Thus, as Frank Thomas states, "Black churches that had a liberation agenda never had the possibility of divorcing theology and rhetoric. Persuasion was a tool of liberation."[426] Based upon this understanding Kimberly Johnson emphasizes, "the preacher has to negotiate, during delivery, all of the available means of persuasion and has to discriminate when to use logical appeal, emotional appeal, and ethical appeal. Then, the words that are conveyed through the message have the power to guide people toward a particular end, a particular understanding or belief."[427] "The theological and persuasive task of the African American preacher is to announce and demonstrate God's character and action in the world for liberation (theology) and interest hearers to join God in God's emancipatory work in the world (rhetorical)."[428]

Finally, the theo-rhetorical nature of African American preaching, and by extension womanist pastoral preaching, finds its roots in African communicative practices. Maulana Karenga notes that "the communal character of communicative practice is reaffirmed, and rhetoric is approached as, above all, a rhetoric of communal deliberation, discourse, and action, oriented toward that which is good for the community and world. And it is here that communicative practice is posed as both expressive and constitutive of community, a process and a practice of building community and bringing good into the world."[429] Karenga finds within African communicative practice four enduring socioethical concerns: the dignity and rights of the human person, the well-being and flourishing of family and community, the integrity and value of the environment, and the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit of humanity.[430] Karenga further explicates "the Kemetic understanding of rhetoric as a craft (hmwt) not simply to persuade through mastery of technique (techne), but to

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[425] Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching*, 38.

[426] Frank A Thomas, "God of a Dangerous Sermon" (Chicago, 2021), 19.

[427] Kimberly Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 5.

[428] Thomas, "God of a Dangerous Sermon," 19.

[429] Maulana Karenga, "Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice: Bringing Good into the World," in *Understanding African American Rhetoric Classic Origins to Contemporary Innovations*, ed. Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 3.

[430] Karenga, 4.

exchange in pursuit of the good for the community and the world."[431] Hence, within African communicative practices we find the roots of African American hermeneutics that proclaim truths from the word (logos) that pursues the good of the community and world using rhetoric. It further solidifies the assertion that African American preaching in general, and womanist pastoral preaching in particular, is theo-rhetorical – a balance of theology and rhetoric.

Pastoral Preaching

In referencing a *pastoral* orientation toward preaching, I am lifting the contextual nature of preaching for those who serve and preach regularly in parish settings. Here inherent in preaching preparation is concern for the specific needs of a particular community. Wilson notes that "God uses the preacher not to pronounce a general word to the whole world. God uses the preacher to speak a specific word to a particular congregation that has set apart this person to speak God's Word on their behalf."[432] Thomas Long emphasizes that for the preacher as pastor, the needs of the hearers take prominence as the preacher discerns the needs of the congregation and strives to help by intervening with the gospel, by speaking a word that clarifies and restores.[433] Pastoral preaching differs from itinerant preaching in that it carries with it an obligation to address the specific needs of the community to which the preacher is called. It seeks to provide a continuity of the gospel message over time for this specific community.

Thompson notes the ways in which the community gives the preacher authority to name and construct truth with them. Our understanding of preaching is derived in community and by the community. Thompson also assert that, "the collective defines what is and what is not a valid expression of preaching in its midst and sets boundaries on preaching based on an inherited and often reproduced experience of preaching. The aural-oral tradition of call and response in some black preaching traditions offer us a glimpse of a community setting the boundaries and limits of preaching."[434] Thus pastoral preacher assumes an understanding of the ways in which the congregation is constituted based upon the preacher's membership in that specific community of believers. Maurice Charland notes any type of "persuasive discourse requires a subject-as-audience who is already constituted with an identity and within an ideology."[435] In pastoral preaching membership in the community provides insight into congregational identity and ideology that aids the preacher in crafting sermons that reach the heart of the people in meaningful and tangible ways.

The communal nature of pastoral preaching means that pastoral preaching is contextual. Counter to a Barthian approach to preaching that is theoretically non-contextual, it is my assertion that preaching is necessarily contextual if we are to present a salvation story that is over 2000 years old to a 21st century audience. More specifically I call attention to the preaching of Jesus. Jesus addressed his message to his specific audience. When preaching to farmers he spoke in agrarian language. When speaking to fishers, Jesus spoke in aquacultural language. Likewise, foundational to Black preaching is a contextual hermeneutic. This contextual hermeneutic was established as enslaved African persons comprehended biblical stories of slavery, oppression, subjugations, mistreatment, wandering, exile through the lens of like circumstances in their own context. They found hope and grace in the stories of liberation,

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[431] Karenga, 11.

[432] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis, MO: Lucas Park Books, 2006), 8.

[433] Thomas G. 1946- Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Third edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 31.

[434] Thompson, *Ingenuity*, 24.

[435] Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*, Second (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 382.

messianic hope, restoration, a resurrected Savior, and a God who was on the side of the oppressed.

Additionally, in pastoral homiletical methodology the proclamation also becomes an extension of pastoral care as the Word of God is proclaimed in response to the concerns of the people. In G. Lee Ramsey's *Care-full Preaching,* he examines the ways pastoral care takes place in sermons. He finds sermonic pastoral care through theological anthropology: what the sermons says about who we are as human beings, the sustenance and healing that God provides; and through ecclesiology: how the church acts pastorally in the world.[436] Edward Wimberly posits a pastoral care version of trouble to grace sermon development that moves from shame to self-worth.[437] Cleophus LaRue lists "care of the soul" as one of his five domains of the dynamics of Black preaching. Here LaRue refers to the inclusion of the well-being of individuals, personal wholeness, healing, grief, and the challenges of believers as result of prejudice and discrimination as foci of Black preaching.[438] All of these homiletical theories demonstrate the dimension of pastoral preaching found in Womanist Pastoral Homiletics.

Womanist Preaching

A womanist orientation toward preaching approaches preaching through what Kay would consider to be a "fixed star" of theology.[439] However, a womanist orientation toward preaching moves beyond what are commonly held as traditional views of theology, to a theoethical orientation toward preaching grounded in womanist theology. Womanist theology then is a theological construct that is centered upon the lived experiences of African American women within their contextual realities both past and present. Womanist discourse locates itself at the intersection of race, gender, and class based upon the existential realities of African American women's lives. Cannon explains that "the goal outlined in the work of womanist scholars is to shape the practices and values of the African-American faith community based on an understanding of the ways in which the experiences of Black women have shaped African-American sacred rhetoric."[440] Therefore, a womanist orientation toward preaching challenges systems and understandings of God that do not represent all persons as the *imago dei.* By embracing Black women's lived experiences, a womanist approach toward preaching holds Black women's stories as integral to the God-human story. Thompson posits that "those most excluded from the conversations, by considering them as the other or outsider, must set the terms for our rules of engagement in preaching. If we do not privilege the lives and truth of the most vulnerable in our communities, then we cannot be faithful to the most fundamental work of preaching itself."[441]

Womanist preaching proceeds from the prophetic preaching tradition of the Black church. Frank Thomas asserts,

> The nature and purpose of African American preaching is to help people experience the assurance of grace (the good news) that is the gospel of Jesus the Christ. It is this

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[436] G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., *Care-Full Preaching: From Sermon to Caring Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 147–202; Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 74.

[437] Edward P. Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999); Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 74.

[438] Cleophus James LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 20.

[439] Kay, *Preaching and Theology*, 2.

[440] Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 57–76; Allen, *Toward a Womanist Homiletic*, 2.

[441] Thompson, *Ingenuity*, 7.

assurance of graced, received through African American preaching and worship that has historically sustained, encouraged, and liberated African American people.[442]

LaRue also explains that central to black preaching is the premise that the sovereign God the preacher speaks about and speaks for, acts in concrete and practical ways on behalf of the marginalized and powerless.[443] Kenyatta Gilbert furthers the discussion by turning attention toward African American prophetic preaching. He explains:

> African American prophetic preaching (alternatively termed Exodus preaching) is "interpretation" that brings clarity to the sacred (the realities of God, revealed truth, highest moral values and so on) and articulates what should be appropriate human response to the sacred. The preacher who preaches prophetically does not treat social justice (or other sacred values) as something independent from God but as rooted in and emanating from God… it is speech that offers a vision of divine intent. It reveals a picture that enables persons and faith communities to interpret their situation in light of God's justice, and to name as sin activities that frustrate God's life-giving purposes."[444]

Thomas, LaRue, and Gilbert's statements articulate an intersection with social injustices experienced by African American people which are addressed in some way by God's divine justice as a focus of African American preaching that theologically, practically, and emotionally connect the hearer to the proclamation. I, therefore, assert that womanist preaching is inherently prophetic because of the ways in which it challenges the status quo and dares to imagine the world differently based upon divine justice. Womanist preaching draws upon Black women's sensitivities to oppressive ideologies and as preachers, womanists are committed to address the community's struggles with communal or individual oppressive forces through the God-human encounter which culminates in divine love, grace, and liberation for all.

For example, Donna E. Allen identifies a womanist orientation as particular for preaching as a critical hermeneutic and homiletic framework that broadens the conversation about preaching beyond sermon content which includes the audience and the context."[445] In womanist pastoral homiletics, I center the discourse on womanist critical engagement. The womanist tenet of *critical engagement* as delineated by Stacey Floyd-Thomas is "the epistemological privilege of Black women borne of their totalistic experience with the forces of interlocking systems of oppression and the strategic options they devised to undermine them."[446] Floyd-Thomas further explains womanist critical engagement as "a hermeneutical suspicion, cognitive counterbalance, intellectual indictment, and perspectival corrective to those people, ideologies, movements, and institutions that hold a one-dimensional analysis of oppression; an unshakable belief that Black women's survival strategies must entail more than what others have provided as an alternative."[447]

M. Shawn Copeland documents the importance of the epistemological dynamics identified as cognitive practices. Informed by the work of Bernard Lonegran, Copeland argues that cognitive practices allow one to question patterns and experiences, and evaluates them

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[442] Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*, Revised and updated. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2013), 3.

[443] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 17–18.

[444] Kenyatta R Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), Kindle Loc. 68.

[445] Donna E Allen, "Womanists as Prophetic Preachers," *Review & Expositor* 109, no. 3 (2012): 388.

[446] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple : Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York : New York University Press, 2006), 208.

[447] Floyd-Thomas, 208.

against cultural codes and signs, against domineering and subjugated truths, and risking judgement. She further argues for use of this epistemology to guide one's struggle against such subjugation. "Such knowledge roots its accountability, its authoritative control of meaning and value, in the cognitive, moral, and religious authenticity of the identity of poor, excluded, and despised black women."[448] Hence, "as a mode of critical self-consciousness, black women's cognitive praxis emphasizes the dialectic between oppression, conscious reflection on experience of that oppression, and action to resist and eliminate it."[449] Copeland argues that "womanist critical cognitive praxis concludes in decision that leads to action, to transformation in religion and society."[450] Black feminist bell hooks observes Black women's recognition of "the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony."[451]

The subversive nature of womanist inquiry and contestation functions as disruption of the economy of anti-blackness that cause and perpetuate racial trauma. Thus, womanist preaching becomes praxis of resistance. Copeland's assertion about womanist critical cognitive praxis also highlights the transformational nature of the preaching event. Cognitive praxis also aligns with the pastoral component of Womanist Pastoral Homiletics in that as the subversive nature of womanist inquiry and contestation land rhetorically on the ears of the hearer, it opens space for the pastoral care of injuries acquired by oppression.

In describing transformational preaching Lucy Rose asserts that it "opens a new way of seeing oneself, one's neighbors, and the world."[452] Brown contends that transformation as perceived by internal and external moral ethical changes in individual and group-lived faith, is the purpose of preaching.[453] I assert that through the Holy Spirit, transformation takes place as the hearer encounters the Word of God in new ways and therefore compliments womanist theology which informs womanist preaching. In womanist preaching, those ways overturn demeaning images of otherness and patriarchal understandings of how God acts in the world and how God see them. This is transformational. Proctor also talks about God as the significant *Other* stating, "there is this significant Other in our world, and such a recognition has consequences, it means that God is the principal referent for us in every detail of life. And the preacher has the responsibility for nourishing this kind of thinking."[454] A Womanist Pastoral Homiletic sees God as the significant Other who is in solidarity with those who are *othered*.

This understanding of how womanist preaching operates to identify and disrupt systemic oppression reminds us that womanist preaching is fundamentally theo-rhetorical because it views scripture and our theological understandings through the lens of Black women's experiences. Elaine Flake rightly declares, "If preaching is to truly reach the hearts, minds, and souls of African American women, preachers must employ an analysis of Scripture that reconstructs the Word of God in ways that are liberating to women as well as men and that reflects the totality of

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[448] M. Shawn Copeland, "A Thinking Margin The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 227.

[449] Copeland, 229.

[450] Copeland, 230.

[451] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984) in Eunjoo Mary. Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 8, http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/55587330.html.

[452] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 60–62 in Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 67.

[453] Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*, 17.

[454] Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*, 10.

the African American experience."[455] Flake then points toward womanist hermeneutics and therefore, employing a womanist hermeneutic that challenges racist and patriarchal understandings of scripture allows the hearer finds fresh identifications with the text in ways that are liberative. This is the heart of womanism articulated in Womanist Pastoral Homiletics.

Womanist Pastoral Homiletical Method

Womanist Pastoral Homiletics as a homiletical method is an adaptation of Thomas' *Preaching as Celebration* with the inclusion of pastoral and womanist considerations. Here a return to Thomas' understanding of preaching's intent is constructive.

> Fundamentally, African American preaching is about helping people experience the assurance of grace that is the gospel… The nature and purpose of African American preaching is to help people experience the assurance of grace (the good news) that is the gospel of Jesus the Christ. It is this assurance of graced, received through African American preaching and worship that has historically sustained, encouraged, and liberated African American people.[456]

Thomas' homiletical method is based on a theology of preaching that understand sermons as moving from trouble to grace. "Trouble to grace" is a contemporary adaptation to earlier theologies of preaching which viewed sermons as moving from "law to gospel."

In his *Manuel on Preaching,* Milton Crum, Jr. articulated preaching as an event where the sermon structure moved from trouble to grace.

> For him, the sermon starts in an area of life that needs transformation by the gospel and moves to a place where that transformation makes a significant difference… He saw direct and immediate parallels among three elements: the preacher's hermeneutical process, "the overall plot of the biblical story," and the structure of sermon design.[457] In his mind, each of these three moves from Situation to Complication to Resolution.[458]

Crum identified five "dynamic factors" that assist sermonic movement: symptomatic behavior, root, resulting consequences, gospel content, and new results.[459] Thomas advances Crum's homiletical theory, adapting it to the African American preaching tradition. He identifies the reoccurring pattern in the human experience in which,

> One experiences a situation, there occurs some complication of that situation, and then invariably there is some kind of resolution of the complication. This pattern is so pervasive in the human experience that it has become embedded in the intuitive aspect of human awareness… One of the most powerful constructs in human communication is the intuitive form of situation-complication-resolution.[460]

Within the African American preaching tradition, the progression from trouble to grace is a function of people of African descent's historic and present experiences of oppression, subjugation, violence, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and varied forms of otherness, and our ability to find hope in the assurance of grace.

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[455] Elaine McCollins. Flake and Kathryn V. Stanley, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), xiv; Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher*, 7.

[456] Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*, 3.

[457] Milton Crum, Jr., *Manual on Preaching: A New Process of Sermon Development* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977), 76 in Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 85.

[458] Crum, Jr., *Manual on Preaching: A New Process of Sermon Development*, 76–85 in Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 85.

[459] Ibid, 85.

[460] Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*, 52.

A womanist pastoral methodology utilizes womanist sensitivities to identify the sermonic trouble and grace. Following Thomas' sermon construction process, but it interjects processes of *contextual discernment* and *womanist inquiry*. Following prayer, the preacher enters a process of *contextual discernment* where she seeks to discern the pastoral needs of her specific community and an awareness of her presence as a preaching woman based upon the preaching context. The pastoral dimension of contextual discernment connects to our aforementioned discussion of pastoral preaching and its concern for the continuity of the message with other dimensions of congregational ministry and the sermon's ability to address issues of pastoral care and/or communal concerns. This discernment also aids the preacher in appropriate text selection. The latter dimension of contextual discernment refers to a womanist awareness of the how one is perceived and received as a woman preacher. Thompson reminds us that,

> The preacher, even as she occupies her particular body and uses words within a particular space, is constantly in tension with received traditions of how a sermon takes shape and is performed and the look of the bodies that carry out its performance. The processes of listening and understanding are also shaped by these traditions… Tradition, the generally contested role of women in society and religion, and listener expectations continue to shape how women are and are not perceived as legitimate proclaimers.[461]

Brown adds, the presence of a Black woman in the pulpit creates new visions of both the image of preacher and the image of justice."[462] Contextual discernment guides women preachers in navigating these embedded traditional perceptions of women as preachers. It helps the preacher determine how they might approach a text and the rhetorical devices necessary to accomplish the preaching task of communicating the good news. Contextual discernment also helps to minimize distractions in sermon delivery as the preacher experiences reception or rejection of her pastoral authority by the audience.

Womanist inquiry happens throughout the sermon development process but is especially necessary in exegesis. By this I mean, Womanist exegetical inquiry seeks to uncover what might be problematic about imageries in the text, historical understandings of the text, the context, and the present situation, as well as what might be liberative in each of these. It searches for opportunities to challenge oppressive structures and ideologies and therefore provides a liberative and celebrative experience of the gospel for the hearer. Thompson references Brown's description of the power of Black women's preaching.

> black women's preaching as a practice that can directly confront injustices and transform religious spaces and traditions. She specifically describes black women's preaching as having the potential to "renovate sorrow's kitchen" (her metaphor for the black church) through using the "tools of renovation." The tools of renovation involve the preacher using "a fresh reading of the text" and "relentlessly engaging injustice," as she articulates her standard of justice and carves out her own space.[463]

Conclusion

Within this discourse I have identified a heuristic framework for a Womanist Pastoral Homiletic as both a homiletical theory and a homiletical method. A *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* approaches the preaching task through a lens that is both womanist and pastoral. Based upon its connection to context and contemporary issues a *Womanist Pastoral Homiletic* is both theological and rhetorical in nature. It follows a theology of preaching by which sermon

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[461] Thompson, *Ingenuity*, 5.
[462] Thompson, 18.
[463] Thompson, 18.

development moves from trouble to grace based upon womanist sensitivities to the challenges inherent in Black women's experiences. Moreover, a Womanist Pastoral Homiletic is pastoral in that it is attentiveness to the specific contextual concerns of the community and continuity of the message with the ongoing faith formation of the congregation. The pastoral dimension also includes aspects of pastoral care for the community. A Womanist Pastoral Homiletic expands the African American preaching tradition through its inclusion of womanist theologies of preaching into homiletical theory. Finally, this project has outlined a methodology for Womanist Pastoral Homiletics. Further scholarship might include an explication of the ways in which this homiletical theory translates to LGBTQIA womanist preachers and how the pastoral aspect of Womanist Pastoral Homiletics functions in a virtual preaching context. Considerations for further study aside, a Womanist Pastoral Homiletics as both homiletical theory and homiletical method works to help preachers meet Cannon's charge to curate sermons that "allow Black preachers to rise to their responsibility to satisfy the whole congregation's spiritual hunger."[464]

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[464] Cannon, "Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church," 114.

Preaching & Culture

HOW ARE PREACHERS NAVIGATING "DANGEROUS" SERMONS? RESULTS FROM "PREACHING AND SOCIAL ISSUES" SURVEYS, 2017 AND 2021

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Abstract
This paper examines survey data from a longitudinal study of mainline Protestant preachers with survey waves in 2017 and 2021 regarding their attitudes about and experiences with preaching and social issues. The paper compares data collected from surveys of U.S. clergy following the 2016 and 2020 elections to identify dimensions of preaching and social issues for political variations across clergy and congregational demographics as well as community characteristics shaping selection and avoidance of sermon topics. In addition to providing insights into the complexities of preaching what Frank Thomas calls "dangerous sermons," this paper examines clergy responses to three controversial issues: abortion/reproductive rights, gun violence, and environmental issues. The paper concludes by making the case that collaborative and conversational preaching about dangerous topics that utilizes deliberative practices can enable clergy and congregations to listen deeply, build relationships, and create community.

In his book, *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*, Frank A. Thomas defines a "dangerous" sermon as one that is "based in the preacher's moral imagination that upends and challenges the dominant moral hierarchy that operates in the church and/or cultural context of the preaching event."[466] By "moral imagination," Thomas has in mind four qualities: "1) equality envisioned and represented by physical presence; 2) death as a catalyst or bridge to create opportunities to overcome the past and make new decisions for peace and justice; 3) wisdom in ancient texts and sources of truth; and 4) address the audience in the language of poetry and art that lifts and elevates the human spirit by touching the emotive chords of wonder, mystery, and hope." [467] He further clarifies that a dangerous sermon:

> challenges unjust moral orders and dominance hierarchies and the resulting misallocation of freedom, resources, assets, and legitimacy. A dangerous sermon disrupts the legitimacy of the oppressive moral order that operates smoothly, efficiently, and often silently in the economic, political, cultural, and religious structures of a given society. The bottom line of the dangerous sermon is the position and benefits of the "winners" at the top are challenged in light of the process of systemic delegitimizing and orchestration of the deserved "losers" at the bottom.[468]

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[465] I am indebted to Rev. Dr. Amanda Wilson Harper, Tarleton State University, for her assistance in designing the research instruments for this project, as well as consulting with me on the analysis of the data. Two other researchers also contributed to designing the surveys and provided editorial assistance with this paper: Rev. Dr. Katie Day, United Lutheran Seminary (retired), and Dr. Wayne Thompson, Carthage College.

[466] Frank A. Thomas, *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2020), xvii.

[467] Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2018)*,* xxi, 45.

[468] Ibid, xviii.

In the extreme cases of historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, if one preaches a dangerous sermon, they are "likely to be persecuted, if not outright killed."[469] While preachers in the U.S. today rarely, if ever, face death for preaching a sermon that arises from the moral imagination and challenges the dominant systems, "it certainly will get you persecuted: fired; harassed; labeled 'enemy,' 'traitor,' and such."[470]

We may wonder, then, how have preachers been navigating "dangerous sermons" in the last several years given the rise in white supremacy, political polarization, social unrest, conspiracy theories and disinformation, and the Covid-19 global pandemic? Are they avoiding certain social issues, skirting around the edges, or trying to find a way to enter these fraught waters? Which issues are they most hesitant to engage with moral imagination? Further, what are barriers that preachers encounter for preaching with moral imagination, and what are supports that bolster their prophetic courage?

Granted, what may be dangerous for a preacher in one context may not be as controversial for their colleague in a different situation, depending on factors such as the political orientation of the congregation or the gender or race of the preacher, for example. However, most preachers have at least a sense of where the "danger zones" are when it comes to preaching about social issues with moral imagination. And when we have empirical data to both quantify and qualify what those danger zones look like, preachers and homileticians can be better informed about the challenges of preaching with moral imagination, as well as what strategies and tactics might support and equip them in this calling.

To that end of providing empirical research to support the work of preaching with moral imagination, this paper examines survey data from a longitudinal study of mainline Protestant preachers in 2017 and 2021 regarding their attitudes about and experiences with preaching and social issues. The paper compares data collected from surveys of U.S. clergy following the 2016 and 2020 elections to identify dimensions of preaching and social issues for variations across clergy and congregational demographics as well as community characteristics shaping selection and avoidance of sermon topics. In addition to providing insights into the complexities of preaching with moral imagination in this divisive time, this paper will make the case that a "ramp" (as Thomas calls it) for a dangerous sermon can be built using collaborative and conversational preaching that utilizes deliberative practices for listening deeply, building relationships, and creating community.

Methodology and General Demographic Data

The data for this project comes from two online surveys distributed to preachers via social media (Facebook, Twitter), newsletters of large organizations serving clergy (state councils of churches, Alban Institute, Backstory Preaching, Clergy Emergency League, etc.), emails to listservs through seminaries and denominational offices, and emails sent directly to individuals. The surveys included both fixed-choice and written comments allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data. The first survey was conducted in January and February of 2017, and the second in January and February of 2020.

Readers will note that because these surveys involved self-reporting by clergy, they risk the classic problem of eliciting "socially desirable rather than objective responses from their

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[469] Ibid, xix-xx.
[470] Ibid, xx.

subjects."[471] As Clifton F. Guthrie has noted, "Asking preachers via surveys about their own preaching can be like asking folks to calculate their own tax deductions: there is always the temptation to claim too much."[472] However, these surveys were testing for *attitudes, opinions,* and *expressions of underlying feelings and concerns* by preachers regarding sermons and social issues rather than examining sermon manuscripts themselves. In this way, we are researching the dimensions of preaching that are contextualized by moral imagination, experiences, emotions, and focal concerns.

Respondents were U.S. mainline Protestant clergy currently serving in congregations (2017: n=1,104; 2021: n=1,919). Responses were anonymous, including demographic variables for further analysis by age, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity. We also tested for clergy characteristics such as denomination, role in the congregation, and political orientation. As for congregation characteristics, we collected data on setting (rural, suburban, urban), worship attendance, racial/ethnic diversity, and political diversity. This allowed us to test for variables when asking about topics preachers chose to address (or avoid), frequency of addressing social issues, rationale for addressing (or staying away from) social issues, the types of pushback and affirmation they receive from congregations, and barriers as well as supports they experience when preaching these kinds of sermons.

Generally, the gender representation was even in both years. Of the ninety-eight percent who indicated their gender, there were 52% male and 48% female respondents in 2017, and in 2021, 52% female and 48% male respondents. In terms of age, both surveys had respondents in categories ranging from 25 to 70 and older, although the 2021 survey had a larger representation of clergy age 51 and older (65%) versus the 2017 survey (45%). Of the ninety-two percent of respondents who indicated sexual orientation, 86% identified as heterosexual and 6% as LGBTQIA in both years. Among the ninety-six percent of clergy respondents who provided race/ethnicity identification for both survey years, 89% percent were White.

In terms of political orientation, almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents in both years identified as progressive or liberal, just under one-third (30%) identified as "moderates." Six percent identified as conservatives and two percent as "other." The data also reveals that clergy voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic presidential candidates: 76.5% in 2016 and 83% in 2020.

This preponderance of progressivism among mainline Protestant clergy contrasts with the political orientations of the congregations they serve. When asked to estimate the political leanings of their congregations in 2021, 16% reported their congregation leans progressive, 21% leans conservative, and 63% were solidly in the middle. Figure 1 illustrates the contrast in the political leanings of clergy versus the congregations they serve.

Figure 1. Political leanings of U.S. mainline Protestant clergy versus congregations, 2021.

[471] Clifton F. Guthrie, "Quantitative Empirical Studies in Preaching: A Review of Methods and Findings," *Journal of Communication and Religion,* vol. 30 (2007), 73.

[472] Ibid, 76.

Political leanings of clergy v. congregations (2021)

Clergy

6%
30%
64%

Congregations

21%
16%
63%

■ Progressive ■ Moderate ■ Conservative   ■ Progressive ■ Moderate ■ Conservative
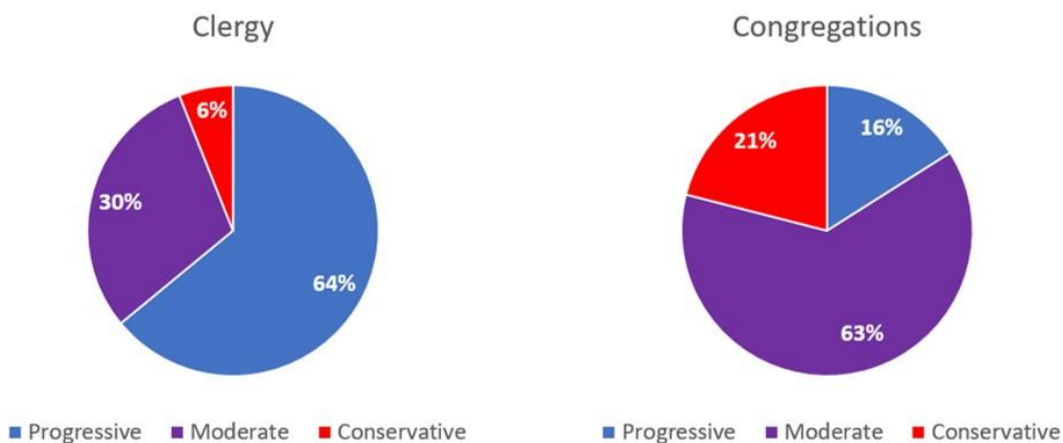
Political leanings of U.S. mainline Protestant clergy versus congregations, 2021.
Source: "Preaching and Social Issues Survey, 2021." Copyright, Leah D. Schade, 2021.

The graphic shows that, collectively, clergy tend to be more "violet" while their congregations tend to be more "magenta." Knowing that many clergy find themselves ministering in a context that is a redder shade of purple may help explain why, as Thomas observes, "Many clergypersons choose to be silent, realizing that 'politics' is polarizing, and the best thing is not to offend anyone by saying or doing anything that remotely could be conceived of as 'controversial.'"[473]

However, it is interesting to note that there was a shift in the number of respondents who reported they "frequently" address social issues. In 2017, that percentage was 30%; but in 2021, that number jumped to 55%. Of course, it is not possible to assess just how many of those sermons truly reflected the kind of moral imagination that would characterize a "dangerous" sermon that Thomas envisions. Nevertheless, the surveys appear to indicate that clergy are more willing to address social issues than they were four years ago. In 2017, 39% of respondents indicated they were more willing to preach on social issues in light of the 2016 election. In 2021, 49% indicated they were more willing, a 10% increase.

Respondents also indicated that their congregations had less aversion to hearing sermons about social issues in 2021 compared to 2017. In the first survey, 39% reported that their congregations were less willing to hear sermons addressing social issues following the election. But in 2021, that number dropped to 15%. What we might surmise from this is that the cumulative effects of the Trump administration's violations of human rights, ethical norms, and basic human decency compelled an increasing number of clergy to preach with moral imagination and convinced their congregations of the need for these sermons.

An interesting variable, however, is the political leaning of the respondent. For example, in 2021, when asked, "Does the idea of a Biden/Harris administration make you more or less willing to address social issues in your preaching and teaching in the coming months?", 43% of progressive clergy said yes, which was twice the amount of conservative clergy (21%). Thus, it appears that a shift in political winds influences preachers' willingness to address social issues,

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[473] *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon,* xxiii.

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depending on the leanings of the preacher, the context in which they preach, and the politics of those in office.

The Effect of Covid-19 on the "Brittleness" of Congregations

In 2017, respondents were given a list of thirty-eight topics and asked to mark which ones they had addressed in their sermons in the previous year and which ones they intentionally avoided. Four years later, we tested the topics again, combining some subtopics in order to reduce the list and mitigate "decision fatigue." The comparisons and contrasts are notable. In both surveys, the following three issues dominated the moral imagination of preachers (ranked in descending order by percentage): economic issues, including debt, poverty, homelessness (avg. 82%); racism/white supremacy/Black Lives Matter (avg. 75%); and hunger/food insecurity (64%). However, in 2021, one issue ranked above all: the Covid-19 pandemic, which 87% of preachers reported they had addressed in the previous year.

The impact clergy and congregations felt from the pandemic, the election season, the Black Lives Matter movement, and general social unrest in 2020 cannot be overstated. Nearly half (48%) indicated that their *communities* were more divided after 2020 compared to previous years, while a quarter of them reported that their *churches* were more divided. And when asked if they were concerned about their church disbanding due to Covid-19 and any other factors, 20% indicated that they were mildly or very concerned, or that their congregation already had plans to disband. Even congregations that are considered "healthy" are subject to the stressors of the last year which impacts their resilience and, thus, their tolerance for a dangerous sermon.

According to Lisa Cressman, founder of Backstory Preaching, which networks with thousands of preachers, when congregations are stressed, they are more "brittle," meaning that they are emotionally fragile and less receptive to being transformed by the gospel. "A brittle congregation is highly stressed," she writes. "The people are anxious, they rarely laugh, and they are probably exhibiting symptoms of grief, including anger, lashing out, withdrawing, isolating, waxing nostalgic, circling the wagons, overreacting, bargaining, making much ado about nothing, targeting you or another leader (or a problem) as *the* problem, and/or displaying passive-aggressive behaviors."[474] She notes that "a brittle congregation can hear only a very few overtly challenging sermons, and only very occasionally."[475] In other words, a dangerous sermon preached in a brittle congregation is even more risky for a preacher.

"Dangerous" Sermon Topics in 2017 v. 2021:
Abortion/Reproductive Rights, Gun Violence, and Environmental Issues

Given the political landscape of the last four years and the increasing "brittleness" of congregations, what topics did clergy consider more "dangerous" to address, and, thus, tended to avoid? In this section, we will focus on three of them and analyze the shifts we observed in the degree to which clergy considered these topics off-limits in the pulpit: abortion/reproductive rights, gun violence, and environmental issues. These topics were chosen to compare three issues that clergy were hesitant to address in 2017 and to contrast one of them – environmental

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[474] Lisa Cressman, *The Gospel People Don't Want to Hear: Preaching Challenging Messages* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 52-53.

[475] Cressman, 53.

issues – which increased between the two surveys, as opposed to abortion and gun violence both decreasing.[476]

Preaching about Abortion/Reproductive Rights

Abortion/reproductive rights is the issue least addressed in sermons, according to both surveys, but was particularly avoided by progressive clergy. In 2017, of the 484 clergy who identified as progressive, only 10% indicated they had addressed reproductive issues. Of the 1,729 progressive clergy who responded in 2021, only 6% reported that they had addressed reproductive issues in the previous year. In fact, when asked which topics they intended to *avoid* in their sermons in 2021, reproductive issues ranked as the number one topic progressive preachers wanted to stay away from, more than LGBTQIA+ issues, gun violence, and racism.

In contrast, conservative clergy appear to be more willing to talk about reproductive issues. In the 2021 survey, of the 370 conservative clergy who responded, 29% reported they had addressed reproductive issues in the previous year – nearly *five times* as many as their progressive colleagues (6%).[477] And 17% of conservative clergy indicated that they intended to address reproductive issues in their sermons in the coming year, compared with only 1% of progressive clergy. Likely, their take on the issue is solely about a single talking point: protecting the life of the unborn.

Further, it appears that conservative clergy who are in conservative-leaning congregations feel more empowered to preach about reproductive issues than their progressive colleagues serving purple or red congregations. For example, in 2021, 26% of conservative clergy serving conservative congregations reported that they addressed reproductive issues in 2020. In contrast, only 4% of progressive clergy serving politically mixed congregations, and 1.5% of progressive clergy serving conservative churches addressed reproductive issues. Nevertheless, even conservative clergy serving progressive churches preached more about reproductive issues (18%) than progressive clergy serving progressive congregations (6%).

What's even more striking is the difference between genders and political orientations. In 2021, 10% of male clergy reported that they addressed reproductive issues compared with only 4% of their female colleagues. When factoring in political orientation, male conservative clergy who indicated they addressed reproductive issues was 24%, compared with 10% of female conservative clergy and 4% of female progressive clergy.

With these statistics in mind, we might make the case that one factor contributing to conservatives gaining power and enacting restrictive legislation against reproductive rights, such as in Texas and other states, has been the relative silence of progressive clergy on reproductive issues compared with their conservative peers. Granted, there are many other factors, but at least in the realm of the church, an argument could be made that because progressive clergy have avoided talking about reproductive rights, this silence has allowed for more strident voices to fill the space.

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[476] In a separate article, I look at preaching and racism. See: "White Mainline Protestant Preachers Addressing Racial Issues: 2017 v. 2021," in *Unmasking White Preaching*, Lis Valle and Andrew Wymer, eds. Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming. I will be presenting this research in the Unmasking Homiletical Whiteness work group.

[477] In the 2017 survey, of the forty clergy who identified as conservative, 20% indicated they had addressed reproductive issues in their sermons in the previous year. However, there is a proportional discrepancy in comparison to the sampling in 2021 (40 to 370). Thus, we consider the sample size too small to compare with the 2021 survey wave.

At the very least, we can certainly say that the contested space of a woman's body requires the preacher's moral imagination. While this is certainly a fraught and complicated topic, reproductive issues are about the lives of women and girls who are often faced with horrendous dilemmas. These dilemmas are sometimes due to sexual violence. Other times they involve medical issues for mother and fetus. But any decision about reproductive rights raises questions about relationships, sexuality, power differentials, wealth and poverty, race and ethnicity, access to healthcare, and family dynamics, to name a few. As such, they require the moral imagination of a preacher, along with an invitation to dialogue that goes beyond a single sermon.[478] We will address this need for dialogue further on.

Preaching about Gun Violence

Another volatile issue for preachers is gun violence. The total number of clergy reporting that they addressed gun violence in their sermons fell from 41% in 2016 to 29% in 2020. This indicates that pastors are more ambivalent about talking about guns now than four years ago. The group that addressed gun violence the most was progressive clergy serving progressive congregations (58% in 2016; 42% in 2020). Though even with this group, the topic fell 16 percentage points over the past four years.

In the 2021 survey, we also included gun *rights*. Those who reported addressing gun rights the most in 2020 were Trump voters in 2016 (18%) and/or 2020 (10%). That's also the only group that ranked gun *rights* higher than gun *violence*. Responding preachers who reported having voted for Trump is the only subgroup that ranked gun *violence* at the bottom of the list of priorities to address. Though it is a very small subset, those who voted for Trump in 2020 indicated that addressing gun rights was a higher priority for them to address in 2021 than in 2020, jumping from a rank of 23 to 17 out of 28.

In her article, "Preaching about Gun Violence: Now is the Time," Katie Day notes the ways in which gun violence intersects with other justice issues, particularly racism.[479] "African Americans have been disproportionately shot by police, a trend that is increasing according to statistics," she stated, citing data showing that police shootings are on the rise and in 2020 were on track to climb above the two previous years. "People of color are killed at a much higher rate: 13 out of a million for whites, but for Hispanics the rate is 23, and jumps to 31 for African Americans.[480] This reality fed into the widespread mobilization by Black Lives Matter that had been sparked by the police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020."[481]

Day observes that notwithstanding Pew Research demonstrating that there is increasing support for expanding background checks, banning high-capacity ammunition magazines, and banning assault-style weapons, gun violence is one proverbial third rail for clergy. "Despite the staggering loss of life that is largely preventable, many leaders—both religious and secular—have succumbed to silence and have failed to effectively bring meaningful change to the pandemic of gun violence . . . This is the basis for conversation that we are not having."[482]

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[478] See, John S. McClure and Nancy Ramsey, eds., *Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence*,

[479] Katie Day, "Preaching about Gun Violence: Now Is the Time," *Journal for Preachers,* Vol. XLIV, No. 1 (Advent 2020), pp. 47-53.

[480] "Fatal police shootings in the United States from 2015 to June 2020, by ethnicity," Statistica, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1123070/police-shootings-rate-ethnicity-us/

[481] Day, 48.

[482] Day, 50.

What might it look like to bring moral imagination to a sermon about gun violence? Day suggests leading with questions borne of theological curiosity: "How should believers think about the guns they own, or their decision about acquiring a gun? How should faith communities engage with curiosity and integrity the role guns play in our cultural imagination and social reality? How does our faith tradition enable us to understand guns?"[483] She notes, however, that preaching and dialogue about guns is "more than a theological exercise; it is vital, especially now, to our survival. Although clergy have avoided it in preaching, it is time to wade in and invite our communities to interrogate the meaning of guns especially in this time of heightened anxiety."[484] She advises, and I concur, that such preaching be done in tandem with ongoing dialogue with the congregation that goes beyond one or two sermons.

Preaching about Environmental Issues

One topic that saw a shift toward less volatility for preachers was environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, environmental racism, and species extinction. In the 2017 survey, 30% of all clergy indicated that they had addressed one of these topics during the previous year. But in the 2021 survey, that number increased to 47%. Not surprisingly, progressive clergy serving progressive congregations saw the largest jump in addressing environmental issues, from 50% in 2016 to 65% in 2020. Even conservative clergy serving conservative congregations saw a small increase, from 13% in 2016 to 19% in 2020.

EcoAmerica's research shows that "a vast majority of Americans (96%) believe we have a right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water. These findings remain in consensus across the major demographic groups studied — including 96% of rural Americans who say they agree with this statement as do 97% of urban Americans."[485] Preachers can be encouraged, then, that applying moral imagination to caring for God's Creation is something that congregations are, in fact, eager to hear.

Even the topic of climate change, once a politically fraught topic to address from the pulpit, is less dangerous than in previous years. Undoubtedly, the acceleration and intensity of the signs of the climate crisis (severe weather events, wildfires, sea level rise, etc.) have been a factor in the increasing number of clergy willing to address this issue in the pulpit. The reality of climate change is no longer debatable and is much less politically fraught than it was even five years ago. EcoAmerica, for instance, reports that 78% of Americans are concerned about climate change in 2021,[486] which is a 10% increase from 2015's number of 68%.[487] Further, EcoAmerica's research indicates that 77% of Americans surveyed in 2021 would support actions to address climate change that will protect human health.[488] We can surmise, then, that because the majority of the American public is convinced that climate change is real, is human-caused, and requires action, when preachers frame this issue from a theological and biblical perspective, they will get less resistance than in previous years.

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[483] Day, 50, 51.

[484] Day, 51.

[485] M. Spieser, A. Hill, "American Climate Perspectives Survey 2021. Vol. III," The Rural-Urban Divide on Climate Change, Where is the Polarization?," ecoAmerica, Washington, DC. (May 2021), 1. https://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/acps-2021-vol-iii-report-.pdf.

[486] Speiser and Hill, 2.

[487] "American Climate Metrics Survey 2016, United States," ecoAmerica, Washington, D.C. (2016), slide 10. http://ecoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ecoamerica-2016-american-climate-metrics-national.pdf

[488] "American Climate Perspectives Survey 2021. Vol. III," 3.

Further, my research has indicated that when preachers frame these issues using theological language, they are less likely to receive negative reactions. For example, when testing politically volatile words with congregants in ten Disciples of Christ congregations in the mid-central U.S. in 2019 and 2020, the term "God's Creation" was the least triggering term among the list. In contrast, the term "climate change" was in the top ten most volatile terms in both years.[489]

Yet, Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, recently wrote an article in *Sojourners* urging preachers to stop preaching about "being good stewards of the earth."[490] Instead, he argued, preachers need to eschew "religious equivocation" and bring the "prophetic thunder." "The world needs religious voices that clearly name the causes of this dire crisis, articulate a moral vision, and catalyze courageous action to meet the suffering that lies ahead while bending history's arc towards justice."[491] Harper admonished faith leaders to get comfortable saying things like:

> "ExxonMobil, BP, Shell, and other oil and gas companies are systematically destroying the planet — and financial giants like JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, BlackRock, and Vanguard are bankrolling the destruction." . . . When describing the actions of these leaders and institutions, we must use some of the strongest language in our moral vocabulary, words like "shameful," "deadly," and "morally abhorrent." We must make it clear that these companies, their shareholders, our government, and those working for these institutions must change.[492]

Harper's boldness is certainly in line with Thomas's critique of preachers who have not "sufficiently examined the moral order and the dominance hierarchies embedded in their theology and their preaching . . . Many preachers attempt to be neutral and say nothing based upon potential negative consequences, and by their conspicuous silence they allow the status quo dominance hierarchy to continue aided and unchallenged."[493]

I do wonder, however, how an explicit sermon such as Harper envisions would be received by congregations whose members are employed by these and other companies that profit from "bankrolling the destruction," or who have more general anxieties over economic fallout from addressing climate change. For instance, in the 2017 preaching and social issues survey, several respondents noted how difficult it is to preach about environmental issues when the livelihood of their parishioners is tied to fossil fuels and view clean energy as "a direct economic threat in an already severely depressed area," as one said. Another respondent put it like this: "The economy of my city is heavily dependent on fracking, and although it is a deeply eco-aware congregation, it is also a congregation that realized that the slowing or elimination of fracking in our community has incredibly far-reaching negative impacts on families in our community."

I argue that dangerous sermons need to be preached as part of a collaborative effort with their congregations in order to dialogue and discern how God is calling them to respond in the

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[489] Leah D. Schade, "You Can't Say THAT in a Sermon: Social Issues, Preaching, and Dialogue During a Time of Societal Upheaval," Homiletic Vol. 46, No. 1 (2021), 57-8.

[490] Fletcher Harper, "Stop Preaching about 'Being Good Stewards of the Earth," *Sojourners*, Sept. 16, 2021. https://sojo.net/articles/stop-preaching-about-being-good-stewards-earth

[491] Ibid.

[492] Ibid.

[493] *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*, xix.

midst of these complex issues. As Thomas encourages preachers to ask, "If I am going to preach a dangerous sermon, how do I construct arguments that build a bridge so that another worldview and I can communicate?"[494]

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Recommendations

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Thomas suggests that an important aspect of preaching a dangerous sermon is to engage the congregation in activating and practicing the use of their moral imagination. Ideally, he aims not only to help preachers craft sermons using moral imagination, but to also "help laypeople push, prod, encourage, and support preachers to preach in such a way that helps the congregation to be more discerning of their moral hierarchy and that of others."[495]

Unfortunately, clergy do not often see their congregations as supportive of this work. In fact, fully half of clergy indicated that "opposition/negative pushback from congregations" was either a moderate or major barrier to engaging social issues in their preaching and teaching, more than any other factor. It is worth noting that concerns about pushback go beyond imagined opposition. When asked about different forms of negative responses they experienced after addressing social issues in sermons in 2017 and 2021, their responses indicate that there are real consequences for preaching a dangerous sermon, including direct confrontation, loss of worship attendance, loss of membership, loss of financial giving, threat and intimidation, and loss of employment (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Types of Negative Pushback Clergy Experience from Preaching about Social Issues, 2017 v. 2021

In the past four years, which of the following NEGATIVE responses have you experienced after addressing social issues in sermons? (check all that apply)

TYPE OF RESPONSE	% REPORTED		
	2017	2021	+/-
Angry words, letters, emails	51%	47%	-4
Some stopped attending worship services	50%	44%	-6
Some left the congregation entirely	26.5%	33%	+ 6.5
Some refused to speak with me	35%	28%	-7
Some withheld financial giving	23%	27.5%	+ 4.5
Some stopped volunteering	NA	20%	NA
Threats or intimidation	NA	11%	NA
Some called for my resignation	8%	6.5%	-1.5
I left or was let go partly or entirely because of the sermon(s) I preached	2.5%	3.5%	+1

Source: "Preaching and Social Issues Survey, 2017, 2021." Copyright Leah D. Schade

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[494] Ibid, 43.
[495] Ibid, xx.

Of course, as voluntary organizations, the religious economy of congregations in the United States places pressure on clergy to respond to their local political and ministry context in specific congregations where they could fall out of favor with influential laity. Legitimacy requires keeping peace, and clergy have reasons to fear member reactions, possibly more so than their professional reference group or ordaining bodies. The church council may be more threatening than the bishop or presbytery executive. Therefore, it is vital to discuss ways clergy might see their congregations as partners in preaching with moral imagination rather antagonists. Or, perhaps more importantly, what are ways to help congregations see their preachers as collaborators with them for enacting the prophetic gospel so that they are less defensive and more receptive to a dangerous sermon?

Thomas offers several practical suggestions for preaching a dangerous sermon, including maintaining strong pastoral relationships, avoiding intellectual sloppiness, and building a "ramp" for people to avoid misunderstanding and to give time to more fully engage the issue.[496] This last involves conversation and collaboration, and is one I wish to highlight.

Conversational and collaborative preaching is a fairly recent development in homiletics, having been initiated by John McClure, Lucy Atkinson Rose, Ronald Allen, and O. Wesley Allen.[497] My contribution to this area is the sermon-dialogue-sermon method developed in *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* where a preacher offers a "prophetic invitation to dialogue" sermon inviting the congregation to engage in a particular social issue.[498] This is followed by a form of civil discourse called "deliberative dialogue" in which a faith community establishes ground rules for discussion, shares their personal stake in the social issues, weighs the benefits and drawbacks of three different approaches using a nonpartisan issue guide, identifies shared values and common ground, and brainstorms next steps for responding to the issue.[499] The preacher follows up with the "communal prophetic proclamation sermon" that integrates the insights and wisdom from the dialogue, framing it theologically and offering a shared vision of putting faith into action on the issue based on the congregation's joint discernment.

Having trained many clergy and congregations in this method over the last five years, and after formally testing it through a Wabash Institute-funded project in 2019-2020, the data appears to indicate that the sermon-dialogue-sermon method can increase a congregation's and pastor's capacity for and willingness to engage in civil discourse and social action. There are two key ways in which this happens. First, the process allows people to identify and articulate their underlying values which can be affirmed as positive and faithful – even if participants disagree

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[496] Ibid*,* 101-112.

[497] See: John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995);.Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church,* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure and O. Wesley Allen*, Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015.)

[498] Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

[499] Deliberative dialogue was developed by the Kettering Foundation, founded in 1927 by Charles F. Kettering, The nonprofit, nonpartisan research foundation trades insights from its research with a broad network of institutions, organizations, and individuals from over eighty countries. The foundation focuses on basic political research, striving to understand how citizens and political systems can work together. Since the early 1990s, the foundation has researched how democracy can be strengthened. The foundation's primary research question is: What does it take to make democracy work as it should?

about the policies that should result from these values. Second, when parishioners are involved in the preaching and discernment process, they may feel represented and affirmed – again, even if there is disagreement on outcomes and further discernment is needed.

In other words, by working collaboratively with a congregation to explore different ways to activate moral imagination, listening deeply to lived experiences, and thinking critically about the challenges of addressing social issues, the dangerous sermon can become less volatile for the pastor and congregation. This is because the process allows congregants to see that they have a stake in the endeavor and a say in the preaching process. In turn, they can begin to reshape their identity around this moral imagination for the good of their church and their community.

Fortunately, data from both surveys indicates that preachers are noticing their congregations being increasingly open to dialogue about social issues. In 2017, 47% indicated that they felt their congregations would welcome the opportunity to dialogue about social issues. In 2021, 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their congregations wanted to dialogue. With support and training from seminaries, denominational offices, clergy colleague groups, and organizations that teach healthy civil discourse,[500] preachers and congregations may be able to see the dangerous sermon not as a threat, but as an opportunity for growth, understanding, and an invitation to respond to the gospel.

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[500] Several organizations offer training for healthy civil discourse, include Better Angels, (https://www.better-angels.org/), Sustained Dialogue Institute (https://sustaineddialogue.org/), National Institute for Civil Discourse (https://nicd.arizona.edu/), and Teaching Tolerance (https://www.tolerance.org/), to name a few.

Theology of Preaching

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Abstract

The proposed paper is a chapter for a book, co-authored by Vincent J. Pastro and María Teresa Montes Lara, OP, on Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe in the English-speaking community). The paper deals with the mystery of evil and the *Guadalupana* as the Indigenous Preacher Woman who denounces evil and genocide. She accompanies the poor, indigenous people, and women as the Saying of God (Emmanuel Levinas) who proclaims the Good News of justice and life in the midst of evil and genocide. We preachers are called announce through our authentic "said" words God's compassion and concern for the poor and the oppressed. The *Guadalupana* is the Divine Presence preaching in dialogue with the poor. She bears the Incarnate Word, integral part of who she is, and mothers authentic preaching.

Evil, Preaching, and Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe

"I undertook a thing one cannot do when I encumbered myself with the writing of these words."[501]

How to write about evil, preaching, and Mary of Nazareth, all at the same time?[502] At the very onset, we must say that like the Mystery of the Triune God that can neither be written nor spoken, evil, too, is deeply enfolded into the Great Mystery. It is best to say nothing about that of which we are "invincibly ignorant," or perhaps better, that of which we speak only through the "learned ignorance."[503]

But we must say something, we must preach and write something, trusting that the Mystery will illuminate by the tiniest spark our "learned ignorance." As these words are written, the world is coming to terms with the tragic news of the mass grave of two-hundred fifteen indigenous children in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. The remains were discovered on the grounds of the Indian Residential School sponsored by the Canadian government and run by the Roman Catholic Church until 1968. The purpose of the Residential Schools was to "adapt" indigenous peoples to the dominant white European culture. The fact that for the first seventy years of their existence the Catholic Church was responsible for them made the news doubly tragic. Indigenous peoples are rightly asking for a formal apology. While we can hope for such with Pope Francis at the helm (he has expressed sorrow and regret for what occurred), it appears that thus far no formal apology is forthcoming. Add the years of abuse, neglect, and

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[501] Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Classics of Western Spirituality, translated by Ellen Babinsky (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 172.

[502] We borrow the title "Mary of Nazareth" (María de Nazaret) from Georgina Zubiria, RSCJ, and Víctor Codina, SJ.

[503] See Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*. *Classics of Western Spirituality,* translated and introduced by H. Lawrence Bonds, prefaced by Morimichi Watanabe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

objectification of the innocent children of these schools—there were residential schools in the United States as well—and we have what the Canadian government has called "cultural genocide." But the discovery of a clandestine mass grave—how did so many children die? Why did the graves remain hidden for so long? [504]

We know that many respected orders of the Catholic institution—the Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Oblates, among many others—participated in the historical oppression and abuse of indigenous peoples throughout the world. Ecclesial figures who searched for justice during the "Conquest"[505] were few—for instance, Dominicans Bartolome de las Casas, Pedro de Cordoba, Antonio de Montesinos. There are also contemporary martyrs for the indigenous and the poor—St. Oscar Romero, Sr. Dorothy Stang, the four women religious martyrs of El Salvador, and many others. Despite these holy people, ecclesial injustice toward the indigenous, which continues to this day, is deeply disturbing and intolerable.

What is needed is a new ecclesiology, one that deconstructs the Church *casta et meretrix*, a Western Patristic (certainly not Matristic!) phrase taken up by Hans Urs Von Balthasar to speak of the "holy and sinful" Church in sexual and misogynist language.[506] Any language that speaks of the "holy and sinful" Church is woefully inadequate because it refers to a lifeless institution justifying its distance from the *justus* and its identity with the *peccator*. A new ecclesiology will privilege a holy Church community once and for all identified with the living Spirit and Jesus the Sacramental Word. Many years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "The Church is not an institution but a Person."[507] This transformed ecclesiology will in every case abandon the thoughtless identification of the Church with the institution; rather, the Church is Person and *Pueblo*—the people of God. We can no longer sidestep the question of *peccator*. In the Church as holy people of God, evil is confronted directly, a Church community fearless in the face of injustice and genocide, a people called and chosen by the living God to be "holy and blameless" (Colossians 1:22, Ephesians 1:4). The *pueblo*, the gathering of the imperfect, is a holy community, a people justified, blessed with banquet upon banquet—"Holy Things for Holy People," as the Eastern liturgies sing. The Holy One makes the chosen people *holy*. The Church community, says Víctor Codina, is not a "Davidic" institution where only the rich and powerful have voice. It is the *Iglesia Nazarena*, the Church of Nazareth. Nazareth is not only the geographic place where Jesus was reared by Mary and Joseph. It is a *locus theologicus*, wholly *theological* and ecclesial in nature, the presence of the poor Jesus of Nazareth[508]. Nathaniel asks, "Can anything good come from Nazareth" (John 1:45–6)? Jesus does not come from the center of power in Rome or Jerusalem. He is from the peripheries, from Nazareth. So must those be who follow him, like Peter hearing the command of Jesus, "Get behind me" (Matthew 16:23). Dietrich Bonhoeffer*'s Nachfolge* (*The Cost of Discipleship*) means that literally— "follow

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[504] Radio broadcast from Vancouver, BC, June 2, 2021, Canadian Broadcast Company. Also see Reuters News Report, June 4, 2021. (Canada's Trudeau blasts Catholic Church for ignoring role in indigenous schools | Reuters), accessed June 12, 2021.

[505] An aseptic word used for the European invasion of the Americas.

[506] Urs Von Balthasar, *Casta Meretrix*, 1961.The literal meaning is "chaste and prostitute." See The Confession of the Casta Meretrix | Articles | Communio (communio-icr.com), accessed June 10, 2021.

[507] See *Sanctorum Communio*: *A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1*, translated by Reinhold Krauss and Nancy Lukens, edited by Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

[508] Víctor Codina, SJ, *Una Iglesia Nazarena: Teología desde los Insignificantes* (Madrid: Editorial Sal Terrae, 2010). See especially 13–16 for the juxtaposition of the Davidic and the Nazarene Church. Codina says that Nazareth is not simply geographical but theological.

after."[509] It is *this* people, absolutely chosen as image of the Holy One, that soundly rejects evil and genocide.

This community goes far beyond the evil that associates morality solely with personal behavior, particularly sexual issues. When male theologians speak of the Church *casta et meretrix*, what do they perpetuate? The holy Church of God can never be seen through brute and misogynist language where evil is associated with gender and sex. Real evil is an economic system that forces poor women into a lifestyle degraded by machoism. Latin American theology, to the contrary, is deeply concerned with the evil rooted in social structures fabricated by wealth and power. A new theology will focus with pin-prick accuracy on *real* evil—injustice, oppression of the poor, and genocide.

There are several ways in which Christian theology traditionally addresses evil. All have "theodicy" in common. God is exonerated of evil. But … how can God *not* be blamed for the evil? Western male-dominated theology is caught in a conundrum, for there is something intrinsically blasphemous about associating evil with God. So God "permits" evil but never "causes" it. But then how does a gracious God act so perniciously? Theodicy is an evil way of dealing with evil.

Jon Sobrino, SJ, says that theodicy is once and for all "nailed to the cross" with Jesus. The cross, he says with Luther, is *Deus contra Deum*—God against God, God struggling with God, God abandoned by God.[510] Jurgen Moltmann takes a similar skepticism toward theodicy, particularly in his Trinitarian theology.[511] Traditional theodicy is simply not adequate in dealing with the horrendous evils of history like slavery, Auschwitz, and the Latin American genocide of some ninety million people. The question of theodicy is no longer relevant. It died long ago and perhaps never really lived in the first place. To blame the God of Life for the death of the poor is sacrilegious

But can God be fully exonerated? Theodicy rightly answers that evil is contrary to God's very being. In an attempt to resolve the conundrum, theologians from Augustine to Aquinas have said that since God cannot will evil, evil must be illusory. It has no metaphysical being. But this goes against common sense and insults anyone who has suffered oppression and injustice. Evil cannot be washed away by calling it illusory. The poor know. They experience the effects of evil and genocide daily, dreadful signposts of death and destruction. All points unmistakably to the reality of evil in the world.

Quo vadis, theologia? Where does theology and preaching go with the question of evil?

Sobrino and Moltmann are correct. Things can only be sorted out by looking toward the cross of Jesus, not as an answer but, rather, a continual questioning of the diabolic presence of evil in the world. Perhaps several perspectives rooted in the theologies and philosophies of five thinkers can help.

The first is Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975), an influential philosopher of the twentieth century whose phenomenology placed the question of evil in primary focus. Like Edith Stein, she was a student of Edmund Husserl. After escaping Nazi persecution because of her Jewish culture and faith, she settled in the United States. Among her best-known works was a series of

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[509] See *Discipleship: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4*, translated by Barbara Green and Reinhold Krauss, edited by Jeffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[510] Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). See especially 233–53.

[511] See especially *The Crucified God: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) and *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

essays she wrote for the *New Yorker* reporting on the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial in Israel.[512] Eichmann, an infamous Nazi war criminal, was accused and convicted of "crimes against humanity" because of his role as "architect" of the Shoah. The book is obligatory reading for anyone concerned with the question of evil and genocide.

What particularly struck Arendt as she observed the trial was the "ordinariness" of Eichmann as a human being. He was concerned for his family, friends, and country. He viewed his work as any ordinary job, one that he did precisely because he was required to "obey his superiors." He held no "ill will" for Jewish people. He did what he did because he was "obliged" by the requirements of his job. He was chagrined that he was accused of "crimes against humanity," because he did nothing that any other person would not have done in his circumstances. And yet, he participated in one of the most horrible evils of the contemporary world.

Arendt named this phenomenon the "banality of evil," how what was so obviously wrong could be logically and even morally chosen by a "cultured" person. This could only happen, Arendt maintains, because Eichmann had no "conscience." His formators had failed. He could not see that what he was doing was wrong. It was not only Eichmann who suffered from this lack of conscience, but everyone who participated in the Nazi machinery. The evil resided in the German people who either ignored what was happening or chose not to see it. It was even present—and this caused great consternation in Israel—in those of Jewish heritage who collaborated or were forced to collaborate with the Nazi crimes against humanity. Arendt rightly discerned that the horrors of the Holocaust were not simply crimes against the Jewish people, but crimes against humanity itself, all enabled by this incipit banality of evil. The question is pertinent for all of us who justify our participation in ecclesial institutions or civil society. What do we do in order to keep our employment or ministry? How do we live in a society whose leaders perpetrate injustice to the poor? How is it that "ordinary people" are caught up in evil, believing it good and correct? Better not to question a drone attack to "take out" terrorists or the use and misuse of the earth's resources that bring about the "death of the poor one precious in the eyes of God" (Psalm 72:14).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945) needs no introduction. A theologian and pastor in Nazi Germany, he had to decide to what extent he could personally participate in the evil around him. The written result is his *Ethics*, which he considered his crowning theological achievement. In the first pages, he asks *the* question of all Christian ethics: What is it that makes Christian ethics *Christian*? The traditional answer is to do good and avoid evil. But this is not the right question, says Bonhoeffer. The proper question is, rather, "What is God's will"? What society says is "good" or "evil" has no bearing when one "follows after" Jesus. Often one must decide against the traditional definition of good and evil. Christian praxis discerns God's will, hearing the word and doing it (Luke 11:28) rather than depending on society's mores. It is often said that in every page of the *Ethics* we can see Bonhoeffer's struggle with his decision to play an active role in the plot against Hitler. When the Church is Person rather than institution, there are consequences.[513]

The name of Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914 – 2009), is known to every "Vatican II" Catholic. A Dominican friar, theologian, and *peritus* to the Dutch bishops at the Second Vatican

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[512] *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

[513] See *Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6*, translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, edited by Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

Council, he is considered one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Since his earliest works on sacramental theology,[514] he has always expressed deep concern for the "humanum" and what humanity is called to be. The Triune God is not a disinterested, transcendent, ethereal Being "out there" somewhere. Rather, God is everywhere and dwells deep in the heart of the human community—experienced not "thought." It is precisely through our humanity that God manifests Godself in the concrete, every day, ordinary experiences of life, especially in the poor. It is there that we are able to "touch" the living God sacramentally in the concreteness—"bodiliness" is the word he uses—of the flesh of Jesus, the Incarnate One. Perhaps if he wrote today he would use another word—"fleshiness." For Michel Henry (1922 – 2002), the French phenomenologist, the two most important themes in philosophy are *life* and *flesh*. They are integrally connected. Flesh is "a living body."[515] For Henry and Schillebeeckx, the flesh is the "stuff" of life. No life without flesh, no flesh without life. Suffering and joy are key to human experience. But the human suffering of the poor through injustice is what Schillebeeckx calls the "negative contrast experience" imposed on the flesh of the poor. Perhaps today Schillebeeckx would encourage a deeper analysis of negative contrast, holding in one hand Michel Henry and in the other Emmanuel Levinas. While Henry's approach is the consciousness of human, fleshy pathos through interiority, Levinas takes an opposite, but surprisingly similar, approach—from "exteriority." For Levinas, ethics, not ontology as in Henry, is "first philosophy." Ethics is discerned in the "face of the other," which demands a response to evil inflicted. It must be denounced and cannot be tolerated.[516]

"Negative dialectics" and "experiences of contrast" are the ways Schillebeeckx has chosen to speak concretely about evil in the world.[517] Evil is not illusory but has a very real existence that is manifested in the "contrast experience"—the deeply human, painful experience of suffering, particularly the unjust suffering of the poor. It does not "manifest" who God is—in fact, the God of Life abhors evil and injustice. But it does open the human horizon to the hope of something better. Negative contrast mysteriously leads to the Gospel of life as it was always meant to be lived. The one who follows Jesus has the responsibility (a favorite word for Bonhoeffer too) to *act* in concrete praxis against evil. Injustice must be denounced and resisted through human praxis.

Raimon Panikkar (1918 – 2010) was a theologian, philosopher, and chemist who likewise deeply affected the Catholic theology that developed after the Second Vatican Council. Especially active in interfaith dialogue, he was born of an Indian father and Catalan mother.

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[514] See especially *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

[515] Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, translated by Karl Hefty (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015). Henry's "reverse phenomenology" has rightly been called a "phenomenology of life." Toward the end of his life, he became deeply interested in the Incarnation, to which he dedicates his last three books—really, a Christological trilogy. Karl Hefty, who translated *Incarnation* from the French, writes in his Preface that Henry's concern is not with any "body" but the "living body." He equates Henry's phenomenology of life with the "phenomenology of the Incarnation." See 119 – 125 for an excellent summary in Henry's own words of this little known work. Life is the key theme in Henry's philosophy. Incarnation is a theological extension of his major work written early on, The Essence of Manifestation. We reference the Spanish translation. See *La Esencia de Manifestacion*, translated by Mercedes Duarte Luxan (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 2015).

[516] See especially Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

[517] See *The Schillebeeckx Reader* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1987), 51–71, for an excellent summary of negative contrast experience containing Schillebeeckx's own words with commentary by Robert Schreiter.

Baptized and raised Catholic, he was later ordained a presbyter. Eventually, he found that while he knew his mother's Christian tradition and culture, he knew nothing of his father's Hindu heritage. He went to India to study the *Vedas*, was incardinated into an Indian diocese, and spent years working with a small community of Indian Christians. After his time in India, he taught in the United States at Harvard and, finally, at the University of California in Santa Barbara.

Panikkar was one of the few Catholic theologians invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at Oxford. From those lectures came one of his most important books, *The Rhythm of Being*.[518] When it comes to evil, he says, there is nothing "illusory" about it. God is not responsible for it, but neither can we say that God is totally "divorced" from it. Evil is, rather, a "disorder" in the rhythm of the universe, much like a musical dissonance that does not belong or a terribly misplaced beat. Like Schillebeeckx, Panikkar says that evil is to be resisted. The rhythm of things must be restored—through Christian responsibility but also by those who are not Christian, in whom "Christic experience" is present and the Spirit of Life moves.[519] The very structure of life, he says, is Trinitarian. Light years from Rahner's "anonymous Christian," Panikkar maintains that a Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish person, or any human being who expresses genuine faith (even an atheist!), is touched by the Spirit without explicit profession of the historical person of Jesus. To impose Christianity, as in the historically forced baptisms of indigenous peoples, is a grave disorder in the rhythm of the universe. The one who "evangelizes" from this disorder participates in genocide.

It may seem strange to number among these contemporary theologians a woman who preceded them by more than six centuries. Marguerite Porete (1250 – 1310) was a medieval Beguine contemplative burned at the stake for writing about her experience of the depths of the Triune God. Particularly striking in her *Mirror of Simple Souls* are themes also present in Meister Eckhart—the "annihilation" (the core word in understanding Porete) of the will and the subordination of the virtues to divine Love. In this dialogue between Reason and Love, it is Love that wins the day. Christian virtues, she says, have turned the human person into a slave. Rather, it is the virtues that serve us. When we become slaves to the virtues, that is, when we act "virtuously" out of obligation in the belief that this is the "Christian" way, Nature is damaged. To inflict harm unto Nature (including human nature) is evil. One is, rather, called to perfect "rest" in the annihilation of the will and the subordination of the virtues, where the human being, not the virtues, is "mistress."[520] The Mystery of the Cross—the suffering but saving evil inflicted upon Jesus—can never be understood, she says. The Cross is implicit on every page of the *Mirror*; this "evil" that is our salvation.[521] Her words are a precursor to Arendt's banality of evil. The soul is immersed in "Fine Love"; but it is also mysteriously the "root of all evil."[522] The mystery of evil is never "understood" except by those whose hearts are enfolded into the mystery of Love.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

In the final pages of this chapter, we wish to relate the question of evil and genocide to Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe (known to English speakers as Our Lady of Guadalupe) and, especially, to the preaching event and the *Guadalupana* as Preacher. The concrete question here

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[518] *The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

[519] *La Plenitud del Hombre: Una Cristofanía* (Madrid: Editorial Siruela, 1999).

[520] See Porete, 86, for profound description of how the practice of virtue can be "evil." The *Mirror* should be required reading in classes in the theological academy on "virtue ethics."

[521] Ibid., 83.

[522] Ibid., 89–90.

is: how do we prophetically denounce evil that is neither illusory nor part of God's plan for humanity? How do we speak from the pulpit about genocide, injustice toward the poor, and the "banality of evil"?

Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe is *the* Preaching Woman. She is bearer of the Word, *Theotokos*, the "God-bearer," *Mater Dei*, the Mother of God. Víctor Codina, SJ, quotes from John Damascene: "It is with justice and truth that we call holy Mary the *Theotokos*; for this name embraces the whole mystery of the economy of salvation."[523] The *Guadalupana* carries within her femininity and her indigenous culture and race the Incarnate Word she preaches through holy presence. To whom does she preach? To the poor, the *Mexica* people who have experienced genocide, culturally, racially, violently, in their living body. The Spaniards "evangelized" through the destruction of the ancient places of ritual and the temples that had been built. They murdered people who had been nourished by the faith of the ancestors. They obliterated everything they wrongly believed "idolatry." The cult of Tonantzin (in *Nahuatl*, "Our Holy Mother"), was observed for centuries on the hill of Tepeyac, now part of present-day Mexico City.[524] Shortly after the *conquista* in 1521, the temple to Tonantzin was destroyed. The people, who had suffered the war and death waged against them, had no resistance to diseases such as smallpox. The ruthlessly violated *pueblo* was also violated by the evangelizers. The *conquistadores* carried out the destruction, but the friars, perpetrators of Arendt's "banality of evil," cooperated through their preaching against "idolatry" and the destruction of Tepeyac where the ancestral cult to Tonantzin was celebrated. After the famous "dialogue" of the "Twelve Apostles" (the first twelve Franciscan friars to arrive in Mexico) with the priests of the *Mexica* responsible for the faith of the people, the priests understood the consequences of any resistance. They could say nothing that could convince the Twelve. "Do with us as you see fit," was the response.[525]

It was within this genocidal context that Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe appeared to the indigenous *Mexica* Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, canonized a saint by the Catholic Church in 2002. Santa María denounces the evil through her preaching, first, by carrying the Word and second, by *acompañamiento divino*, divine accompaniment with mercy and justice. She carries and proclaims the "Preaching Word" (Otto Semmelroth). The *pueblo* know it was not the "Twelve Apostles" who "brought the faith" to Mexico. Rather, the *Guadalupana*, through her face of divine compassion, justice, and love, through the Incarnate Word she bore, proclaimed the faith already present in the Word long before the invaders arrived. She is Preaching Woman who bears the Word and *becomes* the Word. The most vociferous denunciation of the genocide is her Divine Presence. Because she *carries* the Word, she *is* the Word of compassion and accompaniment for the people. Jesus is the Incarnate Word born of Mary of Nazareth, and Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe, to appropriate the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, is the *Saying*

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[523] See Victor Codina, *Iglesia Nazarena*, 79 – 86, for a profound essay on "Mary of Nazareth." The translation for the words of John Damascene is taken from Sermon for the Nativity of the Theotokos 2014 - Holy Cross Monastery (accessed on July 6, 2021). The quote is from a sermon by the Damascene proclaimed on the Feast of the Birth of Mary.

[524] See Alan R. Sandstrom, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Tonantzin." This brief is written for elementary education in England and ignores theological and anthropological subtleties but offers a good summary (The Virgin of Guadalupe and Tonantzin (mexicolore.co.uk), accessed September 13, 2021.

[525] See Javier Garibay, SJ, *Nepantla: Situado en el Medio, Estudio Histórico-teológico de la Realidad Indiana*, (México: Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 2000).

of God.[526] For the *Mexica*, Tonantzin was Divine Presence, a *teotl*—not God but a *manifestation of the divine*. Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe is the liberating presence, the Saying of God where the Incarnate Word shines forth in the darkness of genocide (cf. John 1:5). This manifestation-experience is *the* primordial discourse of the Word, to interpret Levinas in a liberation Mariological context.

For Levinas, the ego, the "I" as we think of it, is meaningless outside the context of the "total alterity," the "absolute exteriority," that "I" am confronted with in the "face." The face of the Other confronts me in my self-centeredness and excises "me" like a surgical scalpel.[527] The demand cannot be refused if "I" am to be faithful to my true self (Thomas Merton) and to the face. The excision is radical—from the root of the false self. The confrontation with the face of the Other thrusts me into infinity. Unlike "totality," says Levinas, infinity is the place of the "overflow." This overflowing encounter stressing the absolute otherness of the Other happens primarily, for Levinas, in "discourse," a divine encounter with the Infinite. Speech, not language, expresses it. Face-to-face discourse with the other—speech is a primary manifestation of the face—confronts "me" in my individuality. It forces my gaze, my deepest listening—to "see" the Other in their complete complexity. Discourse, Speech, the Word, "word of honor," integrally associated with the face, is the place of confrontation—and salvation.[528] The face forces us to confront our ethical responsibility—the only way to be true to the deepest self that cannot be divorced from this dialogue. Out of this philosophy (the "wisdom of love"!), Levinas develops a phenomenology of "saying" and "said." The said can be merely every day, non-reflected conversation—words out of context, individual, separate, without relation to the Other. So many histories—including the history of the *conquista*—are written from the said of the dominant. Reality is turned to illusion. Genocide and evil are not liberating discourse in these oppressive saids. Here we do not take responsibility for the other. Said expresses totality, dominance, and power. Saying is infinity, service, love, justice, and compassion. The challenge is to turn oppressive said into authentic said. For this to happen, it must be immersed in the infinite saying that is its true foundation. Authentic said is liberating preaching through discourse and dialogue.

Flor y canto (flower and song) is the discourse of Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe, the Saying of God. Indigenous cosmovision has nothing to do with individuality in the Western sense. Rather, the Other is the community expressed through the call to be *yya*, the one who serves the other in community.

When dominant race and culture in its "my-ness" is confronted with the discourse of Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe, it cannot turn away from her gently piercing gaze. The Saying of God—her preaching—is absolute in its ethical demand to recognize her otherness in the face of the poor. Her discourse-dialogue is *with* the poor and *for* the poor. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoazin is the One who *Speaks* like the Eagle. His speech is the "cry of the poor" heard by God (Psalm 34), not a monologue, but a dynamic dialogue:

> A deafening cry pours from the throats of millions of (people), asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else. 'Now you are listening to us in silence,

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[526] For Levinas, the "saying" and the "said" are important phenomenological categories of language and the word. The historical said is rooted in the infinite saying.

[527] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 30, 194–97.

[528] Ibid., 202.

but we hear the shout which arises from your suffering,' the Pope told the 'campesinos' in Columbia.[529]

Santa María Tonantzin Guadalupe addresses Cuauhtlatoatzin as "my most Beloved," and he responds, "my darling little daughter." He is Son, she is Daughter. The foundation of the dialogue is alterity, respect, dignity. Her only request is the *casita*—the "little house" where the divine eternal dialogue with the poor continues through the Woman Preacher. The dialogue "overflows"—a favorite word for Levinas going beyond saturated phenomenon and expressing Infinity's gracious touch upon humanity and the poor. The Holy Preaching confronts the culture of the *conquistadores* and denounces the genocide. The Saying of God decries the injustice, evil, and genocide in an overflow and superabundance of the words we preach, authentic said reflections of the Saying. The aeons of the ages, the forever and ever, becomes the Eternal Now, the Saying of the Incarnate One mothered at the Virgin's breast.

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[529] Medellin, CELAM, 1968 ([Medellin Document: Poverty of the Church (povertystudies.org)](#)), accessed July 10, 2021.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's Concept of loving God for a Transformative Reading of the Scriptures
Woori Han, Ph.D.
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Abstract
This paper considers sermons an essential element of spiritual formation and of the movement from loving God for one's own sake toward loving oneself for God's sake. Loving God for one's own benefit is primarily developed by sermons emphasizing prosperity and is based on the individual's hope for wealth, success, and health. Sermons of this type are generally related to fulfilling believers' needs. Loving oneself for God's sake is stressed through sermons that focuses on union of the individual's and the community union with the divine, relying on the mature growth in the love of God. The author analyzes Bernard of Clairvaux's concept of the four degrees of love and his homilies on the Song of Songs as a way of offering a theological interpretive approach of the text, which includes the theme of giving the self to mutual union with the divine based on God's love.

Introduction
This paper aims to clarify and explain the implications of French Cistercian mystic theologian Bernard of Clairvaux's teachings on the spiritual formation of the faithful based on the soul's love of God that leads to a transformative engagement with the Scriptures. According to Bernard, the spiritual formation of the faithful is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, seeking to achieve the empathy that leads to love for others.[530] Bernard came to realize that his prayerful engagement with certain references pointing to God's love and grace in the Scriptures drew him into the mystery of union with God in Christ through the Spirit, as described in his treatise *On Loving God* and his homilies on the Song of Songs. This close relationship with God opens the possibility for the reader to prayerfully and meditatively consider her or his own way of being in the world. The faithful's world, Bernard says, is formed by moving from loving God for one's own sake toward loving oneself for God's sake.[531]

Through this experience, the believer is allowed to satisfy God through pure love caught up in the existential horizon of the Scriptures. Just as Paul Ricoeur highlights that the reader is able to appropriate the world of the senses projected by the text, another way of being in the world projected by the Scriptures is given to the reader.[532] In other words, God invites the reader through the medium of the Word of God to deepen the reader's love of God and to enter upon a process of transformation in the reader's relationship to her/himself and to her or his faith community. Therefore, the world of the preacher as a reader, in the context of the gathered community filled with the love of God, enables reading the biblical text in a transformative way, in which the two worlds of the preacher as a reader and of the congregation both surrender to the divine by responding to the world projected by the text. Here, the love of the Spirit propels both

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[530] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs III*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 50.III.8.

[531] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* vol. 5, trans. Robert Walton (Washington, DC: Cistercian Publications, 1974), 115–204.

[532] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 94–95.

the minister and the gathered community toward union with the divine, thus conforming with the love of God.[533] Both are "hearers of the Word" in a fresh way.

This paper proposes a reorientation, based on the writings of Bernard, of the love of God of the preacher as a reader in which human desire is purgatively reformulated by the divine love whose fruit is a transformative reading of the Scriptures. To this end, the paper explores Bernard's concept of love is analyzed in light of his notion of the four degrees of love.[534] Then, the paper moves on to examine how Bernard brings his thoughts on the subject of love into the lives of the faithful through his homilies on the Song of Songs. The common theme in this preaching is the believer's giving of self to mutual union with the divine based on God's love, which plays an essential role in reading the Bible in a transformative way. This can be described as the faithful's response to the divine love that is being extended to her/him by God. In other words, the believer is moving constantly toward this love from God. Therefore, Bernard's mystical experience, developed on the basis of loving God, enhances the possibility of a transformative reading of the Bible.

A. St. Bernard of Clairvaux's Concept of Love

Bernard's concept of love is a crucial focal point for deepening the spiritual maturity of the faithful. His work *On Loving God* explains in detail the theme of love.[535] It is clear that Bernard employed this treatise to articulate an emphasis on love as the core value of the believer's life, seeking to combine affective spirituality with the aura of mystical transcendence.[536] A close inquiry into the concept of love, which Bernard divided into four degrees in his treatise, plays an essential role in the spiritual formation of the faithful and a transformative engagement with the Scriptures. Before undertaking a detailed examination of the four degrees of love, I will first explain Bernard's basic understanding of love.

For Bernard, love is a verb; to put it more clearly, love is something that one does rather something that one has. This kind of action is described by Bernard as a movement of the will toward a particular person or thing relying on one's desire. Bernard utilizes the term 'affection' to illustrate the action of movement. It can be said that one has affection for something when one determines to love it. Furthermore, love is discovered in the movement of affection from the desire for something to the actual doing of something. It is crucial to understand that love is born from desire as a movement of affection. Thus, for Bernard, true love occurs when a person desires that which God desires and shifts her or his will towards that object in affection and does not solely pursue a reward.[537] Bernard's thought on the four degrees of love suggests how he views God's love for humans.

1. The First Degree of Love

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[533] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13–14.

[534] Bernard's four degrees of love can be described as a model for spiritual development in Christlikeness. In the following section (A.1–4), his four degrees of love are examined in more depth.

[535] This treatise was initiated in an effort to examine in depth the question concerning why and how God should be loved. This work consists of a total of fifteen chapters. Chapters 8 to 10, which describe the four ascending degrees of human love, will be the main focus in this chapter. See Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 93–132.

[536] Emero Stiegman, *On Loving God: An Analytical Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 45.

[537] John R. Sommerfeldt, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 95.

For Bernard, the central aspect of human existence is love, and it can be said that love has many meanings and levels. Bernard also believes that if one loves God totally, then one does not even think of oneself. However, Bernard highlights that this sort of mature love cannot be achieved in a short amount of time but is the outcome of a lifelong spiritual journey that is to be experienced and learned through several significant steps.[538]

According to Bernard the first degree of love is a carnal love of oneself for one's own sake. This means that one has love for oneself for the sake of self-preservation or self-satisfaction. Bernard states that this is the most natural form of love because human nature has become "fragile and weak" through sin. Love is not achieved through rules but instead is planted in human nature as a pure gift that must be received. Bernard asks, "Who is there who hates his own flesh?"[539] However, this kind of love tends to be exposed as a bad habit that allows a person to be guided by these natural motives of self-preservation in a way that leads to a state of intemperance or sin. If this type of love grows immoderately, according to Bernard, "[I]t ceases to be satisfied to run in the narrow channel of its needs, but floods out on all sides into the fields of pleasure."[540] This is likely to make one's conscience insensitive to the condition and circumstances of others and cause one to fall into the difficulty of being caught up in self-pleasure and self-satisfaction only. If one cannot curb one's desire to love oneself too much, then the overflow will eventually face the challenging commandment which says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39).[541] Making an effort to follow this commandment keeps a person from excessive self-love and self-indulgence.

According to Dennis E. Tamburello of Siena College, there is nothing bad about this type of love per se, even though it seems less than pure. However, as has been discussed, there is a risk that it will blossom into a bad thing if allowed.[542] Bernard provides a way to remedy this. Emero Stiegman, formerly of Saint Mary's University, indicates that this first degree of love ought to advance from an individual's selfish love to a generosity to others. He highlights that loving others is not solely caring about them by allowing them to rely on their own will or circumstances, but also involves assisting others in their times of need.[543] Bernard emphasizes that it is at this moment that one realizes that one is freely willing to give up one's possessions in order to serve one's neighbors, heeding the words of the gospel: "First seek the Kingdom of God and his justice and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31).[544] Thus, this love matures into following the commandment to love others as oneself.

The second way to improve the bad element of the first level of love is to learn a healthy form of pleasure. Bernard indicates that if one provides enough to a neighbor in need, one might eventually give away all one has and find oneself lacking what is necessary for one's life. According to Bernard, when this happens, solace in the form of godly pleasure needs to be sought. Now the believer can pray in full faith and learn to be pleased that God is supplying what the faithful need; as the psalmist said, "You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living being" (Ps. 145:16). As long as God's assistance is sought, then the person may well learn to endure the weight of tribulations and difficulties. When these two practical applications are

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[538] Dennis E. Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 85.

[539] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 115.

[540] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* trans. G.R. Evans (New York, Paulist Press, 1987), 192.

[541] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 115.

[542] Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 96.

[543] Stiegman, *On Loving God: An Analytical Commentary*, 99.

[544] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 116.

completed together, they lead to the faithful being able to exercise the first step of love without falling into the negative aspect of love.[545]

With regard to thoroughly observing the commandment to love others as oneself, Bernard asserts that it is necessary to be moved by God in order to love one's neighbor. Loving one's neighbors with perfect justice or purity is only possible when a person loves them in God; it is impossible to love others in God unless the person loves God. Bernard emphasizes that a person must love God first so that then she/he can love her or his neighbor in God (Matt. 12:30–31). Moreover, the way God makes humans love God is simple. God allows people to experience tribulations because God wants them to perceive the weakness and fragility of the human condition. When a person comprehends this feature, she/he starts to realize that some type of external help is needed. It is at this moment, in the midst of her or his difficulties, that the person begins to come to God. According to Bernard, this is the result of realizing that the only hope for true self-preservation lies in the hands of the Creator. Hence, the person runs to God, hoping that good things will happen to her/him. Bernard asserts that this occurs in the moment when "we learn from frequent experience that we can do everything that is good for ourselves in God [Phil. 4:13] and that without God we can do nothing good" (John 15:5).[546]

2. The Second Degree of Love

When one realizes that such self-denying love is only possible through loving God first, one is naturally led to the second degree of love, in which one loves God for one's own sake; namely, the end result of the first level of love is a realization of the second degree of love. Bernard does not spend much time explaining this second degree of love because it is closely related to the first degree of love.[547] This second degree of love is not yet loving God for God's sake but still loving God ultimately for one's own advantage. This is because the motivation to love God is one's own good.[548] Tamburello writes that Bernard is arguing that in this second level of love even the hardest of hearts will sooner or later be melted by God's generosity and mercy.[549]

There can be no doubt that no one wants to suffer. So, humans turn to a loving God in expectation and hope of assistance. Nature *per se* does not teach people to do this but teaches them to ask for what may fill their needs in their life. In this process, one gradually begins to advance from self-centeredness towards God-centeredness. Through the work of God, one comes to know that one is able to receive the assistance and help that one earnestly needs from God. Once this truth is realized, it is natural for one to frequently want to be freed of one's tribulation by God. According to Bernard, if one's trials increase in frequency and, as a result, one comes to God more often and repeatedly experiences God's liberation, then surely, even though one has a heart of stone in a breast of iron (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26), one will realize that it is God's grace that is saving one in one's sufferings. Bernard asserts that this second level of love is not necessarily noble and thinks that it is a love derived from selfishness. Nevertheless, it is still love, and just as the first degree leads to the second degree of love, the second degree of love guides one toward the third degree, where one loves God not for one's own benefit but for God's sake.[550]

3. The Third Degree of Love

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[545] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* 192–93.

[546] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: A Lover Teaching the Way of Love,* ed. Basil Pennington (New York: New City Press, 2001), 72–73.

[547] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: A Lover Teaching the Way of Love*, 73–74.

[548] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 117.

[549] Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 97.

[550] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* 193–94.

The third degree of love, as explained earlier, is when the believer loves God for God's sake, not for her or his own advantage. According to Bernard, the realization of God's character plays a crucial role in advancing from the second degree to the third degree of love. What this means is that a person's frequent contact with God to fulfill her or his needs now makes a small change in that person's heart. Originally, the person turns to God out of her or his own self-centeredness, but then the person gradually starts to experience how sweet the Lord is (Ps. 33:9) and forms an intimate relationship with God in her or his life.[551] As Bernard puts it, "[T]asting God's sweetness entices us more to pure love than does the urgency of our own needs."[552] Once this sweetness of God is tasted, the very needs that drove the person to God begin to be transformed as the person makes an effort to follow God's goodness. Once this transition happens, according to Bernard, the person starts to love God truthfully and so loves what is God's. Tamburello puts it this way: "[F]or now we can love as God loves: unselfishly."[553] In this way, the person is drawn into an intimate relationship of admiration for God's benevolent and righteous character by the divine's complete love that has been given as a gift to be received.

Furthermore, the person who begins to establish a close relationship with God considers the command to love one's neighbor, which came in the first degree of love, as a joy, not a chore. Bernard puts it eloquently: "He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love" (1 Peter 1:22). This person now desires to act out of a pure love composed of truth (1 John 3:18), deviating from excessive self-perseverance and self-love. Stiegman believes that this gradual change takes place when a person comes to realize the fact that loving God is loving what God has created.[554] Bernard taught that the graciousness and goodness of God will be seen and experienced by the person who reaches the third degree of love.[555] This person confesses to the Lord "not because he [God] is good to him but because the Lord is good, truly loves God for God's sake and not for his own benefit."[556] Thus, at the third degree of love, the person comes to love God for more than her or his own benefit; she/he adores God purely due to the Lord's inherent perfection and sweetness.[557]

4. The Fourth Degree of Love

The fourth degree of love, which is very different from the first three degrees, is to love oneself for the sake of God. Bernard regards the person who has attained this level of love as blessed because that person no longer loves herself/himself without loving God. The person who is inebriated with the love of God wants to become one with God in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), saying: "My flesh and my heart have wasted away; O God of my heart, O God, my share for eternity" (Ps. 73:26).[558] Bernard, however, asserts that this kind of experience is rarely given to a person; it is a blessed and holy person who experiences this fourth degree of love even once in her or his life. Unlike the preceding stages of love that are considered to be achievable for a human (a person can come to live through the first three steps of love on a daily basis), human effort cannot sustain the fourth degree of love because it is a present from God that foreshows the

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[551] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 118.

[552] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* 194.

[553] Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 97.

[554] Stiegman, *On Loving God: An Analytical Commentary*, 122.

[555] Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 98.

[556] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 118.

[557] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: A Lover Teaching the Way of Love*, 75.

[558] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux,* 119.

pleasures of heaven.[559] This type of love belonging to God is given to those who know how much God loves them. This degree of love cannot be achieved by the human because it belongs only to God. The human can only experience this type of love in the fourth level when God gifts it to her/him.[560]

Bernard suggests that it is possible for some believers to experience the fourth degree of love during their earthly life, though in a rare and fleeting way.[561] He describes the nature of this degree of love as a moment of ecstasy. According to Bernard, this mystical experience takes place when a person completely loses her/himself in God. He explains it more clearly in these terms: "O chaste and holy love! O sweet and gracious affection! O pure and cleansed purpose, thoroughly washed and purged from any admixture of selfishness, and sweetened by contact with the divine will."[562] Bernard also describes the experience by saying that to lose oneself "as if thou wert emptied and lost and swallowed up in God, is no human love; it is celestial."[563] The human is united with God so as to make her or his human feelings flow into the will of God; all human feelings are melted away. However, this astonishing experience does not last a long time because human beings cannot long escape their current plight.[564] Bernard deplores that "if sometimes a poor mortal feels that heavenly joy for a rapturous moment, then this wretched life envies his happiness, the malice of daily trifles disturbs him."[565] Regrettably, the fourth step of love is rare and fleeting due to the temporal needs of the flesh; as Paul says, "What a wretched man I am! Who shall save me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

To summarize, Bernard's teaching on the four degrees of love demonstrates the great significance of the attribute of love in enhancing the spiritual formation of the faithful for a transformative reading of the Bible. Since a human being is born of carnal desire, it is inevitable that human love and desire ought to start with the body. When one has come to the conclusion that one cannot be the author of one's own existence, one starts to inquire after God by faith and loves God based on one's needs. Through this experience, God gradually begins to make Godself known to one and enables one to love Godself. When one feels and tastes how sweet the Lord is, one is led to the third level where one loves God not for one's own benefit but for God's sake. In the fourth step, which may not be fully attained in this life, in some miraculous way, one forgets oneself, comes wholly to God, and becomes one with God in spirit. Then, one is freed from the weaknesses of the flesh and earthly cares and receives the spiritual body one naturally desires by pursuing the justice of God[566] all and only for love.[567] Thus, human love is gradually advanced

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[559] Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 98.

[560] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* 195.

[561] Bernard highlights that the mystical experience is not a continual ecstasy. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 32:2.

[562] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God,* ed. Hugh Martin (London: SCM Press, 1959), 48.

[563] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God,* 47.

[564] Stiegman, *On Loving God: An Analytical Commentary*, 123.

[565] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God,* 47.

[566] Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works,* 204.

[567] As Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) notes in his book *Love and Responsibility*, "Love forcibly detaches the person, so to speak, from this natural inviolability and inalienability. It makes the person want just that—to surrender to another, to the one it loves." A little earlier he had highlighted, "In this sense, one person can give himself or herself, can surrender entirely to another, whether to a human person or to God, and such a giving of the self creates a special form of love which we define as betrothed love." He also points out, "The essence of betrothed love is self-giving, the surrender of one's 'I'. This is something different from and more than attraction, desire or even goodwill ....Two people give themselves each to the other." See Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, 1981) 96, 97, 125.

by God's grace and love through certain stages and fulfilled at the spiritual level; in other words, the human bears an earthly likeness at first and then a heavenly likeness (1 Cor. 15:49).

B. The Centrality of Love in Bernard's Homilies on Song of Songs

In this section, Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs will be expounded upon to show the significance of the theme of love in promoting the spiritual formation of the believer for a transformative reading of the Scriptures.[568] The key point of Bernard's teachings of love can be summarized as follows: "What a great thing is love, provided always that it returns to its origin . . . flowing back again into its source it acquires fresh strength to pour itself forth once again."[569] These two lines clearly show the two basic premises of Bernard's spiritual program: human love is to be directed to God, and God's grace restores the power that belongs inherently to humanity as *imago Dei* and enables humans to discover again the dignity of their origin.[570] Given this understanding, the analysis of Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs will proceed by considering the five essential ways in which love is a motivating factor in the holy life of the faithful to encounter the world projected by the text. In Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs, the first way of love is considered a factor in promoting a believer's spiritual formation for a transformative engagement with the biblical text. This relationship between God and humans requires the harmony of orderly love.

Bernard emphasizes that an essential principle in the relationship between the lover and the beloved is to share the same goals and aspirations: in other words, to some extent they are inclined to want and enjoy the same things. This view of the relationship does not alter when a person is a considering union with God. This means that the person should first order her or his love in such a manner as to yearn for that which the divine desires. If the beloved one is in complete accordance with the divine, this mutual desire will be able to play a role in preventing issues that would arise when the person is only partially in harmony with the will of God. Thus, a spiritually mature person who seeks to bear fruit under the inspiration of God, understands love as a union in order to be in consonance with God's will.[571]

The second way of love that needs to be highlighted in Bernard's teachings is that a person is allowed to satisfy God by pure love.[572] According to Bernard, this love can be found in the bride's way of loving, standing at the highest degree of love. According to Bernard, the pure

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[568] Bernard started writing homilies for the Song of Songs in 1135 and continued to develop them until his death in 1153. He worked on eighty-six homilies and was only able to complete the third chapter of the Song of Songs. The work that Bernard had begun was eventually finished by his disciples in the monastery. See Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 104. Bernard's hermeneutical approach to the Song of Songs can be explained as follows. In modern-day biblical scholarship, the Song of Songs is mostly considered a love poem that describes a close relationship between a woman and a man. It can be said that this literal interpretation of this song is relatively new. During much of the church's history, the Song of Songs has been interpreted from an allegorical perspective; it has been viewed as the love relationship between God, God's people, and the church. Bernard follows the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs by highlighting the legitimacy of the spiritual nature of the text. The reason for this is that Bernard believes that the Song of Songs primarily concentrates on the heart of the spiritual marriage based on love between God and humans. Bernard uses rich images of love throughout his homilies on the Song of Songs. See Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*, 104–7.

[569] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, trans. Irene Edmonds (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 83:4.

[570] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I,* trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), ix.

[571] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I,* 1.11–12.

[572] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 83.I.3.

love of the bride is not loving the bridegroom for any gain but loving the bridegroom himself. All that will please and satisfy the bride is the return of this love from the bridegroom, not any benefit that the bridegroom brings to her life. Bernard accentuates this attribute of God's love, which does not consider human appearance and possessions as an essential value.[573] God does not ask the believer for anything other than this pure love of the bride, and only this love will satisfy God.[574] This is nothing other than true love, "holy and chaste, full of sweetness and delight, love utterly serene and true, mutual and deep, which joins two beings, not in one flesh, but in one spirit, making them no longer two but one."[575]

The third way of love revealed in Bernard's homilies is that the faithful are required to understand that love is the primary source of spiritual insight.[576] Bernard is convinced that a person who falls in love with God will naturally aspire to spend a great deal of time meditating upon the Word of God and will then give birth to greater spiritual insights than a person whose love for God in not as deep.[577] This is possible because, according to Bernard, the soul who is in love with God "leaves even its bodily senses and is separated from them, so that in her awareness of the Word she is not aware of herself."[578] Bernard underscores that this occurs "when the mind is enraptured by the unutterable sweetness of the Word, so that it withdraws, or rather is transported, and escapes from itself to enjoy the Word."[579] Bernard accordingly encourages his hearers to practice meditation regularly as a way to a better understand the precepts of God. He emphasizes that the meditative reading of the biblical text enables one to penetrate obscure passages and find their meaning. Through the meditative reading of the text, the faithful are helped to grow closer to God and form an intimate relationship with God in their everyday lives. Therefore, time spent dwelling upon the Word will significantly promote the spiritual maturity of the faithful and grow the bond between God and God's people.[580]

The fourth way of love to be learned from Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs is that the believer experiences the deepening of spiritual maturity through love, which is the way to enjoy God in bliss.[581] This means that the small pleasures and happiness the faithful can enjoy in this life ought to come through a close relationship with God. Bernard emphasizes that genuine pleasure and enjoyment can only happen in an intimate relationship with the divine, which is formed by love. Bernard puts it this way: "There is far more pleasure in going aside to be with the Word" [2 Cor. 5:13].[582] He continues, "This is what I spoke of before, when I said that the final reason for the soul to seek the Word was to enjoy him [God] in bliss." Although this type of bliss lasts a short time and is rarely experienced, the faithful will be able to

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[573] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 83.I.3.

[574] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 83.II.5.

[575] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 83.III 6.

[576] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 85.IV.13.

[577] Bernard's method for reading Scripture is based on the Rule of Saint Benedict—a rule that makes *lectio* a foundation of the spiritual life. Bernard describes the meditative reading of biblical text with rich saporous imagery. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I,* 7.IV.5.

[578] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 85.IV.13.

[579] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 85.IV.13.

[580] Bernard underscores that a meditative reading of Scripture, which promotes the believer's spiritual insights, includes not only tasting but also hearing and smelling of the precepts of God. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 67.IV.7.

[581] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 85.IV.13.

[582] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 85.IV.13.

experience a deepening of spiritual maturity if they truly and blissfully love God.[583]

The last way of love taught by Bernard in his homilies on the Song of Songs is that the faithful's love should be directed toward others with an ordered love. The genuinely humble person knows her/himself and thus who she/he truly is. Bernard highlights that one who is truly acquainted with one's own human condition will also have empathy for that of others: "We must look for truth in ourselves, in our neighbors, in itself. We look for truth in ourselves when we judge ourselves [1 Cor. 11:31], in our neighbors when we have empathy with their sufferings [1 Cor. 12:26], in itself when we contemplate it with a clean heart" [Matt. 5:8].[584] Bernard argues that one who has experienced one's own limitations has the ability to empathize with others: "Fellow-sufferers readily feel compassion for the sick and the hungry. For just as pure truth is seen only by the pure of heart, so also a brother's miseries are truly experienced only by one who has misery in his own heart."[585] Furthermore, according to Bernard, for a truly humble person who knows that she/he is weak, the weakness of others plays a role in prompting a reaction of gentle empathy. The love of the faithful consequently ought to be complemented and fulfilled by God's grace, which perfects nature by yielding the empathy that leads to love for others.

To sum up, this section has explored insights into ways to promote the faithful's spiritual formation in love, which are culled from Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs, for a transformative reading of the Scriptures. These five practical applications, which consider love as a motivating element in the godly life of the believer for an encounter with the world projected by the text, have been identified through an examination of his sermons on the Song of Songs in order to clarify his concept of love. These five practical ways can be summarized as follows: first, cultivate a constant awareness of one's shared goals and aspirations with God; second, actively seek the pure love of the bride, standing at the highest level of love in order to satisfy God; third, enjoy and spend a significant amount of time meditating on the Word, which is the source of the advancement of the believer's spiritual maturity; fourth, perceive the pleasure and enjoyment that stems only from an intimate relationship with God established by pure love; and last, be a humble person who is truly aware of his/her own human condition and be attentive to the needs of others with a properly directed love.

Summary

This paper has attempted to clarify the implications of Bernard's teachings on the concept of loving God, which he viewed as promoting the spiritual formation of the faithful to encounter the world projected by the text or, in other words, to have a transformative engagement with the text. Through a reading of his treatise *On Loving God,* this paper has demonstrated that Bernard's teaching on the four degrees of love, through which human love is gradually advanced by God's love and grace through certain steps, plays a significant role in helping the believer to achieve spiritual maturity, thus leading toward union with God in Christ through the Spirit. In considering the four degrees of love, I have identified an essential feature, which is that the faithful's spirituality is formed by the practice of a willed love that surrenders her/himself to the divine. Further, this close relationship with the divine formed by love creates a space for the faithful to prayerfully and meditatively dialogue with the divine, entering into the world

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[583] Bernard stresses that for the believer's spiritual maturity, she/he ought to love God with all her or his heart. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, 83.III.6.

[584] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera,* vol.8, ed. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and Henri Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), 3:20.

[585] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 3:21.

projected by the text.

Furthermore, this paper has described the five ways of love for a holy life and the spiritual maturity of the faithful by analyzing Bernard's homilies on the Song of Songs. Throughout the paper, I have discussed the five practical applications that promote the faithful's spiritual formation through an intimate relationship with God. Further, I have shown that the source of the advancement of the believer's spiritual formation lies in spending a significant amount of time contemplating and meditating on the Word. In this context, the act of engaging in a prayerful and meditative dialogue with God, which entails an expansion of the self through encountering the world projected by the text, is significant since the encounter with God through the Scripture by the Spirit transforms the faithful beyond the texts in the One who speaks through them. This contemplative practice is based on God's mysterious love that brings about the transformation of the reader's mode of being. The mysterious encounter with the presence of God and the faithful's transformation and expansion into God, which stem from a prayerful and meditative dialogue, are due to the love and grace of God. In a transformative engagement with the biblical text, the Spirit opens the human heart to a new future, and divine love purgatively reformulates the faithful's carnal love of her/himself. With the assistance of the Spirit, the center of the faithful's existence is filled with love for God.[586]

Bernard's concept of the mystical experience as relying on love of the divine, the four degrees of love, and the five practical applications offers a foundation that promotes the spiritual formation of the faithful and enhances the conditions for the possibility of a transformative engagement with the Scriptures. Through a prayerful and meditative dialogue with God, the faithful's mode of being is transformed through sharing the same goals and aspirations as God, surrendering the self to God, seeking to have a pure love for God, attending to the needs of others with a properly directed love, and uniting in God in the fullest sense. The soul's love of God is essential for reading the Bible and preaching the Scriptures in a transformative way.

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[586] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self,* 59.

Pedagogy

Teaching Preaching: Homiletical Theory and Pedagogy
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Abstract

Every preacher has a unique homiletical theory embedded in their preaching regardless of whether it is understood through scholarly examination. Homiletical theory is the academic examination of various disciplines' methodological functionality in preaching. Historically, theology and rhetoric constitute the primary frames of references in homiletical theory. However, as the field evolves, other frames of primary and secondary reference will emerge, including epistemology and ethnography.

In this paper, I argue that homiletical theory is a pedagogical paradigm whose lead partner, either rhetoric or theology, determines the point of departure for teaching with emphasis on the rhetorical situation or theological implications. Additionally, the lead partner and contributing disciplines determine the course resources used for class.[587] Therefore, articulating a homiletical theory's lead partners can result in a pedagogical experience that translates to more effective preaching by developing a coherent delineation from theory to praxis.

Introduction

Every preacher has a unique homiletical theory embedded in their preaching regardless of whether it is understood through scholarly examination. Homiletical theory is the academic examination of disciplines in the understanding of the methodological functionality of preaching. The broad categories of homiletical theory include the nature and purpose of preaching, hermeneutics, the authority of scripture, and language. These broad categories unearth the proclaimer's core beliefs about preaching that inform each sermon. Understanding one's homiletical theory may assist with a proclaimer's congruity in that one's message remains consistent from sermon to sermon with respect to theology and sermon structure, etc.

Historically, homiletical theory has two primary frames of reference, theology and rhetoric. In the Christian tradition, theology is the words of God, words to God and the words about God.[588] "Rhetoric is a study of the rhetorical situations that gave rise to the response, and is an examination of how the speaker/writer invited the audience to respond."[589] Some homileticians consider a third frame of reference as poetics which means aesthetics. As the field evolves through the examination of the homiletical theory of African American preachers, other frames of reference will emerge, including ecclesiology, epistemology and ethnography.

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[587] Jennifer L. Carner, conversation with author, August 28, 2021.

[588] James F. Kay, *Preaching and Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007) 4.

[589] Andre E. Johnson, "The Prophetic Persona of James Cone and the Rhetorical Theology of Black Theology," *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (September 2010): p. 282.

However, this conversation focuses on the two traditional frames of reference, theology and rhetoric, and how the leading discipline in homiletical theory determines preaching pedagogy.

Homiletical theory is a pedagogical paradigm for which the lead partner, either rhetoric or theology, determines the pedagogical point of departure with emphasis on the rhetorical situation or theological implications. For example, Frank A. Thomas believes theology leads with rhetoric closely following.[590] Therefore, Thomas teaches preaching from a theological point of departure with an emphasis on the preacher's core beliefs about God. Additionally, the lead partner and contributing disciplines determine the course resources used for class.[591] Therefore, understanding one's homiletical theory can lead to a pedagogical experience that translates to more effective preaching by developing a coherent delineation from theory to praxis.

In this paper, I provide a historical context of homiletical theory with an emphasis on the leading disciplines of either theology or rhetoric. Then I outline the two homiletical methods of African American preachers, Isaac Rufus Clark's Metaethical Method scribed by Katie G. Cannon and the Celebration Method from Frank A. Thomas. Next, I explain the teaching techniques of the practitioner scholars with Cannon teaching from a rhetorical point of departure and Thomas teaching from theology. I discuss how the point of departure impacts pedagogical praxis in the classroom. Lastly, I use my own pedagogy of preaching funerals as a case study that further proves my claims towards homiletical theory as a pedagogical paradigm.

The Relationship Between Theology and Rhetoric in Homiletical Theory

In homiletical theory, the question of the discipline of rhetoric within Christian preaching has been debated since the early church. Plato rejects rhetoric as flattery language that ignores truth. Whereas Augustine incorporates the field of rhetoric in preaching by arguing that the task of the Christian teacher is to discover and teach scripture. This understanding stems from Ciceros' principles of rhetoric as to "teach, delight, and move the audience." Also, Karl Barth engages both theology and rhetoric. He argues that rhetoric makes claims upon the preacher with respect to accountability and intentionality with words; subsequently preaching requires a pious eloquence. Theologically, Barth argues that preaching is "the Word of God which (God) himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words."[592]

The debate continues with contemporary homileticians, such as Richard Lischer and Lucy Lind Hogan. Lischer believes rhetoric as an act of persuasion is an incomplete understanding of preaching that does not account for the revelation of the Gospel, the distinctive mark of the God speech of preaching as a theological calling of the preacher.[593] Whereas, Hogan develops "an incarnational theology of preaching (that) sees the human as redeemed and thus empowered to invite others to redemption, a redemption only possible through the grace of God."[594] For Hogan, preaching is both human and divine speech explained through an incarnational theology of preaching.

Frank A. Thomas and Cleophus J. LaRue contribute to the discussion of theology and rhetoric in homiletical theory with a specific interest in African American preaching. In the *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching,* Frank A. Thomas contributes to the

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[590] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 69.

[591] Jennifer L. Carner, conversation with author, August 28, 2021.

[592] Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 44.

[593] Richard Lischer, "Why I Am Not Persuasive," *Homiletic* vol. 24, no. 2 (1999): 14-15.

[594] Lucy Lind Hogan, "Rethinking Persuasion: Developing an Incarnational Theology of Preaching," *Homiletic* vol. 24, no. 2 (1999), 11.

discussion suggesting that in African American preaching both theology and rhetoric are inherently connected and equally important to the conversation of homiletical theory. For Thomas, "The nature and purpose of African American preaching is to help people experience the assurance of grace (the good news) that is the gospel of Jesus the Christ."[595] In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Cleophus J. LaRue argues that the lived experiences of African Americans are held in tandem with scripture, not overshadowing the exegetical work within the sermon, but equally significant. LaRue states that the departure points of the sermon for black preaching are both, "the content of black socio-cultural experience and how that content impacts the sense in which God is believed to be present in and through scripture."[596]

In doing so, historically African American preaching has used rhetorical strategies, such as imagery, alliteration, metaphors, and persona to create an experiential experience with God's word. According to Mitchell, the use of vivid imagery in black preaching reflects an understanding of hearing, other senses and how they relate to belief, which is necessary for an experiential encounter of the Word. [597] Therefore, one cannot separate rhetoric from theology in African American preaching. Subsequently, the question becomes which discipline leads, theology or rhetoric?

There are many metaphors that homileticians use to describe the relationship between theology and rhetoric. Frank A. Thomas describes the relationship as a dance with theology being the lead partner and rhetoric closely following.[598] The use of the dance metaphor does not consider the contributing disciplines that impact a preacher's homiletical theory. Therefore, I would like to add another metaphor towards our understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and theology.

Homiletical theory is like a cycling team. In cycling, the team consists of four to nine cyclists in a race. The team lead is the strongest member of the team. The other cyclists are domestiques, secondary riders that work together supporting the team lead towards winning the race. During the race, the first rider sets the pace for the team. This rider exerts enormous amounts of energy to set a strong pace for the group. The team lead who rides in the last position conserves energy by drafting behind the other team members. Drafting is when a rider moves into a low-pressure area, closely behind another rider. The team cycles together by working collectively with varying strategies to position the team lead to win the race.

In homiletical theory, theology is the first cyclist that sets the tone of the sermon. Theology does the heavy lifting of the sermon, meaning that the preacher's understanding of the nature and character of God takes center stage. Hopefully, the preacher articulates her theology clearly for the listeners. Rhetoric is the team lead that all the other frames of reference are working together for rhetoric to bring the sermon home for the win. The domestiques, the secondary disciplines that support rhetoric, vary depending upon the context and experiences of the preacher. For my homiletical theory the secondary disciplines include ethnography and pastoral care, which heavily informs my preaching as an African American, chaplain practitioner

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[595] Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), 17.

[596] Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 14.

[597] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 20.

[598] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 69.

scholar. Later, I will briefly discuss my homiletical theory in the case study of teaching preachers how to preach funerals.

Homiletical Methods of Isaac Rufus Clark and Frank A. Thomas

There are many African American preachers that have distinctive homiletical methods. The two practitioner scholars that will be examined for this paper are the late Rev. Dr. Katie G. Cannon who scribed the Metaethical Method of the Rev. Dr. Isaac Rufus Clark and the Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas who teaches his own Celebration Method. Cannon teaches the Metaethical Method with a rhetorical point of departure, whereas Thomas teaches the Celebration Method from a theological point of departure.

<u>Isaac Rufus Clark – the Metaethical Method</u>

In *Teaching Preaching*, Katie Geneva Cannon scribes the Metaethical Method, the homiletical method of her preaching professor, Isaac Rufus Clark, the Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Homiletics at the International Theological Center. The method begins with the Anatomy of the Idea that "has to do with grasping the full thrust of an issue being discussed, by means of raising certain kinds of basic comprehending questions about what is being said or written, with a view toward understanding what the issue means-in-itself and what it implies-for-the-audience."[599] This idea can begin with the Biblical text or the social context. The anatomy of the idea is formed from the following questions: what is the issue about, how do we experience the issue, and why does the issue matter? An example of an anatomy of the idea from a lived experience is as follows: (what) The inauguration of the first African American woman as the Vice President of the United States of America (how) inspires Black and Brown girls to dream big (why) in order to fulfill their God given purpose in life.

The next step is to decide what kind of sermon one is developing. The kind of sermon is either being, doing, or thinking. A being title might be, Becoming A Dreamer which explains how to be a dreamer. Verbs will be used as the moves of this sermon to show how one becomes a dreamer possibly by living, loving, and learning. A thinking title might be, The Relevance of a Dream which explains why dreams are important. The moves in the body could be that dreams are important because dreams nurture authenticity, develop assertiveness, and create aspirations. These moves are nouns – authenticity, assertiveness, and aspirations. A doing sermon might be, Choosing to Dream which challenges the hearers to live their dreams. Possible moves for directives on choosing to dream are facing fear, managing mistakes, reaping rewards.

The sermonic development consists of the following parts: a title, a proposition, an introduction, transition, and the body. According to Cannon, Clark's battle cry is, "If you ain't got no proposition, you ain't got no sermon neither!" The proposition is where the congregation hears the whole sermon. Within the sermon, the proposition could either be placed before or after the introduction, but it must come before the body. "The proposition is the central, integrating, controlling sentence of the entire sermonic discourse, embracing in its makeup a clear, procedural how-meaning that is added to an already established and previously given what-meaning (Title/Subject) and why-meaning (Introduction) of the discourse."[600] For example, the proposition for the inauguration idea could be as follows: The people of God must choose to dream by seeking inspiration in order to fulfill our God given purpose in life.

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[599] Katie Geneva Canon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 171.

[600] Katie Geneva Canon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 16.

The transition from the introduction to the body is the "So what?" For the Choosing to Dream sermon the "So what?" could be as follows: So what - if we don't choose to dream? If we don't choose to dream, we will never imagine a life outside of our own abilities. So what - if we don't imagine a life outside of our own abilities? We will never live a life dependent on God. So what - if we don't depend on God? We will never know the purpose driven life that God has for us. So what - if we never know our purpose? Our life would have been lived in vain.

A life lived in vain is the ultimate consequence of not dreaming. Therefore, living a life in vain is then exemplified by an allegory, metaphor, or something that paints a picture of a life lived in vain. For this transition, a life lived in vain is a life lived beneath your privilege marred by mediocrity. So, let us choose to dream so that we can live a life on purpose in excellence.

The next step is the body, which tells the audience how to choose to dream in order to live a purpose driven life. The people of God choose to dream by facing fears, managing mistakes, and reaping rewards. These moves must be outlined in the sermonic text. The conclusion reflects the intended sermonic response of the congregation choosing to dream. Therefore, the conclusion could be a run of naming historical figures that choose to dream and accomplished feats bigger than themselves through the power of God.

In *Teaching Preaching*, Cannon delineates Clark's perspective on closing a sermon as it relates to the sought congregational responses to the sermon. "The response sought will determine not only the kind of conclusion employed, but also the introduction, the proposition, and the body."[601] Jubilation is but one response to the sermon. Other responses outlined in Clark's method include the following: repentance, conversion, edification, growing edge of concern, sympathy, concrete action, spiritual curiosity, renewal, and sense of human dignity. These responses determine the type of conclusion. The list of conclusions are as follows: resume – reiterating the main points with elements of force and persuasion, direct appeal – tied to the concern of conversion, directive – directions for the congregation, Christian answer to the big question – when the entire sermon has been of problem-raising nature, open dare – challenge for the congregation to put their faith on the line.[602] Neither list of responses nor types of conclusions are exhaustive lists. However, the lists draw the proclaimers towards other forms of closing, rather than the celebration.

In *Teaching Preaching*, Cannon discusses the misrepresentation of the close that becomes a disjointed performance that is disconnected from the main theme of the sermon. A close that does not connect with the entirety of the sermon is a misrepresentation of the African American preaching tradition. This misrepresentation is prevalent in Black preaching. Therefore, Black practitioner scholars address the "proper" close, which may not necessarily always be celebration.

Rhetorical Pedagogical Point of Departure

The Metaethical Method is a homiletical method whose point of departure is rhetoric. A rhetorical point of departure emphasizes the rhetorical situation, either in the Biblical text or lived experience. The rhetorical situation is "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigency which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participants naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical

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[601] Katie Geneva Canon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 163.

[602] Ibid., 168.

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character."[603] In the Metaethical Method, the rhetorical situation is the anatomy of an idea stemming from either the Biblical text or lived experience.

From a pedagogical standpoint, rhetorical point of departures is grounded in the idea of practice makes better. When I was taught the Metaethical method by the late Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, we practiced writing each step of the method with in-class exercises as well as class homework beginning with the anatomy of an idea. The task was to write the what, how, and why of an issue that the preacher wanted to address. What is the problem? How do we exhibit that problem? And why is the problem necessary to address? Then develop introductions of sermons based on the what, how, and why. Each part of the method was practiced repeatedly, like drills. Dr. Cannon distributed handouts with body points, such as red light, yellow light, green light. She employed the students to create files with our own body points, sermon titles, and sermonic illustrations. Rhetorical point of departures focuses on repetition of practicing the parts of the method.

Frank A. Thomas – The Celebration Method

The final homiletic method is the Celebration Method of Frank A. Thomas. In *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching,* Frank A. Thomas describes his Celebration Method that was re-packaged as a teaching tool, in *Preaching as Celebration: Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*. The Celebration Method consists of the following components: Situation, Complication, Resolution, and Celebration. Thomas creates a worksheet that asks six questions, which becomes the components of the method. The Situation is the problem in the biblical text or in society. To develop the situation, Thomas asks the following two questions as it relates to God: 1. What does the passage say to me (about God)? 2. What does this passage say to the needs of people in our time (with respect to God)?[604]

The complication helps the hearers understand how the problem is exacerbated or worsened. In a literary sense, the plot thickens with the complication. To develop the complication, Thomas asks the following questions: 1. What is the "bad news" in the text? 2. What is the "bad news" for our time?[605] The resolution is how the problem is resolved in the text and the life application of the resolve. To develop the resolution, Thomas asks the following questions: 1. What is the "good news" in the text? 2. What is the "good news" for our time?[606] The next step is to determine the behavioral purpose statement, the mission statement of the sermon.[607] The behavioral purpose is a behavioral goal, either stated or implied by the biblical text, which moves the hearers in the direction of the life modeled by Jesus Christ.[608] Lastly, Thomas creates a strategy for celebration, "the joyful and ecstatic reinforcement of the truth already taught and delivered in the main body of the sermon."[609] To develop the celebration,

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[603] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, ed. John Louis Lucaites (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1999), p. 219.

[604] Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Hope for Life International Books, 2018), 66.

[605] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration,* 66.

[606] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration* 66.

[607] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration* 64.

[608] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching,* rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 13.

[609] Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: the Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 85.

Thomas asks the following questions: 1. What shall we celebrate? 2. How shall we celebrate our response in question 1? 3. What materials of celebration shall we use?[610]

The close is a significant discussion in African American preaching, specifically the close of a celebration which is a hallmark of Black preaching. In *Celebration and Experience in Preaching,* Henry Mitchell defines the celebration as ecstatic reinforcement through, "the timed peak of emotional impact is climatically applied to the sermon's text and behavioral purpose."[611] The behavioral purpose is a behavioral goal, either stated or implied by the biblical text, which moves the hearers in the direction of the life modeled by Jesus Christ.[612] In *They Like to Never Quit Praisin God,* Frank A. Thomas builds upon Mitchell's definition of celebration by defining celebration as "the final stage of the sermon (that) functions as the joyful and ecstatic reinforcement of the truth already taught and delivered in the main body of the sermon."[613] Both Mitchell and Thomas emphasize the celebration as reinforcement of the core belief or behavioral purpose of the sermon.

Theological Pedagogical Point of Departure

The Celebration Method is taught with a theological emphasis with reflections on the preacher's core belief. "In the Christian context, core beliefs are our working opinions about whether God can be trusted."[614] This theological pedagogy reflects a more pastoral approach to teaching preaching with regards to self-reflection on one's personal experiences that shapes the beliefs about God, such as God being faithful. Then, rhetoric closely follows with regards to the actual steps of the method which begins with the situation.[615]

From a pedagogical standpoint, a theological point of departure is grounded in the idea of reflecting on one's own experiences with God to understand the preacher's belief about the nature and character of God. Dr. Frank A. Thomas teaches preaching from his workbook, *Preaching as Celebration: Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*. One of the first exercises is entitled "Discovering Core Belief." According to Henry H. Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper-Lewter, "core belief encompasses the ways in which one trusts or fails to trust in one's inner core."[616] Thomas asks the following questions: What do you know to be true at your inner core? What is your core belief? How did you come to know what you most deeply believe to be true? These questions are then followed by specific questions about God. What is it that you most deeply believe about the character of God? How did you come to believe this about the character of God? What experience or story can you share that convinced you of this particular aspect of God's character?[617]

Case Study: How to Preach Funerals of Persons You Do Not Know

The following case study presents exerts from my Doctoral Degree in Ministry Project that focuses on teaching preachers how to preach a funeral for someone they do not know firsthand. The material has been used on several occasions to teach seminary trained and non-seminary trained preachers how to preach funerals. The pedagogical approach models the

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[610] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration*, 67.

[611] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching,* rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 35.

[612] Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching*,13.

[613] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration*, 85.

[614] Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Hope for Life International Books, 2018), 33.

[615] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, 66.

[616] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, 33.

[617] Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, 33-34.

cycling metaphor in which theology sets the tone of the class and the other disciplines of ecumenical ecclesiology, pastoral care, and ethnography work together for rhetoric to convince the audience of the faith formation claims within the sermon.

Preaching Funerals

Christian clergy are tasked with preaching funerals for persons they may not know due to a myriad of reasons. For pastors, the deceased may be a member's adult child who is inactive in the church or the death of a local community member without any church affiliation. For military chaplains, often the deceased is a soldier assigned to their unit that was not active in the spiritual life of the unit. And, for hospice chaplains, the deceased may be a patient that was in a coma-like state during admission onto hospice or a patient that the chaplain visited once prior to their death. At the time of death, these individuals are not actively engaged in the Christian religious community. However, they identify as Christians and desire a Christian funeral. Their expectation presents a dilemma for the clergy presiding over their funerals: *how do clergy honor the faith of the deceased who identified as Christian, but lived outside of a faith community?*

Typically, the type of sermon preached for the deceased within the faith community is a eulogy, presumably, because the clergy has firsthand knowledge of the details of the life of the deceased. If the deceased is unknown to the clergy, he/she delivers a generic funeral sermon. My working definitions of a eulogy and funeral sermon are as follows: The eulogy honors the deceased by describing how the deceased's life exuded Christian characteristics, i.e., the image of God. The funeral sermon focuses on the Gospel message of hope and negates the details of the deceased's life. However, through the use of pastoral care, clergy may develop a eulogy regardless of the relationship between clergy and the deceased.

Eulogies redeem the value of the deceased by revealing their Christian witness as a testament to their faith. The eulogy narrates the deceased's faith by giving examples of how his/her life exemplified Christian characteristics. Since the details of the deceased's faith are unknown to the clergy, during the bereavement visit clergy must employ pastoral care skills to understand the Christian witness of the deceased. Through the integration of pastoral care and prophetic preaching, clergy can develop eulogies for people they do not know, rather than generic funeral sermons. These eulogies require distinct skills in pastoral care that help the clergy "get to know" the essence of the deceased as they listen to the stories told by the bereaved family and friends.

As a hospice chaplain, my point of departure is always the image of God in the life of the deceased, regardless of the way in which they lived or died. As I prepare a eulogy for someone I do not know very well, I ask myself the following questions as I reflect on the stories shared by the deceased's family and friends: In the life of the deceased, where do I hear God's love, grace and mercy as the family engaged the life review process? What godly characteristics are evident in the life of the deceased? Then, how do I uphold these God-like qualities as an offering honoring the life of the deceased and the living God in a manner that comforts the audience of accountability? The fundamental question that eulogies answer is as follows: how then shall we live now that s/he has died?

How then shall we live now that the deceased has died is an existential question grounded in the rhetorical situation. "Rhetoric is a study of the rhetorical situations that gave rise to the response, and is an examination of how the speaker/writer invited the audience to respond."[618] The rhetorical situation is "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an

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[618] Andre E. Johnson, "The Prophetic Persona of James Cone and the Rhetorical Theology of Black Theology," *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (September 2010): p. 282.

exigency which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participants naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character."[619] Therefore, the grounding question situates the audience in the reality of death while inviting them to reflect on the Godly characteristics of the deceased that can be emulated in honor of the deceased and to the glory of God. Theology drives the sermonic development with respect to the character of God displayed in the life of the deceased. The preacher's personal reflection is that of their own understanding of the nature and character of God and how that is exhibited in the life of the deceased.

Homiletical Theory and Pedagogy

Pertaining to homiletical theory, the pedagogical approach of the existential question driving sermonic development hinges on the frames of references of rhetoric, theology, ecumenical ecclesiology, pastoral care, and ethnography. The metaphor used to describe the relationship between rhetoric, theology, and the other disciplines is one of cycling. In my homiletical theory, the 1st cyclist is theology. Theology sets the tone of the sermon. All the other disciplines, ecumenical ecclesiology, pastoral care, and ethnography, support rhetoric, the team lead. Ecumenical ecclesiology is respecting the deceased's faith formation regardless of whether they were active members in church. The preacher must respect the "I am spiritual and not religious crowd", those who experienced church hurt and removed themselves from organized religion, and those who found connectedness to God through a loving community outside of the church. The preacher honors the deceased's faith journey, specifically the ways in which the deceased lived their faith. Pastoral care is the ministry of comfort the preacher provides towards the bereaved family and friends through visitations, listening during the life review process, and the words of expressed in the sermon and worship service. Ethnography is study of the deceased's customs and culture. All these disciplines work together for rhetoric to bring the sermon home for the win. Rhetoric determines the funeral sermon's effectiveness of presenting the case for how the listeners might live now that the deceased has died.

The syllabus for the course on funeral preaching reflects this cycling pedagogical paradigm with theology setting the tone and ecumenical ecclesiology, pastoral care, and ethnography working together to support rhetoric. The course material addresses all the disciplines that create the frames of reference of my homiletical theory. The course materials and texts are described below.

Holloway, Karla F. C. *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. *Passed On* is an intimate portrayal of the funeral history of African Americans in the 20th Century. Holloway provides personal narratives along with detailed historical accounts of African American mourning and burial practices. Beginning with the death of her son, Bem, Holloway interweaves personal experience with ethnography, church history, and socio-economic research to tell the story of death and dying of Africans of the diaspora in American. This book addresses the disciplines of theology, ethnography, ecclesiology, and pastoral care.

Long, Thomas G. *Accompany Them with Singing: the Christian Funeral*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. *Accompany Them with Singing* is a critique of the Christian funeral industry in America that challenges Christian clergy to remember the sacredness of transitioning to life eternal. Long reminds clergy of various historical burial rituals and

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[619] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, ed. John Louis Lucaites (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1999), p. 219.

theological implications of those rituals. The second half of the book provides practical guidance with regards to funeral worship. This book addresses the disciplines of theology, rhetoric, ecclesiology, and pastoral care.

Webber, Randall C. *A Balm in Gilead: Eulogies of Comfort*. Indiana: BK Royston, 2019. *A Balm in Gilead: Eulogies of Comfort* is a collection of eulogies written by African American clergy that demonstrate the use of theology, rhetoric, and pastoral care in the development of funeral sermons. This book addresses the disciplines of theology, rhetoric, and ecclesiology.

Wherry, Peter M. *Preaching Funerals in the Black Church: Bring Perspective to Pain*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013. Preaching Funerals in the Black Church is a practical guide to preaching funerals based upon Wherry's decades of pastoral experience. Wherry discusses pastoral visitation prior to the funeral as well as sermonic development of choosing scripture and sermonic form. Additionally, the book includes sermon models from noteworthy African American preachers. This book addresses the disciplines of theology, rhetoric, ecclesiology, ethnography, and pastoral care.

Preaching Funerals Packet. Unpublished work of Nicole Danielle McDonald, D.Min This packet consists of portions from my D.Min project of preaching funerals of people who are unknown to the eulogist. The packet covers various topics, including the best practices of the pastoral visitation and sermonic form. This packet addresses the disciplines of pastoral care, rhetoric, theology, and ecclesiology.

The Classroom

In the classroom, since theology sets the tone, the students repeatedly reflect on their understanding of the nature and character of God as it is evident in the life of the deceased. However, the written assignments reflect a rhetorical pedagogical approach to teaching preaching – practice, practice, practice. During class, the students work collectively to write an outline for a eulogy based on an obituary from the paper. They select the sermonic scripture and choose a title for the sermon. The class discusses which sermonic form might work best to answer the existential question as well. Additionally, the students' homework is to write a eulogy for someone's obituary in the paper as an individual assignment. The eulogy must answer the question, how then shall we live now that the s/he has died?

The students do not learn a particular method in this course, however, they learn various sermonic forms that represent the best approach for funeral preaching. Henry Mitchell, Peter Wherry, and John McClure provide best practice approaches to funeral preaching with regards to the character sketch and inductive preaching. For example, the character sketch is a genre in preaching that consists of the combination of biblical data and other materials, designed to bring to full, living, proportions a character from the Bible.[620] To develop a character sketch, the preacher chooses a biblical character that presents a trait worthy of emulation. The preacher gathers small narratives, not entire biographical sketches, to illustrate the trait in a manner that resonates with the hearers. The connection with the character provokes the hearers to embody that trait in their lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a homiletician's delineation of the leading partner for their homiletical theory can lead to a pedagogical experience that translates to more effective preaching by developing a coherent delineation from theory to praxis. As the field of homiletical theory evolves with fresh voices of African American preachers and others, more frames of references will emerge to capture the disciplines that create the moment of proclamation. These voices will

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[620] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 101.

continue to theorize metaphors that deepen our understanding of homiletical theory as well as scribing various methods of our beloved practitioners to further the dream of a preaching renaissance that revives American Christianity in the 21st Century.

Women of the Preaching Renaissance:
A Case Study in Liberative Andragogy for African American Preaching Women
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Abstract
African American clergywomen are entering theological education at increasing rates as compared to other demographics. As bi-vocational students (generally), they juggle professional careers, ministry commitments, and personal commitments—much of which goes unacknowledged. In what ways can teachers of preaching critically analyze andragogy to better support these students? This essay is a reflection on liberative andragogy that takes seriously the lived experiences of Black women in seminaries/divinity schools. It traces the student body, course design, and course execution of a doctoral cohort comprised of 15 African American women, engaged in studies related to womanist preaching. In addition to analysis by the instructor, student feedback informs the lessons learned in this essay. I assert that the liberative practices of care, clarity, and critical consciousness make space for Black women to bring their full selves and complex of knowledges into the theological classroom, as full contributors to the theological enterprise.

"The expert is in the room," said the late Katie G. Cannon, as she emphasizes the centrality of our voices to the learning environment.[621] Cannon opened the class session by warmly expressing what a privilege it was for her, a Black woman, to teach a class of mostly Black women. "In my career, this has not happened often," she continued, further stating that it felt like "coming home."[622] Now, an associate professor and seven years removed from that experience, I reflect on what at the time seemed to be an inconsequential statement. What I thought was preamble to the daily lecture was critical pedagogy and consciousness-building that created the conditions for teacher-student co-engagement. While acknowledging her own expertise and experiences, Cannon invited and expected each student to bring their own expertise and experiences to the class. Moreover, she unapologetically centered her embodiment – raced, classed, and gendered – and discussed how her presence (and ours) disrupts the traditional ivory tower experience. Thus began an exploration with liberative teaching strategies, and more particularly, strategies in conversation with adult learning theories. Specifically, I am interested in strategies and practices for teaching preaching that consider the situatedness of African America women (clergy and non-clergy) pursuing doctoral-level studies.

In this essay I reflect on specific andragogical methods for teaching fifteen African American women in a Doctor of Ministry program focused on womanist preaching.[623] First, I

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[621] Katie G. Cannon, "Slave Narratives" (Lecture, MDiv Course, Candler School of Theology, 2014).

[622] Katie G. Cannon. Note: There was one white woman and one white man enrolled in the course.

[623] The term andragogy was popularized in Educational Theory in the 1970s by Malcolm S. Knowles. Though pedagogy remains the most prevalently used term with respect to teaching practices, andragogy more specifically addresses the particularities of self-directed learning, often associated with adult learning. See Malcolm S. Knowles 1913-1997., Elwood F. 1957- Holton, and Richard A. 1942- Swanson, *The Adult Learner : The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, Eighth edition. (London; Routledge,

describe the teaching context and student particularities that make this class a rich source for andragogical reflection. Second, I engage theories of teaching that proved valuable to this teaching/learning community. To do this, I integrate theories and andragogical commitments with attention to the ethical values of care, clarity, and critical consciousness. Finally, I offer reflections on three ways in which teachers of preaching might rethink andragogy for Black women and other communities who have experienced marginalization: revisiting liberative pedagogy, dismantling formidable formatting, and specificity in course expectations.

Who's in the Room?

Introduction to Womanism and Womanist Theology (IWWT) is the first residency course in a 3-year Doctor of Ministry program, with a specific focus in womanist preaching. The course goal was to lay a foundation of womanist theological discourse, upon which subsequent ethics, biblical interpretation, and practice of preaching courses will build. IWWT might be considered a survey course in that it introduces students to a range of relevant womanist literature, and at the same time engages theological ideas and concepts that were central the formation of womanist theology, and that informed early notions of womanist preaching. The course was a one-week residency, with roughly 31.5 hours of scheduled instructional time.

The class was comprised of fifteen African American women from across the United States. All students have earned at least a master's degree in a field related to religion, and several have earned other post-baccalaureate degrees. While a few completed MDivs in the past five years, most students have been removed from academic studies for over five years. Their ages ranged from late '20s to early '60s. While all students are involved in some ministry capacity, several are also bi-vocational with varying levels of nonchurch-related work experience. The point here is to provide insight into the vocational, professional, and personal diversity of the cohort: they are senior pastors, associate ministers, church administrators, educators, health care professionals, activists, and specialists in a range of other fields, as well as care givers and parents and spouses/partners and community leaders. The wealth of experience in the room was made more evident with each class discussion as they considered the topics presented from their vantage point.

Even as I noted the differences within the group, there was at the same time a sense of community and familiarity, of being *home*. Though most were meeting each other for the first time, the students were united by their responses to what became known as '*the flyer*'. One hundred percent of the students admitted that they applied to the doctoral program after having been drawn to *the flyer*. The so-called advertisement *flyer* contained typical information about the seminary program, but more importantly to these students, it contained images of four African American women scholars-preachers. These were women whom they knew – or knew of – and respected their work…and not insignificantly, they "looked like us."[624] Having earned most of their academic degrees in predominantly white educational institutions, the women collectively expressed a desire to "learn from us…to not have to explain our culture…to study with Black women scholars." These students anticipated a different educational experience.

2015). Where appropriate, I use andragogy and pedagogy interchangeably, as is consistent with much scholarship in religion. In other instances, I use the term andragogy to emphasize educational approaches I find most suitable to this teaching experience and the adult learners involved.

[624] Comments made by various members of the doctoral cohort, referring to the instructors advertised for this course.

I, too, anticipated a different educational experience. I am an African American woman; a single parent; a second career academic; a homiletician; an ordained clergywoman. I began teaching preaching to women in predominantly Black churches long before I considered going to seminary. I have been a pastor and/or associate minister or Christian educator in multiple denominations and I have been bi-vocational my entire preaching ministry. These various identities serve as connection points to each student, depending on their own identities. For one student it was my undergraduate STEM background; for another it was being the parent of a young Black son. A shared understanding of womanism as explicitly taking seriously the generative capacity of the quotidian experiences of Black women, with particular attention given to race, class, and gender (and other identity markers), was a connection point for the collective.

In terms of familiarity with womanism as an academic discipline, students fit loosely into three categories: 1) no exposure, 2) conversant in the basics, and 3) trained academically. Those students with no exposure are aware of the language of womanism and its focus on Black women's experiences but have little to no formal introduction to the field more broadly. Students who identified as conversant may have attended womanist conferences or taken a course related to womanism or know of womanist scholars and have learned the language of womanism, especially womanist tenets as described by Stacey Floyd-Thomas.[625] However, students in this category have limited knowledge of the history of womanism and foundational texts. A few students have taken womanist ethics or pastoral theology in graduate studies and are affiliated with other womanist-led initiatives. These students are fluent in womanism as an ethical framework for the church and the world, and desire more engagement with seminal womanist scholarship and womanism in religion.

Attentiveness to *who is in the room* physically, spiritually, and symbolically enables us to draw upon experiences that surpass the core course content. Each student brings *her*story into the classroom, placing it in conversation with other stories, expanding what we know as womanist conversations. Given information about students' levels of acquaintance with the subject matter, I adjusted my teaching methods. I executed a teaching strategy that included informational lecturing, guided discussions and self-directed study.

Student-Centered Teaching

As I prepared for this course – the first in person after 15 months of pandemics, mask wearing, and social distancing - I envisioned the learning environment I wanted to facilitate. In this case, I knew beforehand that the class was singularly comprised of African American identified women. This was not surprising; nevertheless, this information enabled me to engage in particularized student-centered planning. I considered my own experiences in higher education: *in conditions did I feel most affirmed and welcome to contribute? In what situations did I feel overlooked, marginalized, or insignificant to the instructor or other students?* I imagined how best to pour into and draw out of these fifteen African American clergywomen, in ways that would be meaningful and lifegiving. Three andragogical considerations, rooted in womanist ethics, undergirded the planning and execution of IWWT: care; clarity; and critical consciousness.

Care

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[625] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

Teaching with tenderness is a refreshing consideration for what it means to be human in the classroom, what it means to care.[626] "Tenderness comes from being willing to hold in one's mind more complexity, paradox, and community than was previously thought possible…A pedagogy of tenderness," writes Becky Thompson, "asks us to expand ways to talk about the complexity of identity, to open ourselves to new conceptual frameworks…"[627] She describes her own journey toward teaching in ways that invite students (and teachers) to bring their full selves into the classroom, despite the conflicts and contradictions of one self with another. It is pedagogical practice that moves beyond content analysis yet ought not be reduced to 'touchy-feely engagement.' A pedagogy of tenderness values difference while holding with it the sameness that is the human experience. It is invitational and welcoming, with an awareness that human experiences are messy and uncontained. Care-full interacting with students in IWWT allowed them to experience a pedagogy of tenderness. It required a willingness to connect, to be in emotional proximity to each student, in ways that were genuine. It meant making space for vulnerability, error, and visible uncertainty. For instructors, this can feel risky, and it can be risky. However, even with professional boundaries intact, there is a closeness possible that enables students to disarm, when the instructor takes the risk of tenderness. I took this risk with IWWT and experienced a connection with the collective that has not occurred with other classes. Collegial care might best describe this experience.

For example, on the first day of the course, I spent a substantial amount of time encouraging the students to introduce themselves, thereby gaining a sense of who they are inside and outside of the classroom. I learned names and places of origin and any other personally identifiable information they chose to share. I also shared. I sought to create an environment in which they felt comfortable with me and with one another, that is, an environment in which they need not maintain heightened awareness in case of academy-imposed threats. It was my andragogical effort to tenderly recognize the particularity of everyone, and to value the experiences of being Black women in higher education religious circles. It was a practice of care-full active resistance against a sterile academic experience.

Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant provides another angle of entry for the ethic of care. Beauboeuf-Lafontant argues that womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social and educational problems.[628] She uses case stories to demonstrate the various ways in which care is integral to womanist teaching. On the one hand it is care that is commonly associated with mothering and nurturing, but it is also care that understands education as a critical element of social justice. The notion of mothering is connected to "caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual mediation, and dispute resolution" and is necessarily dissociated from biological and gendered connotation.[629] "Once we can begin to see caring and mothering in larger, sociohistorical realms," writes Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "we can recognize how in sharing knowledge we can also share power."[630]

Empowerment of students is a core value in my approach to theological education, particularly for African American women students who regularly voice their experiences of

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[626] Becky W. Thompson, *Teaching with Tenderness: Toward an Embodied Practice*, Transformations: Womanist, Feminist, and Indigenous Studies, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[627] Thompson, *Teaching with Tenderness,* 5.

[628] Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teachers," in *The Womanist Reader* (New York NY: Routledge, 2006), 286.

[629] Layli Phillips, ed., *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxix.

[630] Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teachers," 291.

disempowerment. Often women students unknowingly wear the imprints of oppressive theologies and practices. Moreover, recognizing one's own complicity in repressing other women can be disheartening, even traumatic. Andragogical mothering, from a womanist perspective, allows professors to make visible injustices perpetuated in the name of religion, and simultaneously, to provide space and tools for change. Care-full instructors have the opportunity to help disentangle students from ideologies that are harmful, and in some cases, evil.

Clarity

Zandra L. Jordan, Director of the Hume Writing Center at Stanford University, urges educators to reevaluate pedagogical ethical commitments to bringing equity to theological writing and grading. She invites professors to consider the moral choices imbedded in "what knowledge to assume, what readings to foreground, what kinds of writing to assign, what writing conventions to teach, what criteria to evaluate, what discourses to reward, what conversations to engage."[631] These choices are not ethically benign or neutral, and often work against students from marginalized communities.

The respondents in Jordan's study shared experiences that coincided with that of the students in IWWT. In both instances students shared how their abilities to write theologically had been questioned and critiqued as 'not scholarly', which led to internal second-guessing. Additionally, they expressed how professors' questioning about standpoints that deviated from what was considered 'normal' often resulted in marginalization of Black women's ideas. Jordan asserts that ignoring diversity in theological writing is inconsistent with assertions of diversity as an institutional value.[632] Drawing from the wells of womanist ethical discourse, she proposes clarity and creativity as ethical values to disrupt pedagogical practices that marginalize Black women students and all theological writers. Moreover, she provides a list of practices that aid in implementing more liberative pedagogical practices.[633] Most pertinent to this essay are the following principles: get to know your students; provide sufficient detail when designing writing assignments; and expand your conceptions of what constitutes academic writing. A discussion on IWWT course design highlights implementation Jordan's latter two suggestions.

Clarity in Course Planning

The stated learning outcome in this course was for students to have a working grasp of the historical formation of womanism as an academic field, as a precursor to the practice of womanist preaching. This foundational course responded to the questions, *what is womanism?* and *what is womanist theology*? The planning tasks involved content selection and integration: how to fit roughly 30 years of scholarship into roughly 30 instructional hours. While I assumed that all students had some exposure to the language and practice of womanism, this did not translate to a grasp of the history of the discipline and its development as a field of study. Through scholarly sampling, I endeavored to expose students to womanism as a theological and methodological framework and to make space for theological reflection on themes that most

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[631] Zandra L. Jordan, "Clarity and Creativity as Womanist Ethics for Teaching and Evaluating Theological Writing," *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 2019, 265, https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111/teth.12502.

[632] Zandra L. Jordan, "Clarity and Creativity as Womanist Ethics for Teaching and Evaluating Theological Writing," 263.

[633] Zandra L. Jordan, "Clarity and Creativity as Womanist Ethics for Teaching and Evaluating Theological Writing," 263–65.

resonated with the students. This meant planning for the organic flow of discussions, while executing an intentional outcome-based agenda.

Referring to Bloom's Taxonomy[634] aided in narrowing the scope of the scholarship available. I asked the following questions:

> *What type of learning is pertinent to Doctor of Ministry students?*
> *What level of comprehension is needed for further work in the doctoral program?*
> *What does demonstrated competency look like?*
> *How much time do I reasonably expect students to engage in preparation for class?*
> *What accumulated academic knowledges might these African American women students possess?* [635]

I begin with the last question in mind because it sets the tone for course planning and execution.
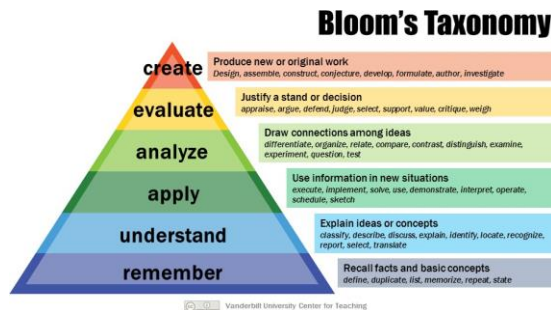
Clarity in Assignments

The assignments for the course consisted of pre-residency reading and writing; residency reading, writing, and group presentations; and post-residency reading and writing. The pre-residency work was intended to establish a baseline of ideas and concepts for students to remember. Subsequent readings and writings were intended to help students understand, associate, and apply core concepts. The final assignment enabled students to formulate questions and ideas, in conversation with the course material and other scholarship, questions that help them investigate research interests for their doctoral project. Stated differently, the early assignments are about content, and about (re)familiarization with writing in academia. The latter assignment is intended to encourage students to create, to intervene, to inject their voice into the womanist preaching scholarly conversation.

To Jordan's point, specific guidance was given about how to complete the writing assignments – an intentional andragogical choice. Rather than have students 'figure out' what is expected of them, I gave explicit detailed guidance in the syllabus and pre-writing discussions. While there is some attention to formatting and uses of [standard] grammar, I am more interested

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[634] Figure used courtesy of P. Armstrong, "Bloom's Taxonomy," Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, 2010, https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/. Accessed 27 August 2021.

[635] I use the phrase 'accumulated academic knowledge' to describe the capacity to draw on pre-acquired knowledge and/or experience of jargon and behaviors used in academic spaces, to anticipate the present experience. It includes having a basic orientation with particular scholarship that is considered 'classic' in the religious academy. Accumulated academic knowledge is embodied subconscious memory that enables African American women to navigate new, yet familiar, academic spaces from a position of knowing.

in helping students capture the essence of the reading and the author's argument as well as development of their own critical voice. Providing students with a critical reading guide aids in reading efficiency and short (less than 5 pages) writing assignments aid in writing economy. Similarly, providing a critical writing guide, that is, a specific framework for preparing and assembling the longer writing assignment, gives hesitant students a starting point.

This is particularly important to mitigating anxiety for students who have been away from academia for significant periods of time and for students who have experienced the trauma of being on the receiving end of instructors' taken-for-granted knowledge. I know firsthand the experience of instructors assuming I understood how to accomplish a particular writing assignment – so they did not bother to explain it. Despite efforts to grasp the writing conventions expected as a student of theology, I periodically received feedback that questioned my fittedness for theological education overall. For Black women students who have been told they 'cannot write', counternarratives are essential. Disconnecting what one does not know (taken-for-granted knowledges) from what one can/not know (cognitive capability) is an important step in student success. Additionally, instructors might interrogate internal conclusions about what makes for 'good writing' and how imbedded biases corrupt and harm otherwise very capable students. Clarity in assignments is one practice that facilitates a counternarrative to undo the trauma associated with overt or covert doubt of students' cognitive capacity, especially based on race, gender, and/or class. With clear guidance, students can excel.

Critical Consciousness

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides a helpful framework for examining my initial teaching approach in IWWT. Freire writes in opposition to a "banking system" of education in which teachers "deposit" knowledge into students.[636] He is wary of "narration sickness" caused by educators who unload information and data, without invitation for critical inquiry.[637] This model instills an oppressor-oppressed dichotomy in which the latter is objectified by the former. Freire argues that for persons to experience liberation through education, they must master their own thinking. This is precipitated by "conscientization."[638] Through praxis persons who are oppressed become co-investigators of the powers and structures with which they contend. They initiate their own freedom through dialogue with those who seek to oppress, and I would add with their co-laborers, for liberative learning.

I envisioned this class as a community of co-learners, co-investigators, co-contributors, invited into intentional open dialogue. Given the breadth of experience of these women, I anticipated that the bulk of our learning would occur at the intersection of their experiential knowledge and the academic content, resulting in thoughtful exploration into uncharted scholarly territory. Engaged pedagogy, which emphasizes well-being, further informs my approach to

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[636] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

[637] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 72.

[638] Conscientization begins with one's awareness of oppression and one's "perceiving the perceived differently." In an oppressive mentality, persons encounter "limiting situations" that are seen as insurmountable barriers and ends. In the process of deeper self-awareness, one reflects on these limitations and perceives alternatives rather than ends. It involves trusting oneself as capable of knowledge generation and critical engagement. See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

teaching this course.[639] Bell hooks' expression of engaged pedagogy is characterized by community, conversation, and co-creation of knowledge.[640]

Valuing students as co-generators of knowledge guided the planning and execution of IWWT. When racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and other isms are mitigated by a community approach to teaching, classrooms may become spaces of hope, trust and excitement for all students.[641] Hope, asserts hooks, infuses the possibilities that reside in a classroom that is radically open and receiving of all voices and all ways of knowing. Through open conversation, students learn to trust themselves, the instructor, and one another, and thereby, self-actualization is possible.[642] Community teaching is such that students and teachers are impacted intellectually, spiritually, and bodily. Students enter a full-embodied educational experience, as opposed to rituals of note-taking and passive listening. Engaging students includes encouraging them to mine their lived experiences for theological gems.

Lastly, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins' focus on the development of critical consciousness is instrumental to this course. Black women are often treated as those who must learn from others; as persons who are cognitively shallow; and as women who manage households on shoestring budgets but are incapable of critical engagement. This assumption about the lack of knowledge generation capacity of Black women is evident in many theological classrooms and shapes the experience of all students. Critical consciousness in both teacher and student creates the conditions in which learners are made are aware of their own capacity for thinking. It requires the instructor to suspend privileged, preferred, legitimized knowledges, and allow learners to approach content with suspicion, inquiry, and critique – even if conclusions drawn by students conflict with those anticipated by the instructor. Teachers and students must freely query: *To whom does the content apply? For whom is it valuable? How might it be understood differently? What is at stake for the writer and reader?*

Critical consciousness is taking the risks associated with questioning objective knowledge that doesn't resonate with what one knows to be true for oneself.[643] It involves silencing the mental scripts with which one has been indoctrinated and opting to honor personal lived experience as a source of knowledge. "Critical consciousness," writes Collins, "starts with the premise that to be different than what is natural, normal, and ideal in dominant curriculum offerings and classroom practices is perfectly acceptable."[644] Embracing what might be deemed as "oppositional knowledge" is a mark of the pedagogical values of IWWT. [645] On the one hand the subject matter itself – womanism – is oppositional at its origins; on the other hand critical engagement with the field as it expands in the 21st century is a means of welcoming emergent alternative knowledges.

Reflections

What lessons do I draw from this course that may be applicable more broadly in teaching preaching?

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[639] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

[640] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[641] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 8.

[642] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 16. Hooks writes about self-actualization throughout the book, emphasizing the opportunity for self-awakening and self-awareness that exists is learning communities.

[643] Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism* (Philadelphia. PA: Temple University Press, 2013), 131.

[644] Hill Collins, Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism,* 129.

[645] Hill Collins, Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism,* 128.

Revisiting Liberative Pedagogy. In theory, liberative pedagogies free students to explore and learn in ways that inspire new ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Teaching students how to think, rather than what to think allows creativity to flourish, and imaginations run amuck. Instructors committed to this work must trust the knowledge that emerges from imaginations run amuck. At the same time, the foundations that create the conditions for imaginations amuck are often laid through Freire's *deposits*. Stated differently, to learn the history of a field – so that one might project an alternative future – requires a degree a deposit-type teaching. Whether through lectures and/or group discussions and presentations, students must be equipped with a historical and linguistic foundation from which to begin.

For IWWT this means students learn the foremothers of womanism in religion, their early scholarship, and the conditions in which the discipline was formed. It means temporary privileging of theory, for the longer-term goal of gaining deeper insights into the practice of womanist preaching. Furthermore, it means accepting that there are times when content and content delivery may overshadow integration of lived experiences – for the sake of establishing a place from which to begin the conversation. Despite attending workshops and presentations that discourage 'over lecturing' and 'too many words', I find that lectures – even mini-conversational lectures - provide the language for students, *all* students, to enter the theological conversation. Rather than assuming students have pre-disposed dexterity and fluency with theological concepts related to homiletics, I present the material on its own, before asking students to engage it from their personal points of entry. In this case, freedom is realized in students' ability to participate, to ask questions, to thoughtfully critique, and to construct theological responses to the issues of their contexts. Practicing liberative andragogy includes inviting students to participate with their experiential knowledges and introducing resources, such as language, aid in articulating those knowledges.

Dismantling Formidable Formatting. Despite my efforts to care for and create community with the students in IWWT (and other courses), an overt concern for traditional academic writing expectations creeps into the crevices of our learning community. I encourage students to do their best work and provide feedback in early writing assignments; nevertheless, I field countless queries about correct formatting. A desire for detailed formatting guidance – to "get it right" - is present even as I attempt to shift attention from formatting to scholarly engagement.

In her article, Jordan interrogates the assigning of theological writing, questioning who teaches students this type of writing. The predicament is more poignant for those who come to seminary with little to no former academic history in religion, which is often the case for African American women. For many Black women, the starting point for theological reflection is their lived experience, whether it be religious or not. Prayer is learned from hearing grandmothers pray, not from the *Common Book of Prayer*. Thus, their written collect has a tone and tenor not captured in a book. Even in a doctoral program, it is problematic to assume students know how to use Turabian or web-based formatting software. To be fair, independent student initiative is an expectation for all graduate students. It is part of the terrain of higher education.

That said, noting the discomfort of students around formatting and footnoting, I experimented with offering an optional hour to discuss formatting, footnotes, and bibliographies.[646] This minor investment of time simultaneously reduced student anxiety and reduced excessive formatting errors on final papers. It is a worthwhile tradeoff. In terms of liberative andragogy, it is taking an extra step to dismantle hindrances to the learning process.

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[646] I have also experimented with this in MDiv preaching courses.

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Overemphasis on formatting has the potential to shift attention away from what is more important – engagement with scholarship and student colleagues to enhance ministry practice. An andragogical query remains: *Are there ways in which adult students might be more affirmed in the writing practices used for effective ministry and educated in the practices they need to know only for academic writing?*

Specificity in Course Expectations. What students found most helpful in managing the workload for this course was specificity. They expressed appreciation for clarity of expectations and clear guidance for course corrections when expectations were not met. For most Doctor of Ministry Students, their academic studies are accomplished in addition to their other ministerial or professional responsibilities. The nature of pursuing higher education means work piled on top of already packed schedules and commitments. One student-centered teaching approach is to ease the load through specificity and precision in the syllabus, assignment expectations, and classroom expectations. Students are empowered to their best work when they are given clear guidance, early and often. This includes distribution of a timeline for assignment due dates, as early as possible, so that students may plan research and writing time appropriately. The precision of pre-course planning is more crucial in this instance, yet the outcomes for students are enhanced. A clear plan, from which to deviate, also accounts for the beauty of real-time shifts in the daily agenda spurred on when students fully 'show up' for class.

Areas for Further Study

Reflection in Community and Exchange of Ideas. Wrestling with theological concepts that conflict with one's current operative theology is difficult work, and often catches students by surprise. A challenge of teaching intensive course formats is the lack of time. The allotted instructional time does not permit space to cover all desired content and the material that seems the most innocuous has the potential to spark the most interest and conversation. Despite strategic placement of topics in the syllabus, invariably, surprise questions or connections lead to prolonged discussions and exchange of ideas. Intensive course designs must be flexible enough to accommodate the exchange of ideas that occurs as critical consciousness is awakened or ignited. Organic discussions are refreshingly unpredictable ~ and yet must be accounted for in the instructional period.

Reciprocal Vulnerability. Self-exposure and disclosure of private lives are areas of vulnerability for all educators, and even more so for African American women and women of color. Societal stereotypes and caricatures of the lives of Black women often necessitate erecting boundaries between the public professorial persona and the private everydayness of life. While teaching through a pandemic has redefined those boundaries, there still exists a resistance to vulnerability with students, and to some degree, colleagues. Reciprocal vulnerability makes it possible for educators *and* students to bring their full selves into the classroom, rather than partitioning the self. Reciprocal vulnerability is an exchange of openness between instructor and co-learner that includes professional and personal data.

  The uniqueness of this class – all professional African American preaching women – created ripe conditions for reciprocal vulnerability. I chanced vulnerability as parent-preaching professor even as I welcomed their multiple preaching selves. Whereas I generally intentionally do not bring parenting tales into the classroom, IWWT students were informed that I was monitoring the movements of my newly licensed teen driver—while I was away from home

teaching all week. A womanist commitment to radical subjectivity, family, and community made this self-disclosure acceptable, even welcomed in the classroom community. In turn, students experienced the freedom to voice their own vulnerabilities that demanded their attention even as they struggled with fatigue and course demands. Further research will explore how reciprocal vulnerability might function in other teaching contexts.

Conclusion

ATS data suggests that African American preaching women continue to fill seats in seminaries and divinity schools at increasing rates.[647] Shifts in the student population require attentiveness to who is in the room and what gifts and graces they bring – before the formal instruction begins. Preaching is one of the many ministry practices engaged by African American women long before they are recognized as preachers, if they are ever recognized. Ordained or not, called or appointed to a pastorate or not, engaged in other full time vocational ministry or not: African American preaching women are critical to a 21st century preaching renaissance. This essay challenges teachers of preaching to reconsider how to embrace the experiences and fan the preaching flames of these preaching women.

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[647] Refer to Association of Theological Schools Annual Data Tables at https://www.ats.edu/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables.

Unmasking

White

Preaching

"Through a Glass Dimly: White Preaching and Epistemological Ignorance"
Chris Baker
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As it becomes increasingly clear that the Movement for Black Lives is today's Civil Rights Movement, it becomes equally clear that just as Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented the milquetoast preaching of white moderates, so much white liberal mainline Protestant preaching today fails to meet the challenge of this moment. Why is white preaching inadequate to the task of preaching in the face of systemic, structural racism and white supremacy? In order to answer this question, one needs to understand what makes white preaching white, and to have an account of the "whiteness" of white preaching that understands "whiteness," the relationship between "whiteness" and constructive theology, and how preaching as an act of doing theology is shaped by such "whiteness." Key to this is understanding "whiteness" as an epistemological formation, an "epistemology of ignorance" that shapes the contours of knowing; the bounds of the known, the mis-known, and the intentionally un-known. "Through a Glass Dimly: White Preaching and Epistemological Ignorance" will use resources from Philosophy of Race to construct an account of the epistemological ignorance of whiteness and how that shapes the theological approaches to race that then make their way into white pulpits.

"The Towering Sermon: Duke Chapel as Monument to White Supremacy"
Peace Lee and David Stark

In The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces, Roxanne Mountford asserts that the material spaces of preaching – "architecture, pulpits, and church communities- anticipate and reinforce" the status quo. She writes that church buildings "have a history written in stone and the social imagination that reminds even a casual passerby of the...authorities who dwell within." In short, the place of preaching matters; the space also preaches. Building on Mountford's scholarship, "The Towering Sermon: Duke Chapel as Monument to White Supremacy" seeks to argue that white supremacy has been proclaimed not just from within the church building but also through it in American Protestant spaces by using Duke Chapel as a case study. This essay takes seriously the task of analyzing the space of Duke Chapel as a sermon and offers historical, visual-spatial, political, and theological analysis of the material place of Duke Chapel, revealing it to be a building that cannot help but preach white supremacy.

"Preaching about Race, Immigration, and White Privilege: 2017 v. 2021"
Leah Schade
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"Preaching about Race, Immigration, and White Privilege: 2017 v. 2021" will compare the results of two surveys of mainline Protestant clergy in the United States conducted in 2017 and 2021 on the issues of race, immigration, and white privilege. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the surveys are designed to assess how preachers are approaching their sermons during this divisive time in our nation's history. The results from this comprehensive empirical research reveal the complexities and challenges of preaching about controversial social issues. The data will be analyzed for denominational, gender, job status, and income variations. When factoring in congregational characteristics such as size, geographic location, and the surrounding community of the church, we can gain insight into the variables affecting clergy willingness or hesitancy to preach sermons about race, immigration, and white privilege.

"White Fragility as a Barrier to Preaching about Racial Reconciliation"
Sarah Travis
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White fragility is a concept that maintains racial inequality insofar as white people have difficulty talking about race, racial difference, white privilege and superiority. Defensive responses to the topic of race arise from a desire to maintain dominance within the racial hierarchy. Any attempt to preach about racial inequality among white people may be sidelined by the fragility of the white person when it comes to notions of race. Drawing on the concept of white fragility, "White Fragility as a Barrier to Preaching about Racial Reconciliation" discusses barriers to preaching about racial reconciliation, with particular reference to the relationship among white settler Canadians and aboriginal peoples in Canada. White fragility must be confronted with persistence and sensitivity in order to unmask racial assumptions and lead to an environment in which reconciliation can occur.

"An Icon of Whiteness: Deconstructing the Pulpit as the Primary Locus of Preaching"
Chelsea Yarborough
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The preaching pulpit is a place of power, prestige, and exclusion. While powerful and important preaching has stemmed from it, centering and maintaining the pulpit as the primary space and place preaching occurs is a byproduct of whiteness that requires the one to be over the many. "An Icon of Whiteness: Deconstructing the Pulpit as the Primary Locus of Preaching" reimagines the spatial demarcation of preaching, considering the necessary ways in which we must move beyond this idea of where preaching happens and therefore, what preaching can be. Tracing the history of the pulpit, and the ways in which its exclusionary nature has reinforced white ideologies, this essay aims to liberate preaching and open the ears to the possibilities of the diversity of preaching spaces and places. Finally, this essay uplifts womanist preaching as a tool to move beyond this stagnant understanding of preaching.