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The Radical Nature of the Du Boisian Metanarrative and Economic Reparations

Joseph N. Evans, Ph.D.
Pastor, Mount Carmel Baptist Church
Washington, D.C.

Abstract: *This essay's purpose is to explore the radical nature and trajectory of the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. A significant part of this tradition is its metanarrative's form and function, which is first located in W. E. B. Du Bois' writings and secondly located in seminal writings and sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. The Du Boisian metanarrative is focused on economic justice, which here is economic reparations.*

I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.

I believe in the Devil and his angels, who wantonly work to narrow opportunity of struggling human beings, especially black; who spit in the faces of the fallen, strike them that cannot strike again, believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image which their Maker stamped on a brother's soul.

W.E.B. Du Bois¹

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

Martin Luther King Jr.²

Elsewhere, I have argued that the Du Boisian metanarrative is defined as the common pathology shared among the socio-marginalized whom Eurocentrism and its claims of cultural and racial superiority oppress. Herein, I am concerned with the central actions of black experiences through which people of African descent understand those experiences. This points toward people of African descent and how they construct their metanarratives by drawing meaningful threads between the central actions of their experiences and thereby weave their stories.³ In turn, the Du Boisian metanarrative is further defined as an autonomous alternative narrative. By autonomous, I mean that the Du Boisian metanarrative empowers preachers in the Du Boisian prophetic tradition to make truth claims independent from the Eurocentric metanarrative. Secondly, I mean that storytellers intentionally craft a narrative motivated to tell stories that are commonly understood and accepted by specific groups of people—thus a

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Credo," in *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (New York: Dover, 1999), 1.

² See James Washington, ed., "I Have a Dream," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 217.

³ Joseph Evans, *Lifting the Veil Over Eurocentrism: The Du Boisian Hermeneutic of Double Consciousness* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2014), 161–168.

metanarrative. Autonomy and alternative are significant characteristics of the Du Boisian metanarrative. In this way, those who employ this metanarrative are empowered to create conversational distance from the dominant culture's narrative form and instead support a homiletic that is crafted and shaped specifically to demand economic reparations for people of African descent.⁴

The aforementioned storytellers are Du Boisian preachers, men and women radicalized by the gospel and yearning to make visible the ethical principles of the Kingdom of God. The Du Boisian metanarrative informs these preachers, which adds synergy to the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. Oftentimes, this metanarrative differs from the traditional Eurocentric metanarrative that claims hegemonic-authorial claims over texts, political events, and human right's movements such as "Black Lives Matter." Another example is that the Du Boisian metanarrative serves as a way to begin a causal critique of people of African descent's historic and current struggle with economic inequality, oppression, and marginalization. Because of its autonomy, it exposes hegemonies that hide economic injustice beneath manipulations of race, exploitations of economics, and unimaginative politics. This unholy trinity is morally and legally unjustifiable. In comparison, the Du Boisian metanarrative shapes a homiletic that provides agency for preachers to demand economic reparations for people of African descent. This Du Boisian metanarrative explores a relationship between language constructs, its symbols, and how this relationship aids storytellers' abilities to persuade. As mentioned, these storytellers are preachers in the Du Boisian prophetic tradition called to be radically prophetic. This means preachers speak boldly in religious language and employ religious symbols in order to point out economic injustice and point toward economic justice, which here is defined as reparations.⁵

The Du Boisian metanarrative upsets the equilibrium of the establishment's status quo. It emerges and confronts the limitations that the predominantly Eurocentric metanarrative continues to posit. That is, biased storylines support hegemonic claims that suppress other hermeneutic, theological, and rhetorical truth claims; these storylines, I contend, inform Eurocentric homiletics. I further contend that these hegemonic claims support global economic oppression against people of color. (From this point forward, I will refer to people of color as people of African descent.) Furthermore, I contend that the Du Boisian metanarrative functions in religious rhetoric and homiletic form in writings and sermons can be demonstrated. Later, I point toward and compare some of King's writings and sermons alongside its forerunner's work, which are cited in the Du Bois' writings.

Like Du Bois, King was an economic reparationist. Of course King and Du Bois were not the only religionists who have made public demands for economic reparations.⁶ However, many

⁴ See Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann and Anthony P. Lombardo, "Framing Reparations Claims: Differences between the African and Jewish Social Movements for Reparations," in *African Studies Review* Vol. 50. No. 1 (April, 2007), 27–48; "Moreover, the principal actor promoting discussion of historical reparations as a new norm of justice was the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, which organized the Durban Conference" that addressed global reparations for people of African descent and people of color, 30.

⁵ Jonathon S. Kahn, "Divine Discontent as Religious Faith," in *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8–14.

⁶ Wyatt Tee Walker, "Case for Reparations" in *Style Weekly* (November 26, 2008) In his essay, Walker writes, "Now that Barack Obama has been elected as the first black president of the United States, he should seriously consider reparations for African-Americans. The issue has generated a lot of critical commentary from white and black pundits, some worrying that reparations would further erode race relations in the United States. The idea of reparations, however, is non-negotiable. Jews received reparations for their Holocaust. Native Americans received reparations for their genocide at the hands of Europeans. Japanese Americans received reparations for their treatment during World War II. Slavery for African-Americans is our Holocaust, yet we have not received

preachers and homileticians are not aware that many of King's published writings and sermons are concerned with economic restitution. Christian thinkers on the political and theological left and right may find consensus that Martin Luther King Jr. was a brilliant theologian and preacher. They may also agree that his works are a part of our American lexicon and religious canon (theology, ethics, and homiletics). However, they may not agree with King's adaptation of the Du Boisian metanarrative and how he employs it to persuade.⁷ Clearly King's hermeneutic does not rely upon the Eurocentric *hermeneutic canon*.⁸ His hermeneutic is informed by the alternative metanarrative that supports and complements the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. When considered in this way, it is conceded that some preachers and homileticians who are informed by Eurocentric claims may contest and even resist this essay's principle claim: Martin Luther King Jr.'s demand for economic reparations was prophetic and informed by the Du Boisian metanarrative.

Stated another way, King's prophetic rhetoric and alternative metanarrative are informed by and belong to the Du Boisian prophetic tradition.⁹ Prophetic rhetoric is filled with political and psychological symbolism.¹⁰ In short, rhetoric that addresses economic reparations is political and psychological symbolic language. What is more, this species of rhetoric (that argues for economic reparations) employs language and strategies that point toward people of African descent's historical endurance of suffering caused by Eurocentric economic injustice. Of import here, this alternative metanarrative is adaptable and agile for supporting homiletic claims that are informed by economic reparations rhetoric. Beyond this, the Du Boisian metanarrative empowers preachers and listeners to experience psychological and spiritual catharsis. In this way, the Du Boisian metanarrative is grounded in what is called elsewhere psychospiritual phenomena.¹¹ Moreover, this metanarrative is a catalyst for shaping an effective homiletic that causes debate in the psyche of diverse congregants and cultural stakeholders. Also at stake, this Du Boisian prophetic tradition seeks to transcend Westernized institutionalized impasses that hinder solutions to economic equality.

restitution." In this editorial, Walker's rhetoric is similar to King's "I Have a Dream" where he demands economic reparations. "In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the 'unalienable Rights' of 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'" See *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 102; and for commentary on "I Have a Dream," see Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 94.

⁷ Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment and Abolition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2002), 60–63. Bacon sees narrative as a form of persuasion. This means that narrative is also a species of rhetoric, as she explains: "[Frederick] Douglass's rhetoric goes beyond personal testimony, and he often presents strong arguments against slavery in narrative form . . . his framing of persuasion of narration can be seen as a reaction to the perspectives of antebellum society," 60.

⁸ John McClure, *Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Preaching* (Saint Louis Chalice, 2001), ix. See also Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Pulpit Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 15.

⁹ Joseph Evans, *Lifting the Veil Over Eurocentrism*, 162.

¹⁰ Harryette Mullen, "African Signs and Spirit Writing," in *African American Literary Theory: African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 626.

¹² Joseph Evans, *Lifting the Veil Over Eurocentrism*, 19.

We can decipher many causes of such institutionalized impasses. First, those who employ this metanarrative must concede that Westernized-Eurocentric economic policies and political polarization historically and currently resist and confront its claims. This impasse occurs because a demand for the abolishment of economic inequality is inherent in the debate, which is the continuation of the 19th century's abolitionist's movement against racial inequality. In essence, economic inequality is rooted in racial and political inequality. To achieve the laudatory goal of eradicating racial, economic, and political inequality, the Du Boisian preachers' goal is to craft a homiletic that bears the burden of confronting hegemonic policies that indeed protect racial, economic, and political inequality.

A second cause of resistance to an economic reparations debate is it threatens the hegemonic status quo.¹² Public economic reparations' debate further brings into question the West's "tried and true" economic system, namely capitalism, which is a Eurocentric invention and the West's most self-serving justification for economic inequality—thus the status quo. In addition, the economic reparation debate challenges religious and public opinion. Ultimately, economic reparations awarded to people of African descent changes global, racial, economic, and political balances, which might lead to an eschatological fulfillment of economic justice.¹³

A third cause of resistance is perhaps the most difficult impasse. This difficult impasse is supported by the manipulation of those whose egos are massaged by Eurocentrism's claims. Here, the Eurocentric metanarrative speaks as *ex-cathedra*—that is, above contradiction and therefore its storytellers, narratives, and adherents avoid critique from dissenting voices. Thus, the Du Boisian metanarrative is necessary in order to critique truth claims asserted by the Eurocentric metanarrative. Keep in mind, the Eurocentric metanarrative is the lens through which many preachers gaze when making homiletical claims. As an example, many preachers who preach in this tradition employ heroic illustrations and biased applications to ground biblical texts under their consideration. In contrast and furthermore, the Du Boisian metanarrative is necessary because an antithetical metanarrative functions against claims of moral superiority and legal immunity from all immoral acts against people of African descent. Thus the Eurocentric metanarrative creates exclusive cultural constructs that lead to racial, economic, and political advantages for Western culture's people of non-color—who are, in fact, globally in the minority.

A fourth cause of resistance is located in the dominant culture's belief system which largely controls private and public institutional spheres that form and shape the contours of debates in the private and public square. Economic reparation arguments are not new; they have been made for more than a century.¹⁴ Since then economic reparations have been and remain

¹² Hilary Beckles, Britain's *Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide* (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 2013), 176. Beckles writes, "The United States had already declared non-participation in objection of the word 'reparation' appearing on the draft agenda [Durban Conference on reparations that occurred in 2007]. The European Union and 'Western' countries threatened to remove themselves for the same reason. Colin Powell, the US secretary of state, and Condoleezza Rice, national security advisor, both African Americans, were bullish about the matter, stating that the world must not tell the United States how to handle its racial past and present." See also "Rice Says US Blacks Should Not Be Paid for Slavery," in *Daily Observer*, Monday September 10, 2001.

¹³ See Jesse J. Holland, "The United States Should Consider Reparations for African American Descendants of Slavery, A United Nation's Working Group said on Friday," *U.S. News and World Report*, [January 29, 2016], accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2016-01-29/un-working-group-suggests-us-work-on-racial-reconciliation>.

¹⁴ Mary Francis Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 4. "By the early twentieth century (more accurately 1899), her organization (Callie House), the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, according to federal officials, would

moral and legal arguments.¹⁵ What then does this essay suggest to be different? There is a small but open window of opportunity that depends on a growing groundswell of global opinion among people of African descent who share a common moral outrage caused by economic inequality. Still, a complete study of economic reparations is too broad for this essay and therefore ethical and editorial choices have been made. Notwithstanding, those who preach in the Du Boisian prophetic tradition need a homiletic that confronts this single most significant 21st century's opponent, which is economic inequality. Those who preach in the Du Boisian prophetic tradition demand abolishment of economic inequality through economic reparations for people of African descent.

This essay therefore explores an alternative metanarrative that homiletically empowers preachers to argue for economic reparations for people of African descent. A homiletic "how to do" list is not included here, but a homiletic for economic reparations must be employed in order to create conversational distance from Eurocentric exclusive heroic truth claims. Critical memory also is important to narrative development. I discuss this caveat later in this essay. For immediate consideration, it is important to note that I follow a historical line; that is, the discussion of narrative follows Du Bois from 1903 to 1940. Between these years, Du Bois writes among others, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The Negro Mind Reaches Out" in *The New Negro, Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* and *Dusk of Dawn* (the latter two books are autobiographical). It is because of Du Bois' writings, sociopolitical, socio-religious criticism, and activism that I credited Du Bois for challenging the hegemonic grip of Eurocentrism. I include in his canon the invention of this metanarrative and a similar hermeneutic of double consciousness—thus the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. My effort, here, is to focus on how Du Bois shapes his metanarrative, which I apply to economic reparations.

The Du Boisian Narrative: "Something to be pitied"

W.E.B. Du Bois made his career mark early and he remains a preeminent archetype for scholar activists. His pivotal work, *The Souls of Black Folk* was published in 1903. At the time, it was largely and negatively criticized by the vanguards of the establishment's institutional spheres.¹⁶ This reception occurred, in part, because the vanguard understood well that Du Bois had introduced a new Negro aesthetic that created conversational distance from the normative Eurocentric dominant metanarrative that degraded the Negro masses. Later you will see Du Bois' new Negro aesthetic is located in "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," an essay that appears in a groundbreaking work edited by a Howard University professor, Alain Locke—*The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925). Here, Du Bois demonstrates his understanding of Eurocentric institutional spheres that inform Westernized culture and canon. He further demonstrates that he understands that liberation for people of African descent must be a global effort, now known as pan-Africanism.¹⁷ Du Bois' focus in *Souls* begins to develop an alternative Negro narrative; a story that is told autonomously and independent of Eurocentric myths and truth claims. Du Bois' metanarrative empowers people of African descent to tell their own story.

swell to about 300,000, determined black people petitioning a government that barely recognized their existence and demanding a law ordering reparations for slavery."

¹⁵ See Rhoda E. Howard-Hassermann and Anthony P. Lombardo, "Framing Reparation's Claims," 32–33.

¹⁶ See Henry Gates, "Introduction" in *Souls*, xvi.

¹⁷ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century 1919–1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 45–52.

The Du Boisian metanarrative stands in stark contrast with the dominant cultural metanarrative which has exhausted blacks and whites globally with its heroic figures who share similar DNA with godlike figures found in Greek and Roman mythologies. Indeed the Eurocentric metanarrative distorts the past and continues to mask its role in the destruction of other peoples. Today these mythologies are believed widely. It further seems that the metanarrative which employs these mythologies passionately reinforces stereotypical-mythical views of past and current people of African descent's accomplishments. By implication this gloomy depiction predicts a gloomy future for the accomplishments of otherwise intellectuals.¹⁸ There are few academic scholars of African descent in the academy's halls, which includes the halls of religion. Ralph Ellison's prophetic claim remains contemporary in his protean work *The Invisible Man*.¹⁹

Du Bois began his metanarrative with critical memory development. He highlights three salient phases of critical memory, namely: the pathological, the therapeutic, and the disturbances of blocked memory.²⁰ Du Bois includes these phases in his metanarrative development because he wants to form his metanarrative as an affirmation of people of African descent. To do so, first he addresses the psychological effects that Eurocentrism has on the flawed dominant cultural metanarrative that continues to support dominant cultural hegemonies. In short, the dominant cultural hegemonies continue to have a grip on the Negro masses' psyche (people of African descent). The following excerpt captures the bruised psyche of the American Negro:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All nevertheless flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?²¹

This passage from "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in *Souls* speaks volumes. Those who fought at Mechanicsville are outraged by Southern hegemonies. Apparently Du Bois does not want his readers to confuse these characters with embittered Southerners over the Civil War's outcome and the emancipation of people of African descent. Indeed it appears that Du Bois is speaking of Northern people (or possibly someone from another region of the country). More than likely however; the character in this essay is representative of a Yankee Civil War veteran. An assumption is made here that Du Bois wants his readers to see themselves, namely Northern liberals, the majority of people who were predominantly the first readers of *Souls*, as duplicitous in the newly emancipated Negro's degradation. They too are aligned with Eurocentric values that reinforce deeply flawed cultural advantages.

Whether it is among so called sympathizers or hard-shell critics, it is clear that Du Bois shares with his audience his daily humiliation. That is, he has offered his readers a glimpse into his psyche, his double consciousness as something to be pitied:

¹⁸ John McClure, *Otherwise Preaching*, 2001. The reference here to McClure's work is to emphasis that otherwise means something or someone who thinks outside of the proverbial house looking for truth claims beyond traditional and conventional institutional spheres.

¹⁹ Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man* (New York, Random House, 1952).

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 57.

²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Spiritual Strivings" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 2005), 1–2.

After the Egyptian, and the Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity of the other world. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²²

In the first excerpt, “How does it feel to be a problem?” Du Bois points toward this relentless pathology as something to be pitied. People of non-color ask a similar contemporary question about people of African descent. The former may not be aware that this question alone resurfaces as a burning negative self-image embedded inside the Negro psyche. A second example, “Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?” is for the interrogator a kind of catharsis. Du Bois understands that aligning with the oppressed indeed is therapeutic purging. A third example is the disturbance of blocked memory. It appears that Du Bois guards his inner feelings from humiliating memories of the past as well as present acts of continual physical and psychological terrorism. Thus Du Bois responds to his past and present memories similarly as does his interrogator. Both block their unpleasant memories. On the one hand, the oppressor attempts to block memories of the benefactors of slavery, Jim and Jane Crow and apartheid; and on the other, the oppressed attempts to block memories of seething and lingering dehumanization and strangely both are possessed by double consciousness.

Indeed, in the second excerpt, I have located critical memory as double consciousness in these three phases. The first phase is pathological memory: “...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, of the other world.”²³ Here Du Bois points toward pathology that informs people of African descent's collective cultural worldview. Commonly held experiences and storylines are important for Du Bois' metanarrative development. For blacks, it signs something to be pitied. It also indicates Du Bois' intention is to create a heroic Negro, “gifted with a second-sight.” Another example of memory as pathology is Du Bois' expression of double consciousness: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²⁴ Here, Du Bois focuses on “something to be pitied” pathology. A third example is the disturbances of blocked memories. “One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”²⁵ signifies a daily coping mechanism to survive. This is an example of what previously has been characterized as disturbance of blocked memory. Double consciousness is an emotional response to socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and socio-psychological marginalization. It is important not to

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

lose sight of critical memory development, which is an important characteristic of the Du Boisian metanarrative formation.

The Du Boisian metanarrative however continues to evolve. Du Bois published “The Negro Mind Reaches Out” in the groundbreaking work *The New Negro* in 1925. Here Du Bois continues to develop his metanarrative as an alternative, the antithesis metanarrative. Ironically, Du Bois suggests that his metanarrative functions in multiple places where people of African descent are located geographically. This paradigm shift is located in the following passage where Du Bois alleges that a deliberate effort has been made to keep people of African descent struggling to survive racism in social isolation. Racism then is a part of a larger global construct that is economic and unjust:

Once upon a time in my younger years and in the dawn of this century I wrote: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” It was a pert and singing phrase which I then liked and which since I have often rehearsed to my soul and asked:—how far is this prophecy or speculation? To-day in the last years of the century's first quarter, let us examine the matter again, especially in the memory of that great event of these great years, the World War. Fruit of the bitter rivalries of economic imperialism, the roots of the catastrophe were in Africa, deeply entwined at bottom with the problems of the color line. And of the legacy left, the problems the world inherits hold the same fatal seed; world dissension and catastrophe still lurk in the unsolved problems of race relations. What then is the world view that the consideration of this question offers? Most men would agree that our present problem of problems was not the Color Problem, but what we call labor, the problem of allocating work and income in the tremendous and increasingly intricate world-embracing industrial machine that our civilization built...²⁶

This is a clear example of critical memory development. Here it is employed to express how people of African descent are affected by global conflict. The so-called Great War was believed to end all wars, but instead it further reinforced conditions associated with post colonialism. This truth claim further reinforces memory as pathological, the first phase of psychological phenomenon associated with memory. Thus the Eurocentric storyline emerges. In *Souls* to which Du Bois alludes, he focused on racism, the primary scourge of the earth. Here, seventeen years later, Du Bois permits his readers to observe his critical thought-evolution.

Du Bois describes the results of the Great War in this way: “And of the legacy left, the problems the world inherits hold the same fatal seed; world dissension and catastrophe still lurk in the unsolved problems of race relations.”²⁷ Du Bois claims racism still plagues people of African descent. The Great War unearthed another gravely looming problem that involves the color-line, a problem “...we call labor, the problem of allocating work and income in the tremendous and increasingly intricate world-embracing industrial machine that our civilization built.”²⁸ Herein, Du Bois’ metanarrative makes a distinct connection between racism and global economic injustice. In what follows, Du Bois suggests that study of the Negro problem has been too narrow in its scope: “Our good will is too often confined to that labor which we see and feel and exercise around us, rather than directed to the periphery of the vast circle, where unseen and

²⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 385.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

inarticulate, the determining factors are at work.”²⁹ He defines Eurocentrism as the guardian of Empire: “Modern imperialism and modern industrialism are one and the same system; root and branch of the same tree. The race problem is on the other side of the labor problem. . . . With nearly every great European empire to-day walks its dark colonial shadow.”³⁰

During that same period, Du Bois publishes *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil*. Writing in essay form, Du Bois forcefully confronts race and economic inequalities that he locates in labor disputes. Du Bois intends to make his readers aware that race and labor disputes are unjust economics and a global threat to people of African descent. The following excerpt is chosen from “The Hands of Ethiopia” in order for readers to appreciate further the global scope of the Du Boisian narrative:

One cannot ignore the extraordinary fact that a world campaign [is] beginning with the slave-trade and ending with the refusal to capitalize the word “Negro,” leading through a passionate defense of slavery by attributing every bestiality to blacks and finally culminating in the unconsciously trained millions of honest, modern men into the belief that black folk are sub-human. . . . Those who do believe in men, who know what black men have done in human history, who have taken pains to follow even superficially the story of the rise of the Negro in Africa, the West Indies, and the Americas of our day know that our modern contempt of Negroes rests upon no scientific foundation worth a moment’s attention. It is nothing more than a vicious habit of mind.³¹

What is important here, Du Bois “blames” Western plutocrats and oligarchs, those guardians, investors and benefactors of this “world campaign” as instigators of psychological terrorism enacted against people of African descent. This kind of terrorism is evidenced in the slave trade, which I purport is symbolically akin to recent police brutality in Florida, Baltimore, Chicago, and San Bernardino and other documented places around the world. Secondly, psychological terrorism includes those who refuse to respect the dignity of people of African descent, and here referring to them as “negro instead of Negro.” The campaign then reinforces an artificial storyline of superiority, which is Eurocentrism. This artificial storyline has denied the storyline of black accomplishment in Africa, the Caribbean, and America.

Du Bois’ *Darkwater* locates a final but disturbing example. It describes the East St. Louis race riots of 1917. Du Bois meticulously tells a graphic and compelling story about racial discrimination among blacks and whites. According to Du Bois, whites are afraid of free market capitalism and economic competition from blacks, who have migrated outside the *Jim Crow* South, to look for jobs and democratic justice. What is made obvious in the following passage is that an inherent social relationship exists between race, labor, and economics that indicate political hegemonies:

[After the Great War] Then the world changed; the civilization, built for culture, rebuilt itself for willful murder in Europe, Asia, America, and the Southern Seas. . . . The wants of common men were forgotten before the groan of giants. War brought subtle changes. Wages stood still while prices fattened. It was not that the white worker was threatened

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 385-386.

³¹ Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 41.

with starvation, but it was what was, after all, a more important question,—whether or not he should lose his front-room and victrola and even his dream Ford car.³²

In his essay “Of Work and Wealth,” Du Bois provides an amazingly accurate portrayal of an emerging white Middle America (the proletariat). An economic civilization, he writes, that was built for culture, became a changed culture and that happened because the culture became inseparable from its motivated economic interest. The people at the lower rungs of the economic ladder are conditioned to be satisfied with economic inequality, referenced here as a living room with a Victrola phonograph and the pathetic hopes of owning a Ford—the American car.

In 1940, Du Bois publishes *Dusk of Dawn*, which was the second of three autobiographies. Again, he has mastered essay in form. The following excerpt dramatizes Du Boisian metanarrative development. It is a brief look at what motivates and informs his invention, making it useful for homiletic consideration for Du Boisian preachers.

I think it was in Africa that I came more clearly to see the close connection between race and wealth. The fact that even in the minds of the most dogmatic supporters of race theories and believers in the inferiority of colored folks to white, there was a conscious or unconscious determination to increase their incomes by taking full advantage of this belief. And then gradually this thought was metamorphosed into a realization that the income bearing value of race prejudice was the cause and not the result of theories of race inferiority; that particularly in the United States the income of the Cotton Kingdom based on black slavery caused the passionate belief in Negro inferiority and the determination to enforce it even by arms.³³

Du Bois describes racism as a psychological pathology. It is motivated by selfishness which remains recognizable in post colonized Africa and beyond. Economic inequality then is not based on motivations and native intelligence but instead, it is grounded in psychologically racist classifications. It is simply irrational; it is morphed into the collective psyche of people influenced and conditioned by Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism’s tentacles have reached into the United States, and as I remind Du Boisian preachers and homileticians, “the Cotton Kingdom based on black slavery caused the passionate belief in Negro inferiority and the determination to enforce it even by arms.”³⁴

I have concluded that at the root of the Eurocentric metanarrative is an aggressive and imposed psychological terrorism. It imposes terrorism upon collective Negro and black psyches that are nearly if not permanently damaged. If this assertion is accurate, it sheds light on what motivated Du Bois to invent his metanarrative as an alternative to its antagonist, namely the Eurocentric metanarrative, its stories of heroism, traditions, and mythologies. Still, a natural question rises among thoughtful people: If we cannot believe the accuracies of Eurocentric cultural stories, why should we believe Eurocentric truth claims about Scripture, the nature of liberation, the person of God, or the identity of Jesus of Nazareth? This matters to preachers, those who proclaim biblical texts—the believability of their proclamations. What follows is an

³² Ibid., 50.

³³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward An Autobiography of A Race Concept* (Piscataway, NJ, 1984), 129–130.

³⁴ Ibid., 129.

attempt to locate truth claims supported by the Du Boisian metanarrative in the writings and preaching of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr., the Epitome of the Du Boisian Prophetic Tradition

An integral part of this metanarrative discussion is a consideration of epideictic rhetoric.³⁵ This species of rhetoric is more commonly known as “praise and blame.” It is important for preachers and homileticians to note that the Du Boisian metanarrative tells a persuasive story, which is the central focus of rhetoric.³⁶ I now turn to locate the Du Boisian metanarrative (and rhetoric) in King’s writings and sermons that focus on economic justice, particularly where he demands economic reparations. It is clear that King’s major writings employ our metanarrative as a species of rhetoric to craft arguments that shape his homiletic.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the epitome of the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. His brief public career was meteoric, courageous, and yes, prophetic. Here at the outset, I will argue that King understood the significance and importance of the Du Boisian metanarrative and he embraced it. The following excerpt from “Honor Dr. Du Bois” was an essay that first appeared in *Freedomways*, “a quarterly review of the freedom movement, [it] was a leading proactive journal edited by black Americans from the 1960s to the 1980s.”³⁷ Of Dr. Du Bois, King writes:

One idea [Du Bois] insistently taught was that Black people have been kept in oppression and deprivation by a poisonous fog of lies that depicted them as inferior, born deficient, and deservedly doomed to servitude to the grave. So assiduously has this poison been injected into the mind of America that its disease has infected not only whites but many Negroes. So long as the lie was believed the brutality and criminality of conduct toward the Negro was easy for the conscience to bear. The twisted logic ran: if the black man was inferior he was not oppressed – his place in society was appropriate to his meager talent and intellect.³⁸

King aligns with the Du Boisian prophetic tradition and metanarrative. If we return to phases of critical memory, we will notice that King has described an emotionally destructive pathology. Today many preachers see this visible parallel. That is, the Eurocentric metanarrative is seared psychologically into the brainwashed minds of many people of non-color and African descent. Many believe they have been commissioned to commit “brutality and criminality of conduct” against people of African descent.³⁹ Possessed with “twisted logic,” some believe that people of African descent can be forced back into a mythical parochial “place in society.”⁴⁰ King’s words however, serve as a testament. He intentionally appropriates and employs the Du Boisian metanarrative into his orality, written words, and activism. What is more, this brief passage sheds light for interpreters of King’s metanarrative and homiletic. Interpreters will notice that King is radicalized by the Du Boisian prophetic tradition.

King in fact adapts several aspects of the Du Boisian metanarrative into his philosophical point of departure. His metanarrative persuades and provides space to tell a pathological and

³⁵ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, ed. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1932), xxx.

³⁶ Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth*, 60–63.

³⁷ Martin Luther King Jr., *The Radical King: Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. Cornel West (Boston: Beacon, 2015), 113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

therapeutic story that gets around the dominant culture's collective disturbances of blocked memories. King understands Westernized culture and the Eurocentric metanarrative are constructs namely of race, economics, and politics. Like Du Bois, he sees them as a single thread. In the following passage, King further amplifies this premise when he comments on Du Bois' magisterial book, *Black Reconstruction*:

To understand why his study of the Reconstruction was a monumental achievement it is necessary to see it in context. White historians had for a century crudely distorted the Negro's role in the Reconstruction years. It was conscious and deliberate manipulation of history and the stakes were high. The Reconstruction period was a period in which black men had a small measure of freedom of action. If, as white historians tell it, Negroes wallowed in corruption, opportunism, displayed spectacular stupidity, were wanton, evil and ignorant, their case was made. They would have proved that freedom was dangerous in the hands of inferior beings. One generation after another of Americans were assiduously taught these falsehoods and the collective mind of America became poisoned with racism and stunted with myths.⁴¹

Notice that King "blames" white historians of conscious, deliberate, manipulation, and distortion; but notice also why! The stakes are high. It is obvious that economic reparations for people of African descent points toward what Du Bois and King discovered: Eurocentric intellectual dishonesty. Dishonesty is employed to retain sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic advantages. Unavoidable is King's indictment; he "blames" white historians, members of the Eurocentric establishment, vanguards of the Westernized canon, and guardians of the establishment's status quo for creating deliberate mythologies about themselves and casting themselves as superior to people of African descent. Intentionally then, we see that oligarchs through Eurocentric claims continue to mislead generations of Americans who are "assiduously taught these falsehoods and the collective mind of America [black, white, and all others] became poisoned with racism and stunted with myths."⁴²

This brief summary helps Du Boisian preachers and homileticians appreciate King's understanding and employment of the Du Boisian metanarrative. This understanding is significant for preachers who do, and who will argue for economic equality. These preachers hold that an alternative narrative is important to make rhetorical strategies that inform a homiletic crafted and shaped to reinforce biblical truth claims for economic reparations. As mentioned earlier, like Du Bois, King was an economic reparationist. It is my intention then to focus on King's economic reparations argument, which I believe is the thesis for the "I Have a Dream" speech:

One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast oceans of material wealth. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. . . . In a real sense we come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic

⁴¹ Ibid., 116. See also Jonathon S. Kahn, "Divine Discontent as Religious Faith," in *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 8–10. See also Edward Blum, "Rethinking Du Bois: Rethinking Race and Religion," in *W.E.B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 11; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

⁴² Ibid.

wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.” But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.⁴³

King was a master of sacred rhetoric and had few peers (Howard Thurman, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Vernon Johns, and Gardner Taylor are among the privileged few). Du Boisian preachers and homileticians will immediately notice that King sets the boundaries for his rhetorical discourse when he repeats. “One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty. . . . One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society.”⁴⁴ This is effective, in part, because King employs critical memory from the Du Boisian metanarrative. In this way, King discloses that because of psychological and economic terrorism, people of African descent possess negative self-image pathology. This pathology results from constant forms of oppression, such as *Jim and Jane Crow* laws and other sociopolitical gerrymanders. This refrain also marks time passed and distance traveled by people of African descent without attaining democratic equality. Adroitly, King then transitions to the present and frames his thesis: “In a real sense we come to our nation’s capital to cash a check.”⁴⁵

Some may interpret this now famous phrase only as metaphoric, but at close reading, it can be taken quite literally to signify that people of African American descent have come to the nation’s capital to demand economic reparations. King’s metanarrative is supported by rhetoric that follows historic and conventional lines. King grounds his argument in constitutional and legal rights that are guaranteed to all Americans. “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.” King expands his thesis argument. Economic reparations is also a moral mandate: “This [promissory] note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” King aligns the Civil rights movement with his personal convictions and activism with those convictions and activism represented in the content of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. By implication, the emotional and psychological yearnings are shared universal yearnings of all people. In short, like the white masses the Negro masses too are human.⁴⁶

King moves from “praising” the American declaration of freedom and equality to “blaming” the Eurocentric establishment for defaulting on said promises that all men and women

⁴³ James Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, 217.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “I Have a Dream” in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World* ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 101–106.

are democratically equal regardless of their ethnicities or orientations. His emphasis however is placed on the racial, economic, and politically deprived status of people of African descent, “America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’” King then speaks in the Du Bosian prophetic tradition when he remarks, “We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” What is of import here, King demands economic equality, that is, economic reparations. As civil and racial pressures continued to increase, King became more prophetic and his Du Boisian metanarrative became more edgy and complex.⁴⁷

On April 4, 1967, King preaches one of his most controversial sermons, “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence.” White liberal and conservative politicians knew King was speaking against American empire. Indeed this position is a significant part of his sermon but King speaks beyond Eurocentric in-house interests. King is concerned with implications associated with race, economics, and politics. King’s rhetorical strategy must be placed into context; he is burdened with America’s unwillingness to eradicate America’s poverty. Secondly, King is burdened by the escalation of the war. He knows that increased numbers of socio-marginalized people would die on bloodstained international soil, and people of African descent would disproportionately suffer the largest casualties and experience disproportionate fatalities. These factors would affect the Negro masses, emotionally, economically, and politically at home and abroad, including diasporic people of African descent. In short, the Vietnam War was an act of genocide against people of color and people of African descent; it was a global act of racial, economic, and political exploitation that continues to hinder the world’s populations. At the center of this mess is the United States; and its policies mirror Eurocentrism.

Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it not surprising that I have several reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a real promise of hope for the poor – both black and white – through the Poverty Program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the build-up in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonical destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” in *The Radical King*, 203–204.

King is Du Boisian here and shapes the contours of his metanarrative around race, economics, and politics as Du Bois does prominently in *Dusk of Dawn*. Du Boisian preachers and homileticians should notice that King deconstructs the purpose behind the war's escalation. First, the war increases plutocratic economic profit margins while continuing to decrease possibilities of abolishing economic inequality. This cycle is a vicious one. Poor blacks were dying disproportionately for their country that has denied them basic democratic rights guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁹

In 1968, King further demonstrates clearly that he understands the Du Boisian metanarrative helps conscientious citizens. Similarly Du Boisian preachers employ this Du Boisian invention to compare and contrast truth claims in light of the Eurocentric metanarrative. He writes: "Racism is no mere American phenomenon. Its vicious grasp knows no geographical boundaries. In fact, racism and its perennial ally—economic exploitation—provide the key to understanding most of the international complications of this generation."⁵⁰ As Du Bois has before him, King unmasks Eurocentrism:

I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective – the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income. . . . The problem [i.e., race, economics, and politics] indicates that our emphasis must be two-fold. We must create full employment or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other. Once they are placed in this position, we need to be concerned that the potential of the individual is not wasted. New forms of work that enhance the social good will have to be devised for those for whom traditional jobs are not available.⁵¹

Some have suggested that King was engaged in democratic socialism. Of course this charge seems pedantic and reveals hegemonic insecurities. More accurately, King shared Du Bois' prophetic worldview and metanarrative, which I have argued here has informed King. Realized eschatology or the radicalized Kingdom of God—The Beloved Community—influenced both of them. With this understanding, it is obvious that King sought solutions to eradicate economic inequality. For King, and many others, the eradication rests in economic reparations. Those who preach in the Du Boisian prophetic tradition and employ the Du Boisian metanarrative should not neglect King's last publication, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* The manuscript was completed in 1967. It was published in June of 1967. Recently, the book's content has entered into our world consciousness. His prophetic voice called for guaranteed income and full employment.

Conclusion

As a final note, I hope this essay demonstrates that I will continue to explore and develop the trajectory of the Du Boisian prophetic tradition. Until I am able to present theoretically the parts as a whole, it will continue to evolve toward a complete homiletic. In the meantime, I will continue to develop different aspects of the tradition. This essay establishes metanarrative as

⁴⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., on April 4, 1968, one year to the day after this sermon, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on a balcony of the Lorraine Hotel.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., "The World House," in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 162–163.

persuasion, which belongs to species of rhetoric. I contend that W. E. B. Du Bois provides Du Boisian preachers and homileticians a way forward to address the 21st century's single most significant and important moral issue—economic reparations.

Preaching in the Face of Poverty

Marvin A. McMickle, Ph.D.

President and Professor of Church Leadership
Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to reflect on Luke 16:19-24, using that text as the starting point for a discussion about preaching in the African American church's context. It also examines how African American preaching can and should speak to the growing issue of poverty and income inequality in the United States in general, but more precisely within the African American community in particular. Ultimately, this paper suggests some specific ways that sermons can challenge both adherents to the Christian faith and leaders in various arenas of civil society to respond to this growing problem of poverty and income inequality.*

For purposes of clarity, people are considered to be living in poverty in the United States when individual income is at or below the annual federal poverty guideline of \$12,000, or \$23,540¹ for a family of four. However, poverty can also be understood by considering three separate but inter-related headings. First, there is poverty that is experienced by the working poor, which involves people who have part-time employment or even multiple jobs, but do not earn enough income to earn their way out of poverty. The working poor still need government assistance, but part of their dilemma is if they earn even one dollar more than the federal guidelines that define poverty, they lose all of the federal benefits such as child-care subsidies and food stamps otherwise known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Thus, a built-in disadvantage exists for people who earn more than the federal guidelines allow but less than accepted standards of self-sufficiency.

The second issue involving poverty is extreme poverty, which includes persons who are subsisting on a daily income of \$1.90.² According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1.65 million American households are living in extreme poverty, and these households include 3.5 million children.³ In truth, white-non-Hispanics households head 61.2% of all families living in extreme poverty. However, 46% of all African American families living below the Federal Poverty Level are actually living in extreme poverty.⁴ According to a recently released report on poverty in the United States, my hometown of Rochester, New York finds that Rochester suffers with the highest rate of childhood poverty of all comparably sized cities (250,000) in the country with a rate of 50.1%. It also has the second-highest rate of poverty among individuals and families in the country with some neighborhoods that have 60% of the population living below the poverty level.⁵

¹ Tom DeMichele, "Federal Poverty Level Guidelines," Spokane, WA: *Media Solutions*, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://obamacarefacts.com/federal-poverty-level/>.

² Rene Heeskens, "Global Basic Income," Gelderland, Netherlands: *GBI Foundation*, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://globalincome.org/English/Facts.html>.

³ "Extreme Poverty on the Rise in the United States," Washington, DC: *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, 2013, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://nlihc.org/article/extreme-poverty-rise-united-states>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Progress Report: A Roadmap for Change," Rochester, NY: *United Way of Greater Rochester*, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, <https://www.uwrochester.org/UnitedWayOfRochester/media/Our-Work-Results/Documents/RMAPIProgressReportOctober2015.pdf>, 7.

The third issue involves concentrated poverty. This dilemma points to housing policies, and to the refusal of certain towns and neighborhoods to allow for the construction of low-income housing within their communities. Often referred to as NIMBY or “not in my backyard,” this is the notion that there should be housing that is made available for low-income persons and families, but many persons do not want such housing to be constructed anywhere near where they live themselves. These factors cloister together people in poverty in densely populated, demographically similar neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods are islands of despair cut off from quality public education, health care facilities, public transit connections for work and/or shopping, restaurants and places of entertainment with the exception of fast food outlets and an abundance of liquor stores. Living in poverty is hard enough, but being ghettoized in places that offer few if any visible opportunities or paths to escape that poverty or any role models or examples of persons who have managed to escape the grip of poverty is even worse.

In truth, the problem of income inequality and the devastating effects of poverty on the human spirit and on our society are not new in the United States. Writing in the *Federalist Papers* #10 on November 22, 1787, James Madison, one of the founders of this republic wrote “The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society.”⁶ The irony in this statement from my perspective as a member of the African American community is that my ancestors were part of neither faction (those who own property and those who do not). Our ancestors were listed as among the property that generated wealth for others. The United States Constitution, Article 1, section 1, clause 3 makes that fact explicit, stating that:

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other persons.⁷

While the so-called 3/5ths clause is no longer employed, the problem of wealth disparity and income inequality in the United States continues to be a matter of great concern. The U.S. Constitution enshrined the legacy of slavery. The offshoots of slavery, which were sharecropping, legalized segregation, the denial of voting rights, and the relentless exposure to terrorist attacks from the KKK and other white supremacist groups and individuals, have had an incalculable impact on the persistent levels of poverty that impacts African American communities to this day. In his book, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Aldon Morris describes “the tri-partite system of oppression” that locked African Americans into the margins of American society.⁸

The first part of that tri-partite system is maintaining people in abject poverty with no chance of escape through education, promotion, or the establishment of one’s own business. The

⁶ James Madison, “The Union as a Safeguard against Domestic Faction and Insurrection,” New York, NY: *foundingsfathers.info*, 1787, accessed February 1 2016, <http://www.foundingsfathers.info/federalistpapers/fed10.htm>.

⁷ “Constitution of the United States,” *The Charters of Freedom: “A New World Is at Hand”* (2016), http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html.

⁸ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1984), 1–2.

second part of the system involves the denial of voting rights so that no legislative solution to the problem of poverty could be pursued. The third and most brutal part of the system involved the regular use of physical intimidation and even death by the most torturous means imaginable for those in the African American community who dared to break out of their assigned and prescribed place in society.⁹

The reasons for poverty in America take many forms; the increasing concentration of wealth and political influence in the hands of fewer and fewer people certainly lead the list. To begin, the total compensation of CEOs in many U.S. corporations is over 200 times the salary paid to their workers. Some corporations pay their CEOs at a rate of 1000 times their median worker's salary.¹⁰ A recent study by the Harvard Business School revealed that it takes a typical worker at Starbucks or McDonald's more than six months to earn what each company's CEO earns in a single hour.¹¹ Those persons, and the banks and corporations they control, decide what factories are closed, what jobs are outsourced, what wages will be paid to workers, what levels of health care workers receive, and the number of days of maternity leave and sick days workers will be provided. They also decide what environmental regulations they will observe or circumvent. They decide what use or abuse of legal and illegal immigrant labor they will employ and at what wage level; usually offering wages and working conditions that lock many native born American citizens out of many sectors of the labor market.

Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C. wrote this about the facts of poverty in the United States:

[T]he United States ranks second out of 35 developed countries on the scale of what economists call "relative child poverty," with 23.1 percent of its children living in poverty. Only Romania ranked higher. It was another shameful reminder that, as economist Sheldon Danziger put it, "Among rich countries, the U.S. is exceptional. We are exceptional in our tolerance of poverty."¹²

Here is the dilemma involving poverty in the United States. You have an unconscionable concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of persons relative to the national population. You have "exceptional tolerance" for poverty even as it impacts the lives of children across the country. Add to these factors the role of America's original sin, which is racism, and the problems of poverty, extreme poverty, and concentrated poverty in the African American community comes more clearly into focus. Under related conditions elsewhere in the world, Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian liberation theologian, offers true and compelling insight:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jenny Che, "Here's How Outrageous the Pay Gap between CEOs and Workers Is," New York, NY: *The Huffington Post*, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ceo-worker-pay-gap_us_55ddc3c7e4b0a40aa3acd1c9.

¹¹ Ferdman, Robert A. "The Pay Gap between CEOs and Workers Is Much Worse Than You Realize," Washington, DC: *The Washington Post*, 2014, accessed February 1, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/09/25/the-pay-gap-between-ceos-and-workers-is-much-worse-than-you-realize/>.

¹² Edelman, Marian Wright. "Tolerance of Poverty," Washington, DC: *Children's Defense Fund*, 2012, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.childrensdefense.org/newsroom/child-watch-columns/child-watch-documents/tolerance-of-poverty.html>.

“Christians cannot forgo their responsibility to say a prophetic word about unjust economic conditions.”¹³

What has been stated above sets forth the problem of poverty in the United States. The looming questions become: Why is it important that preachers take the time to educate themselves about these issues and statistics? Why is it important for preachers to focus some of their sermons and their church programming, including their church budget, to address and respond to the issue of poverty? Gutierrez makes clear the importance of this work for preachers when he states:

All theological inquiry is contextual. Our context today is characterized by a glaring disparity between the rich and the poor. No serious Christian can quietly ignore this situation. It is no longer possible for someone to say “Well, I didn’t know” about the suffering of the poor. Poverty has a visibility today that it did not have in the past. The faces of the poor must now be confronted.

Gutierrez continues:

An active concern for the poor is not only an obligation for those who feel a political vocation; all Christians must take the Gospel message of justice and equality seriously. Christians cannot forgo their responsibility to say a prophetic word about unjust economic conditions. Poverty poses a major challenge to every Christian conscience and therefore to theology.¹⁴

The questions that arise for the preacher are, “How do I identify an angle or perspective from which this problem of poverty and its effects upon people can be addressed within the context of a Sunday morning sermon?” “What biblical texts offer a legitimate and insightful focus on the question of poverty that can be used by preachers as they consider the sermons they might want to preach on this subject?” In particular, this paper weighs the biblical text, Luke 16:19-24. This pericope clearly extends beyond verse 22 and the ultimate focus of the text touches upon more than simply the issue of poverty. Nevertheless, this text is unique among biblical passages for the way in which wealth disparity and the problem of being so called “exceptional” in the tolerance of poverty sit side-by-side.

The relevant part of the text for purposes of this paper reads as follows in the NRSV:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

¹³ Daniel Hartnett, “Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez,” New York, NY: *America Press, Inc.*, 2003, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/420/article/remembering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.”

The text begins with a description of a person’s wealth and prosperity. This person is simply described as “the rich man.” The first indicator of his wealth is his attire; he is dressed in purple and fine linen. Only those who could afford the cost of the dyes required to produce that color in a garment wore the color purple. One thinks about the woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira in Acts 16:14-15 who was able to provide hospitality to Paul largely on the basis of the wealth she had generated as someone who was a “dealer in purple cloth.” In addition to the outer garment made of purple, the story indicates an additional layer of clothing made of fine linen. More than simple cotton, fine linen is a higher level of quality and cost. In a world where people were largely confined to wearing clothing made of homespun cloth with no added colors included, this man’s attire was an easy indicator of his wealth and the conspicuous consumption he could easily afford.

The second indicator of his wealth was his lifestyle; “he feasted sumptuously every day.” This phrase points to more than his daily diet. The NIV (New International Version) translates the phrase to say, “He lived in luxury every day.” That speaks to his entire lifestyle; the appointments in his home and the resources he possessed to acquire anything he desired that might make his life more comfortable. This was not a man who squirreled away his money for a once-in-a-lifetime vacation. This was a man who spent every day living at a level of opulence that most people will never be able to enjoy. “He lived in luxury and ate sumptuously every day.” He was not worried about saving money for a rainy day; he had disposable income well beyond his three-to-six months of emergency funds.

The third indicator of his wealth is introduced at the same time the poor man named Lazarus enters the story, “At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus.” The text does not say “at his door.” The text says “at his gate.” Before you could get to his front door you had to enter through the gate that would then allow access to his door. He lived off of the sidewalk or the thoroughfare. One thinks about the scene in the film *Ben Hur* where a rich man lived in a lavish house that could only be approached when you came through the front gate and then passed through the garden that led to the front door. This man was not a common man of the people living at the same level as everyone else in town. This was a rich man, dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in luxury every day, and whose home could only be accessed when you got past his front gate.

The text then shifts from the rich man, often referred to by the Latin word *Dives*, to the poor man named Lazarus. There are several indicators attached to the description of Lazarus that allow for a sharp contrast between the man inside the house and the man lying outside the gate. The first indicator of his impoverished condition is that every day someone came and laid Lazarus outside the gate of the rich man. Lazarus did not walk there; probably because he was crippled or perhaps even paralyzed. Lazarus was not described as standing or even sitting outside the gate; he was described as being laid there by others. The author not only describes Lazarus by his physical disabilities, but also describes him by his economic condition; he was a beggar. This description linked him in many ways to the paralyzed beggar who sought money from Peter and John in Acts 3:1-6. Rather than living in luxury every day, these paralyzed beggars lived only by the charity, mercy, and compassion of those who passed by them. In short, beggars sat in the place where they were laid each day. The sole hope of the paralyzed beggars was that those

who passed by them would notice them, and that those who noticed them would respond to their desperate condition.

The effects of a physical disease that complicated his life further describe Lazarus' condition. He was covered in sores! This was likely not a matter of leprosy, because such an affliction in the first-century AD in Palestine would have prevented him from being carried through the streets by others to the gate of a prominent community member. Often leprosy results in isolation or in the humiliating practice of hearing and stating the word "unclean." Like Job before him, Lazarus probably suffered with boils that covered his body from "the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7).

That miserable physical condition was made even more humiliating by the fact that dogs came and licked the open sores on his body. This detail points to two separate but important indicators. First, Lazarus did not have the strength or the mobility to prevent the dogs from licking the open sores on his body. More important, however, is the type of dogs licking those open sores. There are two words for dogs in the Greek New Testament. One word is *kunarium*, which refers to little dogs or puppies that were sometimes allowed to eat crumbs from the table. The other word is *kuon*, which means full-grown dogs that were no longer allowed in the home or welcomed by homeowners. The word for dogs used in Luke 16:21 is *kuon*. People in first-century Palestine did not keep these full-grown dogs as house pets as is so commonly done in the US in the twenty-first century. *Kuon* dogs were scavengers that ate out of garbage heaps and piles of trash.¹⁵ They were not subject to any vaccinations that would rid them of any infections like rabies. Instead, these dogs that had been eating from the garbage piles of the city, carrying with them unimaginable germs and bacteria, were left to freely lick the open sores on the body of Lazarus.

Here is the contrast that Jesus communicates in this passage. Great wealth on the one hand, and great poverty and sickness on the other hand co-existing side-by-side, day after day, year after year. The rich man ate sumptuously and lived in luxury every day. Every day the poor man was laid outside his gate, covered in sores, being licked by the tongues of scavenger dogs. Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; crumbs that would have been offered to the *kurion* (puppies), but were never offered to Lazarus. The phrase "longed to eat" suggests that Lazarus would gladly have eaten the crumbs from the rich man's table, but the rich man never offered even the crumbs from his table to the poor beggar who was laid outside his gate. The rich man never noticed, never responded to, and never showed any interest in the condition of Lazarus even though he passed by him every day as he entered and exited through his front gate. The rich man was guilty of the sin pointed to by Gustavo Gutierrez when he said, "It is no longer possible for someone to say, 'Well, I didn't know' about the suffering of the poor."¹⁶

The text then shifts from markedly different conditions during life to their markedly different conditions after death. When Lazarus dies, he is carried by the angels to heaven where he is placed in the arms of Abraham. When the rich man dies he is buried and awakens in Hades where he is now being tormented in the flames. While the text moves to discuss other matters, it is at this point that readers must pause and ask the theological and ethical question: "Why did the rich man end up in hell?" There is something to be said about the request to have Lazarus remain in a subordinate position and bring cool water to Hades so that he could quench the rich man's

¹⁵ Miller, Madeline S. and J. Lane Miller, "Dogs," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Madeline S. Miller and J. Lane Miller (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 139.

¹⁶ Hartnett.

thirst. There is also something to be said about the dialogue between Abraham and the rich man, asking that Lazarus be sent to the rich man's brothers to warn them so they do not have to face the fate that this rich man was enduring in the flames of Hades.

All of these issues follow after the initial fact that the rich man who dressed magnificently and ate sumptuously every day was now sentenced to eternal torment in Hades. Why? The answer cannot be so simple as to say that it was his wealth that prevented him from entering into heaven. Abraham himself had been a wealthy man during his earthly life, and now Lazarus was sitting in heaven in the presence of Abraham. Jesus did warn that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25). However, while Jesus warned that it was difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, he did not say it was impossible. The deciding factor is not the possession of wealth, but what a rich person chose to do with that wealth.

Preachers and homileticians need to focus not simply on the evils of wealth as an end in itself, but on challenging of persons with financial resources to use their money in ways that can bless and benefit those around them. It could easily be concluded that the reason why the rich man was confined to Hades is because at no point in the text, and probably at no point in his life did he ever pay attention to the poverty, sickness, humiliation and hunger that was laid outside his front gate every day. The way in which this rich man responded to Lazarus calls to mind the story of the person who was asked, "Which is worse, ignorance or apathy?" The person's answer was, "I don't know and I don't care." Apathy is the sin of the rich man in Luke 16:19-24 that finds him in Hades; he never took the time to notice or care about the poor man just outside his front gate.

This text has much to say to and about African American preachers and the sermons delivered in African American churches. There may be a tendency to describe the entire African American community through the condition of Lazarus. I made this error during my first year in seminary in a paper that I wrote for Old Testament scholar James A. Sanders. Coming out of the experience of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and enrolling in seminary in 1970, I sought to make the case that the best way to read this text in Luke 16:19-24 was as a racial paradigm in which all of white society was embodied in the character of the rich man, and all of black society was lumped into the misery of Lazarus. Such a reading of the text served to focus all of the blame and all of the responsibility for correcting and addressing the problem of wealth disparity solely on white people. This rationale suggested that the black community was victimized, paralyzed, and reduced to waiting upon the benevolence of others.

Sanders offered a not-so-subtle rebuke to my analysis by saying that "when you come away from a biblical text feeling better about yourself, you can be reasonably sure that you have misread that text." Since the text was not approachable as a racial paradigm that exempted black people from any responsibility in addressing the issue of wealth disparity, it could only be concluded that the text was, in fact, a class paradigm in which two people of the same racial or ethnic group lived side-by-side, or at least encountered each other on a daily basis. By this reading of the text, one can and should ask the question of whether or not most black churches in the United States are more like the rich man than they are like Lazarus?

Preachers need to challenge many black churches with the prospect that many persons who are part of congregations may end up in Hades, not because their worship format is improper, or because their sanctuaries are improperly adorned, but because every Sunday they come and leave their churches without noticing or responding to the Lazarus-like conditions

existing outside their sanctuary doors. Most black churches still sit within inner-city communities, even if the members of those churches have long since moved out of those neighborhoods to safer and more prosperous communities. The question then arises, what should inner-city black congregations do about the squalor and poverty that exist in their church neighborhoods? For some the answer is to simply relocate the church outside of those communities where their membership is not troubled by the people and problems that are found on every street corner and in every alleyway. However, for those persons who for whatever reason choose to remain in their inner city locations, this passage in Luke 16:19-24 becomes a haunting problem.

With parking lots crowded with expensive luxury cars, with persons inside the church dressed in expensive designer clothing, and with substantial amounts of money being raised every Sunday to maintain the beauty and comfort-level of the church sanctuary and other gathering spaces, what should those churches be asked or expected to do about the problems of the people that are just outside their sanctuary doors? In my thirty-four years as a Senior Pastor and in my 44 years as an ordained member of the clergy who has worked with predominantly if not exclusively African American congregations, it has been a regular and consistent challenge to get those churches to take any interest in or responsibility for the surrounding community.

In his 1963 "I Have A Dream" speech, delivered at The March on Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about America's black communities as "islands of poverty and despair surrounded by an ocean of material prosperity."¹⁷ That visual image of prosperity and poverty co-existing within close proximity to one another is reinforced by the central finding of the 1968 Kerner Commission Report that sought to identify the root causes of the urban violence that broke out in cities across the country between 1965 and 1968. That report concluded that America had become "Two nations, one black and one white, separate and unequal."¹⁸ In this country, there is no doubt that there are multiple reasons for the existence of two Americas, ranging from failing public schools, to urban violence, fragile families, mass incarceration, and discrimination in hiring and promotions. A great economic gap exists between blacks and whites. However, focusing on that fact and its causes is not the aim of this paper. What this paper seeks to address is how black churches and black preachers can stop being mere spectators of this problem as they come and go from their churches weekly. Using Luke 16:19-24 as a point of reference, this paper argues that African American churches and those who preach there must be challenged to find their proper place within this parable. On the whole, the membership rolls of most African American churches are not filled with people who fit the profile of Lazarus; sick, impoverished, hungry and humiliated. Rather, most African American churches, including every one that I have served or belonged to are characterized by the lifestyle of the rich man in the parable; well dressed, well fed, well housed and generally well employed, but largely detached from and disinterested in the conditions of people living in poverty who are just outside the church doors.

To be sure, there were persons within those congregations whose lives were closer to Lazarus than to the rich man, but they never represented the majority of those congregations, or the majority of most congregations in the African American church community. So the challenge remains for African American preachers to find ways to speak to the horrific problem of poverty

¹⁷ James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 217.

¹⁸ Otto Kerner, "The Report on the National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorders." ed. United States Department of Justice: *National Institute of Justice*, 1967, 1.

as it impacts people not only around the world but also around the corner, and not only across the country but also across the street from where their churches are located. Not only that, but their sermon objectives should persuade congregations and individual members to work together to address suffering going on around them.

This is not an easy task since most people do not come to church looking for something else to do or for something else over which to worry. They come looking for personal hope and relief from problems that confront them every day. Preachers should never fail to address these concerns. Much can be learned from what Cleophus LaRue refers to as domains of concern in black preaching. In his book, *The Heart of Black Preaching* LaRue lists five domains or themes that have regularly been employed by black preachers over more than a one-hundred-year period of time. Those domains are personal piety, care of the soul, social justice, corporate concerns, and the maintenance of the institutional church.¹⁹

There are times when a sermon should focus on matters of personal spiritual formation. There are times when the souls of people need to be soothed and sustained as they pass through times of great personal trial and suffering. There are times to be specific about life of a particular ethnic group that needs to be addressed; issues such as black-on-black crime or the staggeringly high level at which black males drop out of school. There are times when a sermon needs to address the day-to-day needs of the local church; volunteers, stewardship, leadership development, as well as building and staff maintenance challenges. However, as LaRue suggests, there must be those times when the focus of a sermon turns to matters of social justice, which in this instance involves the face of—causes of—problems related to poverty.

On more than a few occasions, I have been reminded of the words of Amos who said, “Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall...but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph” (Amos 6:4 and 6). When I hear churches and pastors suggesting that the worship of God is their primary interest, with no interest being expressed or exhibited in the issues of apparent poverty and human suffering that are visible all around them, another passage from Amos also comes to mind that needs to be employed in weekly preaching: “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:21-24). It is clear that the biblical prophets objected to people who preferred religious rituals over works of righteousness, and who would rather sacrifice an animal to atone for their own sins than to sacrifice some of their personal wealth to address the unmet needs of food and clothing for their neighbors.

James Henry Harris, writing in *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective*, clearly speaks to this issue when describing so many African American congregations as “introverted churches.” He says:

The church acts like an independent entity, divorced from the suffering of the external world. It is basically silent, peaceful, and harmonious – failing miserably to understand the need to abandon its neutrality on issues of social and political justice . . . basking instead in the beauty of its bricks and mortar and the melodious syncretizing of its chancel choirs, pipe organs, and grand pianos.²⁰

¹⁹ Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 21–25.

²⁰ James Henry Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 34–35.

Harris continues by saying:

This approach may contribute to numerical growth and internal excitement. However, what the church must do is “move beyond personal conversion to community transformation. The concept of community needs to be expanded to include the whole community – the church and the world. However, as long as the church is parochial and introverted in its approach to ministry, it will continue in its failure to effect liberation and change in the United States and the world.”²¹

It is absolutely essential that preachers within the African American church community challenge their congregations to see the necessity of opening their doors, their hearts and even their wallets and church budgets to address the issue of poverty and the issues of economic injustice in the United States. It is not enough to point the finger of blame at those outside of the community who may contribute to the problem of poverty; although, such advocacy and prophetic critique are always in order. It is also not enough to look elsewhere for help from government grants and funding; although, some problems and projects do require a level of financial investment that only a governmental or corporate entity can provide.

In addition to those necessary aspects of advocacy and programming, there remains a public need for Christians to demonstrate the love of God by showing love and concern for those just outside the doors of their local churches, those whom Jesus described as “the least of these” (Matthew 25:31-44). It is long past time for African American churches located in the inner-city areas of this country to stop waiting for checks from their members and start writing checks that intend to meet the human needs in their surrounding community that are difficult if not impossible to ignore. Churches, under the guidance of biblical principles, need to imagine ways by which they can offer help and hope to persons who live within the immediate neighborhood where churches are located. Failure to do so is to place black preachers and black churches in the position of the rich man in Luke 16:19-24 who failed to notice the poor man just outside his gate and who ended in Hades as a consequence of that failure. We need preaching from the pulpits of African American churches that seeks to raise these issues on a continuing basis.

This argument brings us to a question of what might be preventing African American preachers from addressing the issues of poverty in their sermons. At least one answer to that question is the fixation that many African American preachers have with what is commonly called “prosperity theology” or Word of Faith theology. This notion emerged in the 1950s in the preaching and teaching of Kenneth Hagin of Tulsa, Oklahoma, but was popularized in the African American community by Frederick Eikerenkoetter, also known as “Rev. Ike.” His only advice for dealing with poverty is captured in this phrase, “The best thing you can do for the poor is not be one of them.”²² This philosophy professes that “God’s primary focus is to bless followers with health and wealth.”²³

Over the years, an increasing number of preachers in the African American community embrace and espouse this theology. They also tend to agree with another idea from Rev. Ike,

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Dennis McLellan, “Rev. Ike Dies at 74; Minister Preached Gospel of Prosperity”, Los Angeles, CA: *Los Angeles Times*, 2009, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-reverend-ike31-2009jul31-story.html>.

²³ Marvin McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2006), 106.

namely: “It is not the love of money that is the root of all evil. It is the lack of money.”²⁴ The clear successor to Rev. Ike in this ministry approach is Creflo Dollar, referred to in *Business Week* as “Cashflow Dollar” because of the estimated \$70 million raised by his ministry each year.²⁵ He heads a 25,000-member congregation in Atlanta, GA. In addition, Dollar leads a 5000-member church that meets regularly in New York’s Madison Square Garden. He recently announced the need for his followers to raise \$65 million so he that could purchase a new, private jet to shuttle back and forth between his two congregations.²⁶ As I argue at length in *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?*, it is increasingly harder to see or hear African American preachers functioning as prophets because too many have become intoxicated by the pursuit of “profits.”²⁷

Luke Powery refers to prosperity theology and the preaching that flows from it as “candy theology.” This term surfaced in an interview with Gardner Taylor. In 2006. Dr. Taylor spoke about the willingness of his daughter to eat candy because of its pleasant taste, even though it offered no nutritional value. Powery then points out that this fixation on prosperity theology does not flow from anything found in scripture. Instead, it is the result of “teleconditioning,” or an understanding of the Christian faith that is conditioned by what one views through television and internet broadcasts of noted prosperity preachers. The perceived prosperity of the preachers viewed on TV serves to validate their message.”²⁸ William Swift of Rice University writes that the apparent prosperity of the preacher delivering this message of wealth and health is essential to the process because “the preacher’s wealth is confirmation of what they are preaching.”²⁹ Luke Powery capsulizes the problem when he states, “there are many mega-churches that are preaching a mini-gospel at times, one that promotes a feel-good religion.”³⁰

Ultimately, the problem with prosperity theology is that too often it reflects the dichotomy of wealth and poverty living in close proximity—similar to that described in Luke 16: 19-24. What differs is the prosperity of many of the people inside the church contrasts the poverty of so many of the people who live in the neighborhoods that surround those churches. Add to this fact the obstacle of sermons that regularly focus more on the “good life” spoken of by John Locke rather than the “abundant life” spoken of by Jesus Christ, it becomes easy to see why the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is both insightful and challenging for African American preachers and to the people for whom their sermons are intended. Here is how preaching under the influence of prosperity theology so often occurs:

It is preached from the pulpit of churches that are located in neighborhoods resembling bombed-out war zones. They are infested with drugs, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS, prostitution and domestic violence. The poverty rate among school-age children approaches 65%.

²⁴ McClellan, “Rev. Ike Dies at 74; Minister Preached Gospel of Prosperity.”

²⁵ Brian Grow, “Church of the Mighty Dollar,” *Business Week Online*, May 23, 2005, accessed February 2, 2016, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_21/b3934016_mz001.htm?campaign_i.

²⁶ Abby Ohlheiser, “Pastor Creflo Dollar Might Get His \$65 Million Private Jet after All,” Washington, DC: *The Washington Post*, 2015, accessed February 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/06/03/pastor-creflo-dollar-might-get-his-65-million-private-jet-after-all/>.

²⁷ McMickle, 99–118.

²⁸ Luke Powery, *Dem Dry Bones* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 4–5.

²⁹ Carolyn Tuft and Bill Smith. “TV Evangelists Call Signals from the Same Playbook,” St. Louis, MO: *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 2003, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://culteducation.com/group/1050-joyce-meyer/13457-tv-evangelists-call-signals-from-the-same-playbook.html>.

³⁰ Powery, 8.

More often than not there is little interaction between those black congregations and the people and/or the problems that reside just outside the doors of their church buildings.³¹

Karl Barth quotes Paul Tillich in the book *The Preaching of the Gospel*. Tillich states, “Preaching must always be done with an awareness of the present moment.”³² With that challenge in mind, African American preachers need to direct more of their attention to the issues of poverty, economic justice, and the wealth disparity just outside the door of their churches. There may be no more urgent issue confronting the African American community as a whole than this single problem. Failure to respond to this issue both from the pulpit and the pew could result in a great many church-going people dying and waking up in Hades!

³¹ McMickle, 89.

³² Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 54.

Slave Prosperity Gospel

Debra J. Mumford, Ph.D.

Frank H. Caldwell Professor of Homiletics
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

Abstract: *Contrary to popular belief, what is known today as the prosperity gospel did not emerge ex nihilo in 1962 from the preaching of Kenneth E. Hagin. Long before Hagin began preaching his message that God wants Christians to be rich and experience good physical health, Protestant preachers of many different sects integrated their faith in Jesus Christ with their commitment to capitalism to justify theologically and to perpetuate socially the institution of African chattel slavery. This integration of theology and capitalism formed the first prosperity gospel of the New World: the slave prosperity gospel.*

This essay traces the origins of the slave prosperity gospel to understand better how *gospel* has the ability to shape and be shaped by ideology and culture. The development of slave prosperity gospel evolved in four distinct movements, based in historical periods.

The First Movement (1452–1558)

European capitalists and papal authorization initiated the West African slave trade. Based on the presumption that Popes wield Godly authority over all of God's creation, on June 18, 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued a call to "Holy War" in *Dum Diversas*, a papal bull giving the Portuguese the right to "attack, conquer and subjugate Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ" wherever they happened to be.¹ The bull authorized the conquerors to subjugate their captives into perpetual slavery. This edict applied to recently explored territories along the West Coast of Africa. The Portuguese later appealed to Nicholas V for authorization not only to enslave Africans but also to sell them. In 1455 Nicholas V issued *Romanus Pontifex*, which expanded the authority to the Portuguese capitalists to acquire Africans through violence or trade.² In return, the Pope granted remission of sins to kings, all participants, and those who furnished money or troops for the expeditions.

Christopher Columbus is credited with making the continent of Europe aware that North and South America existed. The Spanish monarchy sponsored his thirty-six day voyage, which concluded in August of 1492. At this time Columbus claimed the Bahamas on behalf of Spain.³ His supposed "discovery" came during a rivalry between European nations for geographical expansion of their territories. Though Columbus made his voyage on behalf of Spain, Portugal also asserted a claim to the new territories. The Portuguese based their claim on Nicholas V's papal bull of 1455.⁴ In 1493, the Pope issued a series of bulls that awarded all territories east of

¹ Richard Raiswell, "Nicholas V, Papal Bulls of" in *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery, Volume II*, ed. Junius P. Rodriguez (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1997), 469.

² Ibid.

³ Biography.com Editors, "Christopher Columbus Biography," New York, NY: *A & E Television Networks*, 2015, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/christopher-columbus-9254209>.

⁴ Pope Nicholas V, "Romanus Pontifex," Rome, Italy: *Carnegie Institution of Washington*, 1455, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.nativeweb.org/pages/legal/indig-romanus-pontifex.html>. Many aspects of this document are mindboggling. First, any one person believed that he had the God given right to determine the fates of people throughout the world. Second, in the name of Christianity people could be held in perpetual slavery. Three, the name of Christ was used to wreak havoc upon people of many other nations—especially Africans in this case.

Cape Verde Islands to Portugal and those to the west to Spain. Spain was ultimately awarded Brazil in the Treaty of Tordesillas. Other European nations like France, Denmark and England factually denied that the Pope had the right to “give and take kingdoms to whomsoever he pleased.”⁵ As a result, European nations continued to struggle for colonial territories. Through these struggles, England emerged the clear victor. Thus, to the victor goes the spoils!

In 1553 a group of London merchants set out on a mission to expand English trade. They returned two years later with ivory, gold, Malaguetta peppers, and five Africans from Ghana. The Africans were taught English and later returned to Ghana to serve as interpreters for future English traders.⁶

The Second Movement (1559–1640)

England experienced a political, theological, and cultural sea change when Elizabeth I was crowned Queen of England in 1559. Upon ascending to the throne, she re-established Protestantism by establishing the Church of England and decided that it was no longer necessary to adhere to the will of the Papacy. Rather than adhering to previously issued papal bulls, she embarked on her own mission to expand colonization and trade. In 1561, the Queen provided ships and provisions to adventurers and merchants who returned to England with more commodities and more Africans.⁷ The Atlantic Slave Trade officially began with Englishman John Hawkins in 1562 who captured 300 slaves by sword and other means along the Guinea coast.⁸ Because estate owners in the Dominican Republic needed cheap labor for their sugar and tobacco plantations, Hawkins sold to them one hundred and twenty-five Africans.⁹

The Third Movement – North American British Colonies (1640–1819)

The seventeenth century was one of political unrest in England. The 1640’s brought civil war under the reign of Charles I, followed by the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, and then the subsequent restoration of the monarchy with Charles II in 1660.¹⁰ During this time, working class people suffered from poverty, hunger, and unemployment. For them, the prospect of escaping to a New World had great appeal. Like many other English citizens, they dreamed of owning their own land for what they considered a more prosperous future.¹¹ However, it was not only the working classes who were interested in the New World. Some who wanted to make the journey were members of the gentry, people of higher social class. Investors recruited the gentry

⁵ Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 4. Williams’ work remains one of the most comprehensive published treatments of the Atlantic slave trade. Williams includes in his work details of the slave trade in the United States and the West Indies. In addition, he provides details of the beneficiaries of the slave trade, which were not simply plantation owners in the West Indies and North American colonies like Virginia. The major beneficiary was England itself. England established a monopoly of trade in which only English ships and English merchandise could be traded. This monopoly gave rise to industries such as shipbuilding, roperies, and clothing merchants. Williams contends that the mammoth profits from the slave trade served to undergird the establishment of British capitalism when capital earned directly from the slave trade was put into banks, which financed cotton factories, brewers, liquor merchants, and grocers.

⁶ Black Presence, “Adventurers and Slavers,” London, England: *The National Archives*, 1991, accessed November 28, 2015, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/adventurers.htm.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Williams, 99–100.

⁹ Black Presence.

¹⁰ Kolchin, 9.

¹¹ Archibald Andrews Marks, “Life at Jamestown,” Williamsburg, VA: *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation*, 2007, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www.historyisfun.org/visitus/documents/LifeatJamestown.pdf>, 3.

to help found new colonies.¹² In addition, those religiously persecuted sought to live in a place where they would be allowed to worship according to the dictates of their consciences. Though people chose to make the trip to North America for different reasons, many heard stories of a faraway place with a moderate climate, rich soil, and abundant waterways that were conducive for agriculture.¹³

While the citizens of England had various reasons for wanting to live in the New World, the government had its own interests. If they could establish British colonies in North America, they could expand their ability to conduct trade throughout the world. For example, if the colonies were able to produce raw materials such as lumber, then lumber would be one less commodity England would need to purchase from other nations. In turn, the colonies could become markets for goods produced in England.¹⁴ With economic interest in mind, Britain issued charters for colonies with three different types of government: royal, proprietary, and corporate.¹⁵ The proprietary and royal charters maintained direct reporting relationships with the British government. The corporate colonies were more independent. In 1776, nine of the thirteen colonies were royal.¹⁶

When the English decided to cross the Atlantic to settle in the New World, they encountered several challenges. The first challenge was cost. Making the trip to the new world required large sums of money. Therefore, royal, corporate, or independent sponsorship was necessary. The second challenge was the environment. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, America was a wilderness. A large percentage of people who made the early voyages died within a year of their arrival from malnutrition, starvation, disease, oppressive heat, unbearable cold, Native American attacks, murder, or suicide.¹⁷ Such was the case of the Jamestown settlement. One hundred and four men and boys were members of the group who settled in the New World in April of 1607. By the time a new group of settlers arrived in January of 1608, only thirty-eight of the original one hundred and four were alive. Of the thirty-eight, only ten were able to do physical labor because of illness.¹⁸ The first attempt to establish an English settlement on Roanoke Island in North Carolina in 1587 suffered an even worse fate. Two years after one hundred and twenty men, women, and children landed on the Island, they disappeared.¹⁹ Though there were many theories about their fates, no one actually knows what happened to them.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619–1877* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1993), 24.

¹⁴ Marks.

¹⁵ Nelson Klose and Robert Francis Jones, *United States History to 1877* (Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1994), 34.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), 23.

¹⁸ Marks.

¹⁹ Richard Carney, "Roanoke Island," Raleigh, NC: *North Carolina History Project*, 2015, accessed November 28, 2015, <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/commentary/25/entry>. Sir Walter Raleigh, a wealthy Englishman, received a charter from Queen Elizabeth I in 1584 to establish an English colony. After sponsoring several expeditions, Raleigh sent John White with 120 men, women, and children to settle a colony in 1587. The first English Christian child was born, on August 18, 1587, was Virginia Dare. In November 1587, White sailed back to England to report to Elizabeth I about the colony. When he returned two years later, the colonists had disappeared. The only sign that remained of the colonists were the letters "CRO" carved in a tree and the word "CROATOAN" carved on an entry post. White search for the colonists but never found them. This colony became a North Carolina legend and deemed "The Lost Colony."

Despite these early experiences, many made the journey with hope of realizing a better and more profitable future. During the early years, more people crossed the Atlantic determined that expansive trade could be realized through the production of crops such as tobacco and cotton. The largest obstacle to maximize trade and profit was labor. A large labor force was necessary for large-scale production. Settlers first attempted to establish a labor force with Native American populations. However, colonists complained that Native Americans were “haughty” and refused to work properly. Native American men in agricultural labor brought the colonists face-to-face with a cultural roadblock. Native American men refused to engage in agricultural labor because in their culture it was women’s work. Also, engaging in supervised labor was a very new and different experience. In addition, the Natives used their intimate knowledge of the terrain to escape captivity and then to conspire against their captors.²⁰

After failing to find a needed labor force, colonists enlisted poor white populations. Some of these came as indentured servants, signing contracts that bound them to serve for agreed upon periods of time in return for their passage.²¹ The ship captains sold to the highest bidders other poor whites, known as “redemptioners” because they arranged with the captain to pay for their passage within a certain time period, if they were unable to pay. The British government sent to the New World another group of poor whites, who were convicted criminals, to serve as laborers for a pre-determined period of time.²² In 1661, religious intolerance provided another source of free white labor. Quakers who refused to take the Crown’s Oath of Allegiance were transported to the New World and forced into service on plantations.²³ Poor whites who made the journey were mostly young men. Some engaged in skilled trades such as blacksmiths and carpentry. Most worked as agricultural laborers under the supervision of men who tried to maximize their labor before their time of servitude expired. Some escaped their toil. If they were apprehended, they were whipped and branded, and their period of servitude was extended.²⁴ As the years passed, new immigrants were not the only ones who became indentured servants. Citizens of the colonies who found themselves unable to pay their debts became convicted criminals and then forced into indentured servitude. Sometimes they even served multiple terms.²⁵

Indentured practices, however, presented several challenging issues. Indentured servants sometimes accepted food and clothing after declaring unwillingness to immigrate and then sued for unlawful detention when they were imprisoned. As the population of the colonies increased, white indentured servants escaped and blended into the local population. In addition, some indentured servants expected to receive land at the end of their contracts.

When the demand for free labor became greater than the supply of indentured servants, the English turned to Africans. African slaves could not blend among the local populations if they escaped captivity like the whites. African slaves did not have intimate knowledge of their geographical environment like the Native Americans. Over the long term, African labor was

²⁰ Kolchin, 8. The English discovered that enslaving people on their home turf was difficult if not impossible. As a result, they found it more profitable to export them to other locales once they had been captured in battle. For example, in 1676, after Massachusetts settlers conquered the Native leader Metacom, they sold his wife, children, and many of his followers as slaves to the West Indies.

²¹ Williams, 9.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 13. Swearing oaths to secular powers was against Quaker beliefs. Imprisoning people for their dissent was common practice. Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society 1655–1725* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 2000), 183.

²⁴ Kolchin, 9–10.

²⁵ Ibid.

cheaper. Though the initial purchase price of African labor was higher, it was a better long-term investment—especially since, unlike white labor, the female slaves passed along their slave status to their children.²⁶

Under the monarchy of Charles II in 1672, Britain formed the *Royal Adventures into Africa Company* (which was later reformed and renamed the *Royal African Company*). This company held a monopoly in the African slave trade and included, among its membership, representatives of the royal family and the aristocracy.²⁷ With the establishment of the Royal African Company, the British passionately pursued a monopoly on trade. What became known as the transatlantic slave trade formed a triangular exchange: ships left Europe bound for Africa with British manufactured goods such as guns, cloth, and beer; their ships landed in Africa and exchanged British manufactured goods for slaves; their ships left Africa with slaves and landed in North America or the West Indies where they exchanged slaves for goods such as sugar, rum, and tobacco; their ships returned to Europe where they sold goods traded in the Americas for healthy profits.

Before slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833 and in the United States in 1865, slavery grew into an industry that brought tremendous profits to people on both sides of the Atlantic. Many people and institutions profited from the slave trade: British slave ship owners and the colonies that could only use British ships when engaging in trade,²⁸ slave traders who bought and sold slaves, plantation owners who used slaves to grow and harvest crops, planters who invested their profits in manufacturing which helped to finance the Industrial Revolution,²⁹ factory owners in Britain who made and sold traded goods such as guns since colonies could only buy British goods unless the goods were first taken to England,³⁰ manufacturers in British factories that included glassware for rum and refined raw sugar, West African leaders who were involved in capturing and selling other Africans, the port cities and businesses that grew up around the slave trade, banks and lenders who made loans to merchants to finance long voyages, ordinary people who worked in factories, and small businesses who made goods that were sold to people in West Africa.³¹

More than six million Africans were transported on British vessels before slavery was finally abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833.³² During that dark period of world history millions of people profited socially and financially from slave labor. Since the institution of slavery was the source of economic well-being for millions of people, justification for its perpetuation originated from many different societal sectors including religious ones.

Slave Prosperity Theology

Many Protestant newcomers to the colonies not only embraced slavery personally by becoming slave owners, they used the Bible to justify the institution of slavery and developed their own *slave prosperity gospel*. Slave prosperity gospel is defined here as

²⁶ Ibid, 13.

²⁷ Black Presence, "Britain and the Trade," London, England: *The National Archives*, 2003, accessed December 19, 2015, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/africa_caribbean/britain_trade.htm.

²⁸ Williams, 56.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The Abolition Project, "British Involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," London, England: *East of England Broadband Network*, 2009, accessed November 28, 2015, http://abolition.e2bn.org/slavery_45.html.

³² Marika Sherwood, "Britain, Slavery and the Trade in Enslaved Africans," London, England: *Institute of Historical Research*, 2007, accessed November 28, 2015, <http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/sherwood.html#17t>.

Christian preaching that includes the death and resurrection of Jesus but also the benefit of financial prosperity.

A Puritan pastor and Harvard graduate, Cotton Mather, developed and propagated one of the earliest slave prosperity gospels in 1706.³³ Mather delineated the tenants of his gospel in the essay *The Negro Christianized: An Essay to Excite and Assist That Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity*. With this essay, Mather had two goals: to convince slave masters to convert their slaves to Christianity and to provide slave owners with guidelines to educate their slaves into Christian faith. The education section of the essay includes a longer and shorter catechism.

Mather wrote definitively that it was the duty of Christians who owned slaves to share their faith with their slaves. He then proceeded to address slave owners' particular concerns, such as the belief that slaves would have to be set free after Baptism. Mather assured slave owners that baptism was not a license for manumission. Indeed, quite the opposite. Baptism in particular and Christianizing slaves in general had benefits: better and more financially profitable slaves. Mather used the words of the Apostle Paul in Philemon to justify his contention that Christianized slaves could be profitable:

Your *Servants* will be the *Better Servants*, for being made *Christian Servants*. To *Christianize* them aright, will be to *fill them with all Goodness*. *Christianity* is nothing but a very Mass of Universal *Goodness*. Were your *Servants* well tinged with the Spirit of *Christianity*, it would render them exceeding *Dutiful* unto their *Masters*, exceeding *Patient* under their *Masters*, exceeding faithful in their *Business*, and afraid of speaking or doing anything that may justly displease you.³⁴

Onesimus was doubtless a *Slave*: but this poor *Slave*, on whose behalf a great Apostle of God was more than a little concerned; yea, one Book in our Bible was Written on his behalf! When he was *Christianized*, it was presently said unto his *Master*, Philem. 11. *In time past he was unprofitable to thee, but now he will be profitable*.³⁵

With the catechisms in mind, we get a glimpse of Mather's Protestant theology, anthropology, and ethic. Africans were slaves because God called them to be slaves. If they served Jesus Christ faithfully in their calling and lived Godly lives by not sinning against God, they would be

³³ Reiner Smolinski, "Biography: Cotton Mather," Atlanta, GA: *Georgia State University*, 2011, accessed August 9, 2015, <http://matherproject.org/node/22>. Cotton Mather was a Puritan pastor, philosopher, and scientist who wrote over 450 books and pamphlets during his lifetime. His unusual name was a combination of his maternal grandfather's name (John Cotton) and his family name (Mather). He was the pastor of Boston's Second Church (Congregational). Among his many publications, he produced one of the most comprehensive medical handbooks in colonial America, *The Angel of Bethesda*. He also published more than fifty works related to eschatology. Mather's many scientific and theological achievements have been eclipsed by his role in the Salem witch trials in which he had people investigated for witchcraft.

³⁴ Cotton Mather, "The Negro Christianized: An Essay to Excite and Assist That Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity (1706)," Boston, MA: *University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/28/>, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

rewarded with eternal happiness in heaven. It was only in heaven where they would enjoy rest from all of their labors and troubles.

Tell them; *That if they Serve God patiently and cheerfully in the Condition which he orders for them, their condition will very quickly be infinitely mended, in Eternal Happiness.* Show them, that it is GOD who has caused them to be *Servants*; and that they Serve JESUS CHRIST, while they are at Work for their *Masters*, if they are *Faithful* and *Honest Servants*, and if they do cheerfully what they do, because the Lord JESUS CHRIST has bid them to do it; and that, if they give themselves up to JESUS CHRIST, and keep always afraid of Sinning against Him, it won't be *Long* before they shall be in a most *Glorious Condition*; It can't be *Long* before they Dy, and *then!* they shall *Rest* from all their Labours, and all their Troubles, and they shall be Companions of *angels* in the Glories of a *Paradise*.

If taken out of context, it would be easy to presume that Mather's contention that African slaves were called by God to be slaves and that this error was based solely on race. As previously mentioned, this assumption ignores the status-based social hierarchical structure of 18th century England. Mather believed that God assigned people to their place in society.³⁶ At the top of Mather's hierarchical social structure were the nobility. At the bottom were the laboring poor. Though people could move from one level of the hierarchy to another, people generally accepted their caste assignments, responsibilities, and privileges of their ascribed status. Therefore, Mather's advice to slave masters may have been a reflection of his acceptance of English status hierarchy. To Mather, God called Africans, like many white English men and women, to occupy a low social status.

Left out of the *slave prosperity gospel* are sections of the Bible that would lead slaves to believe that they should be free, such as the entire book of Exodus or Luke 4. Passages such as Ephesians 6:5 ("slaves, obey your masters...") were highly recommended. The Ten Commandments were part of the catechism with slight modifications such as:

Q. *What is the Tenth Commandment?*

A. Thou shalt not Covet.

Q. *What is the meaning of it?*

A. I must be Patient and Content with such a Condition as God has ordered for me.

The catechism includes each of the Ten Commandments. However, they are also interpreted intentionally for slaves. In the example above, the tenth commandment was interpreted to encourage slaves to be content and satisfied with their enslaved condition. The task of slaveholders was to persuade slaves that God created them for slavery. By attributing their enslaved condition to God, Mather undoubtedly hoped slaves would be persuaded to accept their forced servitude.

Fear of the wrath of God was used to persuade slaves to accept Christ as savior. Mather instructed slave masters to tell the slaves that God was angry with them because of their sinful state. If they died in that sinful state, their endured earthly suffering would pale in comparison to

³⁶ Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: New History* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 2008), 47–48.

the suffering they would experience in hell. Also slaves were taught that Jesus was “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” He would look upon “sorry slaves” who believed in Him and prepare a mansion for them in heaven.³⁷

This *slave prosperity gospel* conflated faithfulness to God with service to the slave master so that slaves could only please God when they pleased the slave master. Only God could reward them when they met the many standards of the slave master. Slaves who pleased their slave masters were financially profitable to the slave masters as well. Therefore, the greatest financial beneficiaries of the *slave prosperity gospel* were the slave masters. Slaves benefitted spiritually by being introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ and receiving the spiritual reward of an afterlife with God.

Mather cited Colossians 4:1 as evidence that it was the will of God for masters to impart just and equal treatment upon their slaves. While Mather encouraged masters to teach slaves that God called them to be slaves, he taught that God mandated masters to treat their slaves humanely by feeding them, clothing them, affording them “convenient rest,” and allowing them to live comfortable lives.³⁸

Missing from Mather’s gospel was a racialized ideology. In one section of his essay, Mather refutes slaveholders’ objections to introducing their slaves to Christianity. Some slaveholders believed that it was a waste of time and energy to Christianize slaves because they lacked reason:

It has been cavilled, by some, that it is questionable whether the *Negroes* have *Rational Souls*, or no. But let that *Bruitish* insinuation be never whispered any more. Certainly, their *Discourse*, will abundantly prove, that they have *Reason*. *Reason* shows itself in the Design which they daily act upon. The vast improvement that *Education* has made upon *some* of them, argues that there is a *Reasonable Soul* in *all* of them.³⁹

In another statement, he counters those who consider Africans to be less than human:

An old Roman, and Pagan, would call upon the Owner of such Servants, *Homines tamen esse memento*. They are *Men*, and not *Beasts* that you have bought, and they must be used accordingly. ’Tis true; They are *Barbarous*. But so were our own *Ancestors*. The Britons were in many things as *Barbarous*, but a little before our Saviours Nativity, as the *Negroes* are at this day if there be any Credit in *Cæsars Commentaries*. *Christianity* will be the best cure for this *Barbarity*.⁴⁰

While Mather denies that Africans are beasts, he also denies that they are any more barbarous than their white ancestors before they too were converted to Christianity. Mather’s slave prosperity gospel held five key teachings: God condoned slavery; God called slaves to be slaves; God obligated slave masters to share the good news of Jesus Christ with their slaves; slaves who were converted to Christianity made better, more profitable slaves; only select sections of the Bible should be used to preach and teach slaves.

The Fourth Movement (1820–1865)

³⁷ Mather, 20.

³⁸ Ibid., 3.

³⁹ Mather, 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 14–15.

Mather's slave prosperity gospel was one of the first forms. A second form of slave prosperity gospel was developed in defense of the institution of slavery during a period when abolitionists were gaining social and political support. The Second Great Awakening of the 1820's led by evangelists such as Charles Grandison Finney inspired many revival attenders to live more Godly lives.⁴¹ Out of the Second Great Awakening emerged social initiatives such as the abolitionist movement. Abolitionists including David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips used all of their available resources, from Newspaper commentary to public proclamation, to influence public opinion to abolish slavery.⁴²

In an attempt to counter abolitionist momentum, this second form of the prosperity gospel had one element that Mather's lacked: racialized ideology. Charles Colcock, an attorney and a Harvard graduate, was an eager proponent of this second form of the slave prosperity gospel. In 1842, he published a book called *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*.⁴³ This text included an anthropology that characterized African slaves as morally deficient beings who required the paternalistic efforts of whites for their spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being.⁴⁴

While Jones, like Cotton Mather, wrote his slave prosperity theology with slave owners in mind, Jones' intended audience included the wider public. Jones attempted to change public objections to African enslavement. To this end, he included a history of slavery and anthropology. In his anthropology, he contrasted the degraded moral character of the Negroes with the stellar moral character of people of the "fair Caucasian variety." He wrote that Negroes are "ignorant, vulgar, full of vice and speak broken English."⁴⁵ They are also "duplicitous, dishonest, tricky and cunning."⁴⁶ Their character includes being "idle, dissolute, criminal and worthless."⁴⁷ Jones wrote that people of the fair Caucasian variety, on the other hand, have given birth to the most civilized nations of ancient and modern times. They have also exhibited stellar moral and intellectual powers. According to Jones, the Caucasian race stands at the head of the human race. The Negro race is at the bottom. Therefore, Caucasians are superior to Negroes and Negroes are

⁴¹ "Second Great Awakening," Columbus, OH: *Ohio History Central*, 2006, accessed December 24, 2015, http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Second_Great_Awakening?rec=1532.

⁴² "African-American Abolitionists," Philadelphia, PA: *The Independence Hall Association*, 2008, accessed December 24, 2015, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/28b.asp>.

⁴³ Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (Savannah, GA: Thomas Purse Printer, 1842). Charles Colcock Jones was born in Liberty County in Georgia in 1804. He attended South Carolina College, Columbia. He graduated from then Princeton College and Harvard Law. He practiced law and served as mayor in Savannah. He also practiced law in New York during the Civil War. He was the author of many archeological and antiquarian works. Jones wrote this manual for Christians in 1842. During this period abolitionists were publicly advocating an end to slavery. Jones' work, and other writing during this period, reflects the need of slave owners to justify slavery's continuance. They make their case by adopting a racialized ideology and integrating it with their theology.

⁴⁴ Anthropology is the study of humankind. It includes the study of human behavior, differences in body shapes and sizes, customs, clothing, food, speech, religion, and worldviews. Anthropology has four main subfields: sociocultural, biological, archaeology, linguistic anthropology. See David Givens, "What Is Anthropology?" Boston, MA: *Boston University Arts & Sciences*, 2015, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.bu.edu/anthrop/about/what-is-anthropology/>.

⁴⁵ Jones does not acknowledge the reality of English being the second language of first generation slaves or the reality of withholding education from Africans that could have improved their English speaking abilities.

⁴⁶ Jones, 104.

⁴⁷ Jones, 103-4.

inferior to Caucasians. Superiority mandates that the behavior of Negroes be regulated, which means that they should not be released en masse into any city lest they serve as a “corrupting influence.”⁴⁸ Since Negroes are completely dependent on whites for their moral improvement, it is the moral obligation of white Christians to attend to their spiritual and moral needs.⁴⁹

Like Mather’s slave prosperity gospel, Jones used the fear of God to provide incentive for slaves to accept Christ as savior. He admonished slave masters not to abuse their slaves. They were to treat slaves with kindness and show gratitude for their work.⁵⁰ While Mather’s slave prosperity gospel provided catechisms to teach slaves about the Christian faith, Jones’ gospel referenced catechisms while admonishing slave masters to deny slaves two particular rights: the right to read the Bible and the right to preach the gospel. Rationale for denying these two rights was not provided. However, it is not difficult to surmise that slaves who could read the Bible may come across parts of the Bible that inspired resistance and liberation. It is also not difficult to surmise that slave preachers may not preach a message of submissiveness and contentment with their enslavement.

Why Slave Prosperity Gospel Matters Today

Reflection on the slave prosperity gospel reminds us that Christianity has not simply been complicit in the perpetuation of racialized ideology but helped generate it. As a result, followers of Christ must help eradicate it. The racialized ideology and anthropology of the slave prosperity gospel are woven deeply into the fabric of our society. Recent highly publicized incidents of police brutality such as the deaths of Laquan McDonald in Chicago and Sandra Bland in Texas demonstrate that some in society still perceive people of African descent as criminals who pose a threat to the wellbeing of others simply because of the color of their skin.

Followers of Christ should closely study the slave prosperity gospel to acknowledge and to understand that its anthropology and racialized ideology shapes the ways we perceive and interact with one another on every level of our society. We will never be able to fulfill the Godly mandate to love all of our neighbors as ourselves if we allow racism to guide our thinking.

Followers of Christ should closely study the slave prosperity gospel to understand how the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for people who are oppressed by the various teachings of the slave prosperity gospel. People who are victimized by systems that perpetuate the ideology espoused in the slave prosperity gospel need to know that Jesus came to set them free from the racism that binds them. As members of the body of Christ we must allow the love of Christ to guide our actions on behalf of others.

We must confront racialized ideology, anthropology, and theology with a gospel of liberation and an affirming anthropology. Biblical texts such as Psalm 139 are instrumental:

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well. (Psa 139:13-14 NRS)

⁴⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁹ Jones, 174.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Through preaching we can affirm that wonderful are all of God's works, all of God's creation.

Homileticians teach pastors and faith leaders that sermons should be relevant to the people in their congregations. This instruction underscores that sermons directly impact the lives and well-being of the people present in the pews. In addition we must recognize that congregations in the United States are still, by and large, racially segregated spaces. As a result, preachers must not only preach to the people in the pews but to those whom are not represented. Catherine and Justo Gonzalez remind preachers to speak empowering and healing words:

The pastor whose preaching begins to accustom a congregation to hearing such words [words from the powerless that highlight the necessity of change] has made great strides in enabling the mission of the church to go forward in the midst of a very new reality in the world. Such preaching could also begin to heal divisions within denominations caused by differing worldviews and assumptions. To bring the absent powerless into the sermon wherever they belong in the biblical text can have these effects.⁵¹

Combating racism contributes to a liberated ontology—a reconstructed sense of being that shapes the daily, lived reality of all people. In this liberated ontology, people are empowered to conceive a new way of being that impacts self-consciousness, enables the racialized to dream big dreams of what they can do and become in the world, and compels those with racist conceptions to reconstruct and ground their anthropology in reality rather than stereotypes and falsely constructed personas.

Though the slave prosperity gospel was originally intended to maintain the institution of chattel slavery, in its second iteration it also helped to inscribe deeply a racialized ideology into the fabric of our society. Since the church helped to create and perpetuate racism, we have an obligation to help annihilate it.

⁵¹ Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 74.

**“The Truth Is Always Relevant”:
Race and Economics in Contemporary African American Preaching¹**

Frank A. Thomas, Ph.D.

Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics
Christian Theological Seminary

Abstract: *Through activating and empowering preaching in the mid 20th century, though admittedly by a few, the civil rights movement flourished and brought significant change to American society. Addressing the need for preaching on race and economics in the contemporary African American community, this article explores how the church can engage, assist, and reach Millennials, who seek the reemergence of mass social justice movements. If the church does not address race and economics, or is not thoughtful and skilled in addressing these issues, Millennials will consider the church not relevant to their needs and struggles. Will the relevance of 21st century sermons and churches be obvious and empowering to the mass social justice movements of today?*

To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.

James Baldwin

The hip-hop and business mogul Jay-Z, in his critically acclaimed and surprisingly exegetical tour de force, *Decoded*, makes this penetrating statement:

. . . for hip hop to grow to its potential and stay relevant for another generation we have to keep pushing deeper and deeper into the biggest subjects and doing it with real honesty. The truth is always relevant.²

The context of Jay-Z’s comments is that he believes musical genres can die because they lose their “signature and vitality,” and other musical forms “steal their fire,” and ultimately these genres will go the way of disco and the blues. Some would debate the demise of the blues, but his point is if hip-hop is to stay relevant to another generation, it must push deeper and deeper into the biggest subjects with real honesty. Jay-Z’s insightful maxim is that facing the biggest subjects with real depth and honesty brings truth—and truth is always relevant.

I teach preaching and I have applied Jay-Z’s statement to churches, seminaries, and denominations that are trying to figure out how to stay relevant amidst the painful decline of mainline churches and religious institutions in a post-modern culture that is increasingly secular, diverse, and non-traditional. For many Millennials and Gen-Xers, the church is not a priority; and, as a result, white American Millennials are non-affiliating in alarmingly large numbers. My paraphrase of Jay-Z is to suggest that churches, seminaries, and denominations must push deeper and deeper into the biggest subjects, with real honesty. Otherwise, irrelevance pushes religious institutions further to the fringe of culture and society, and eventually to the place of anachronism.

¹ For review of this essay within a fuller treatment of black preaching, see Frank Thomas’ upcoming book, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*, to be released published by Abingdon Press, Fall 2016.

² Jay-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011), 277.

If irrelevance pushed religious institutions to the fringe of society, at least some of that irrelevance is a result of the preaching. If preaching does not engage the biggest subjects with real depth and honesty, then preaching itself will go the way of disco, and for Jay-Z, the blues. Black preaching will go the way of the comedic caricatures that television shows and movies characterize, such as in *The Blues Brothers*. Preaching and preachers will only be respected for their comedic entertainment as emotional relief, or for ceremonial chaplaincy in invocations, weddings, funerals, dire emergencies, and in time of crisis such as terrorism. Neither preaching nor preachers will be consulted or valued for the most important ongoing civic, social, political, economic, and spiritual issues in the lives of young people. If the church does not move from exclusion to inclusion and diversity, from insistence on gradualism and patience to sensing urgency, from charismatic leadership to collaboration, from a focus on appeasing the white majority and conservative ideology in the church and nation to listening and responding positively to the pain, hurt, anger, and activism of young people and new movements, then the church will be a relic and holdover from an old worldview that refuses to face new 21st century flattened hierarchies and consensus building.

In this article, I want to discuss the relevancy of the church through its preaching to this present generation of young African American people. Youth in the black church by and large still remain in the African American church, unlike youth in the majority population. They have identified their major concerns as police violence, brutality, and accountability, or as some have said, “the right to not die prematurely,” which are intricately and ultimately connected to issues of race and economics. How then does the church remain relevant?

After witnessing the killing of so many unarmed young black men and women by police, and in several cases non-police, young people are saying clearly and loudly, “enough is enough.” They have formed their own dispersed movement, most visibly known as Black Lives Matter, but with many other coalitions and organizations as well, such as Dream Defenders, Coalition Against Police Violence, Black Youth Project 100, Tribe X, and Lost Voices. And not just within the borders of the United States, Black Lives Matter has become a global movement stretching to Palestine, Canada, and Ghana. As Janaya Khan says:

Black Lives Matter has become a transformative outlet for all black people from different historical, cultural, socioeconomic and political identities. It is a source of solidarity for the survivors of colonization, exploitation, capitalism and police brutality.³

In turn, churches must question if religious institutions, inclusive of denominations and seminaries, are relevant to these organizations. How relevant is our preaching in black churches to this movement? And, if a preacher wants to be relevant to this movement how and what would the preacher preach? Let’s begin by contrasting the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s with our present new movement of primarily African American young people.

Civil Rights Movement and the New Movement

Many references compare the new movement to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Through dynamic and relevant preaching that empowered activism, the civil rights movement flourished, broke the back of segregation, and brought significant change to American

³ Janaya Khan, “Black Lives Matter Has Become a Global Movement,” *The Root*, August 7, 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2015/08/black_lives_matter_has_become_a_global_movement.html.

society. It is virtually indisputable that preaching was central and vital to the civil rights movement. While the preaching and addresses of Martin Luther King Jr. almost exclusively foreground such consideration, many other preachers activated people to make change. Gifted preachers surrounded King—including among them Prathia Hall, Wyatt Tee Walker, Joseph Lowry, Andrew Young, Gardner C. Taylor, Walter E. Fauntroy, Jesse Jackson, C.T. Vivian, Ralph Abernathy, etc. While other civil rights campaigns with other organizations worked extensively, the media largely focused on King.

It is also important to acknowledge that not all African American churches were involved in civil rights. Though the black church's participation in the civil rights movement is claimed today by the vast majority of African American preachers and churches, many preachers were silent from their pulpits, and some were critical of King and the civil rights movement. The most vivid example of such opposition is J. H. Jackson, the president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., from 1953–1982, the largest predominantly African-American Christian denomination in the United States, and the world's second largest Baptist denomination. Jackson consistently, publicly, and vociferously advocated against the civil rights movements. A small minority of preachers, black, white, Jewish, and otherwise led the chorus for change, which came to be known as the civil rights movement.

Within the struggles for civil rights, tensions and tussles emerged between younger leaders and the older and more traditional leaders, King in particular. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had tremendous public conflicts with King and others about tactics and what SNCC acknowledged as the hierarchical leadership of King and his associates, even as they derisively called King “De Lawd.” Besides conflicts with SNCC, the role of non-violence was one of the biggest struggles in the black community between King and the church and the nationalistic and black power tactics represented by Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, and other such groups. Stokely Carmichael, also known as Kwame Ture, in 1966, was the leader of SNCC, and launched the phrase “Black Power” in national consciousness seeking to force King to take a position for black power. Nationalists and black power advocates did not agree with the tactics of moral suasion and appealing to the conscience of white America, since, in their opinion, that tactic had been tried without results for centuries since the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. They believed that black pride, self-determination, self-protection, and self-economics would yield African Americans the respect due to them as citizens of the United States of America. This present tension between younger, more nationalist and aggressive leadership of the new movement and older, more traditional and patient approaches of the church is not by any means new. It has been debated since the advent of black struggles for freedom and, as it will be debated into the foreseeable future.

Acknowledging that these same tensions exist today in the contemporary moment, let's look at what might be the most significant subjects in the new movement that require the levels of depth and honesty with which Jay-Z speaks for the church to be relevant for Millennials and Gen-Xers. Let's search for the truth that is always relevant.

The Bigger Subjects for Millennials and Gen-Xers

The acquittal of George Zimmerman for the shooting death of the African American teenager Trayvon Martin re-ignited the issue of violence against black youth and galvanized outrage and mass protests. The issue of violence against black people and black youth has always been a critical issue that has never been far below the surface of concern and activism in the black community. We can trace protests in opposition to violence against blacks from and

through the epoch of slavery and fugitive slave laws, the era of Jim Crow segregation and lynching, the period of the war on drugs, to this present time of the new Jim Crow, the mass incarceration of black people. Throughout American history, blacks have resisted state-sponsored and state sanctioned terrorism, murder, brutality, and violence by slave patrols, night watches, sheriffs, police, and vigilante and para-police violence (i.e. riot mobs, lynch mobs, White Citizen Councils, the Klan, etc.).

We have protested these issues for redress in so many ways and instances that I can mention only a few in the 20th century. Billie Holiday sang “Strange Fruit,” protesting the violence and inhumanity of lynching: “Southern trees bear a strange fruit, blood on the leaves and blood at the root, Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.”⁴ In “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” Gil Scott-Heron said: “There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers in the instant replay. There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers in the instant replay.”⁵ The Black Panthers listed in their “10-Point Program,” “We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.”⁶ NWA stirred major cultural polemics by controversial lyrics of protesting police brutality and racial profiling in late 1980s and 90s. Constitution, state, and court sanctioned over-policing, and para-policing, of the black community has been an ongoing and continued issue of tension and struggle for generation upon generation in the black community.

But the acquittal of George Zimmerman was a tipping point beyond what many young people could bear in the contemporary moment of the black freedom struggle. A movement emerged around the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media. One year after the acquittal of Zimmerman, Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, who fired 12 times at an unarmed teenager. When a grand jury announced that Officer Darren Wilson would face no indictment, the movement against police violence grew in greater intensity and fervor. A further rash of deaths of unarmed young black people, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Tony Robinson, Rekia Boyd, Walter Scott, and Eric Garner, to name a few, proved the nature of structural racism, violence, and brutality had to be reformed. Protests launched diverse acts of defiance. Bree Newsome climbed a flagpole to bring down a confederate flag after the killing of nine people by a racist young man in Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston, South Carolina. Undeniably, many young black people in America are in a state of protest, and have formed their own 21st-century movement without consultation of traditional civil rights groups such as Rainbow Push, Social Action Network, NAACP, The Urban League, etc.

Rahiel Tesfamariam, social activist and former columnist for *The Washington Post*, wearing a representative T-shirt that said: “This Ain’t Yo Mama’s Civil Rights Movement,” was arrested in Ferguson, Missouri, in an act of civil disobedience for blocking the entrance to the St. Louis federal court. Such acts summarize the new movement:

In the streets of Ferguson and Baltimore, the new movement for black lives was radicalized by legions of poor and working-class youth who forced the nation to grapple

⁴ Billie Holliday, “Strange Fruit,” accessed December 1, 2015, http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/billie+holiday/strange+fruit_20017859.html.

⁵ Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/the-revolution-will-not-be-televised-lyrics-gil-scottheron.html>.

⁶ “10 Point Platform,” in *A Huey Newton Story*, Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Network, 2002. PBS, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/>.

with black rage. They fearlessly confronted a militarized police force, tear gas, snipers and tanks designed for warfare. . . . These young people, including countless women and LGBTQ people who have organized many of the movement's most powerful acts of resistance, have changed the predominant image of black activism in America.⁷

As stated earlier, though the new movement is diverse, the public face of the movement tends to be Black Lives Matter. Representative of this new movement, in a September PBS-Marist poll, 59% of white Americans said that Black Lives Matter is a distraction and, in response to a separate question, 41% said it advocates violence (16% said they were unsure whether it does).⁸ In my discussions with young activists, I hear that it does not matter—that is, white American's response to the new movement. They expect such, given the long history of structural racism, denial, and violence perpetrated against black people in America. While appreciating any support from any quarter in American society, including Whites and other minorities, they are self-determined and not looking for the approval of whites to establish their agenda. The most important question for this discussion then is, how will the church-at-large respond to this movement? How will the black church respond to this movement? What will we preach? Will we push deeper and deeper into these bigger subjects with real honesty and search for truth?

In an article entitled, "Why Black Lives Should Matter to the Church," Brittany Pashcall states:

Statistically, 87% of African Americans identify closely with a religious group. Similarly, 84% of Latin Americans identify closely with a religious group. This means that a large majority of those most frequently targeted for injustice occupy a pew on Sunday morning.⁹

As we said from the outset, more white Millennials, known as "nones" (those that check the "none" box when asked to state their religious affiliation) are leaving the church. Alan Bean, in an article entitled "Why (White) Millennials Are Leaving the Church," suggests that people of color comprise only one-third of American Millennials, and they represent over half of Millennial Christians.¹⁰ Bean suggests that Millennials love the Jesus portrayed in the Bible, who preached good news to the poor, and the upside down kingdom, where "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." Bean suggests that Millennials "hear vague references to justice, caring for the poor, and feeding the hungry in many white churches, but the systematic roots of injustice,

⁷ Rahiel Tefarmaiam, "Why the Modern Civil Rights Movement Keeps Religious Leaders at Arm's Length," *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 16, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-black-activism-lost-its-religion/2015/09/18/2f56fc00-5d6b-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html.

⁸ Simon Sebastian, "Don't Criticize Black Lives Matter for Provoking Violence. The Civil Rights Movement Did, Too," *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2015, accessed November 15, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/10/01/dont-criticize-black-lives-matter-for-provoking-violence-the-civil-rights-movement-did-too/>.

⁹ Brittany Paschall, "Why Black Lives Should Matter to the Church," *Unashamed Impact Blog*, October 19, 2015, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://unashamedimpact.com/blog/why-black-lives-should-matter-to-the-church>.

¹⁰ Alan Bean, "Why (White) Millennials Are Leaving the Church," Arlington, TX: *Friends of Justice*, 2014, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://friendsofjustice.wordpress.com/2014/12/20/why-white-millennials-are-leaving-the-church>.

poverty and hunger are rarely explored.”¹¹ Because most white churches find these teachings and their challenge to the core structures of American life to be so polemical in the congregation, they ignore as much of it as they can, or “ratchet up the machinery of denial” and frequently remain silent. The cognitive dissonance is too much for white Millennials and so they leave the church. Bean argues the black church is only slightly better since most minorities take the rough outlines of their theology from white Christians. What forces black churches to be slightly more political is that “bad public policy has such a devastating impact in poor communities of color.”¹² He says, “There is just enough of the Jesus stuff in America’s Black and Latino churches to sustain the commitment of a restless Millennial generation.”¹³ Frustrated by what they hear and see in their church community, there is enough social justice and a “dash of genuine Jesus-religion” to keep them coming.

Even though Black Millennials are still coming, there are serious tensions between the black church and the new movement Millennials. Heretofore, the church has been the center of black America’s struggle for civil rights. At the center of the black church has been traditional values, hierarchical male leadership, doctrinal opposition to the LGBTQ community, the politics of accommodation and respectability, and non-violence and reconciliation. These traditional values are significant subjects that we must engage with real depth and honesty in order to find the truth. What is at stake in the church’s response is if the black church is, or will ever be again, the main institution of black life and relevant to the needs and concerns of this new movement.

Tension Points Between the New Movement and the Church

There are at least four principal tension points between the new movement and the church: the historical straight male leadership of the church, the disruptive tactics of the new movement, identification with and practice of black theology, and new movement proficiency with technology. Let us turn more explicitly now to these tension points.

Tension One: The Historical Straight Male Leadership of the Church

For the most part, historically within the black church, women have been subordinated and restricted, and the LGBTQ community has been ostracized and muted. The new movement demands the inclusion of women and the LGBTQ community as equal voices and partners. For example, women in the new movement have predominately focused on violence against black men after the death of Sandra Bland. As such, the hashtag #sayhername emerged, and the new movement addressed the issue of full inclusion of the protest of police violence against women and girls, and also violence against transgender women. These key tenets of the new movement run counter to overwhelming claims of church doctrine on homosexuality, which many clergy and theologians believe is a social sin, and the almost lackluster inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making positions in church hierarchies.

The new movement does rely upon a centralized charismatic leadership—that is, a single person who is accepted as the model of church leadership, whether that leader is female or male. A majority of this elder leadership has insisted that the new movement appoint leaders, tone down the rhetoric, utilize less confrontational tactics and come to the negotiating table. However, many in the movement consider this model of leadership outdated. If nothing else, history has

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

taught that the leader can be assassinated and the movement severely is debilitated. Besides the risk of assassination, often in the charismatic sole leadership paradigm, black male preachers are propped up as figureheads and friends of those in political power and produce nothing for the black community other than their celebrity, as evidenced by front seats at funerals, church, and sporting events, television coverage, and shows, or becoming the go-to authority about racial issues for the mainstream media. The new movement is clear about the kind of leadership they do not want. They do not want the church to arbitrate the narrative of their emerging movement and thus have abandoned the church's model of leadership. Without change, the church runs the risk of irrelevance to 21st century political change.

Tension Two: Disruptive Tactics of the New Movement

While the church based civil rights movement was anchored in non-violent resistance strategies and moral suasion, the new movement is more confrontational, disrupting political rallies, sporting events, and shopping malls on holidays, not to mention morning and evening commutes. They are willing to “shut it down,” with dispersed and hashtag organized protest movements around the country. Their model is not the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), but rather the Black Panther Party. They openly declare, “Black Power,” wear natural hair, fists in the air, with clothing, apparel, signs, and symbols unapologetically announcing and celebrating blackness. The church, for the most part, has not been as radical in its rhetoric and tactics. Often for the church, Black Power has connotations of violence and separatism, and the church has operated from the sphere of accommodation, assimilation, negotiation, and change from within the power structures. Alternatively, the new movement is non-conciliatory in their righteous rage. They report that they have grown up disappointed with the gods of Generation X and the failure of political courage in the hip-hop generation. Their ultimate faith is in themselves to be agents of change, and admittedly they suggest that it might turn out to be hubris. Again, what is clear, Tesfamariam says:

they will not invest in a nation-state project that hands them black presidents alongside dead unarmed black boys in the street. These are irreconcilable contradictions. And these are non-conciliatory times.¹⁴

Tension Three: Identification With and Practice of Black Theology

From the perspective of the new movement, the church's deeply conservative theology and practice has led to a disconnection from social issues in the pursuit of personal success and affirmation, as suggested by the popular prosperity and celebrity preacher gospel doctrines, “get your personal blessing, breakthrough, and miracle theology.” By and large, new movement young people ask, “What has happened to Jesus as a freedom fighter, liberator, community organizer, proclaimer of freedom from the captives, and revolutionary?” Where is the blending of substantive theology with real and astute political critique?

Traditionally our pulpit preaching has focused on freedom from sin, coupled with an aversion to homosexuality, affirmation of heteronormative male leadership, and Jesus as a life coach to help make you healthy, wealthy, and wise—that is, without any mention or challenge of structural racism to have good health, great relationships, and financial stewardship. Most employ a conservative theology of personal salvation that rarely addresses racism and structural

¹⁴ Tesfamariam.

oppression and liberation of the oppressed. This problem exists not only among white churches, but also among many black churches that accept the theological outlines of white theology.

Tension Four: Technological Proficiency of the New Movement

The new movement is diffuse, less centralized, and more collaborative because information is accessible to all and based upon the mobilizing force of social media. The world took notice of social media's ability to mobilize grassroots movements such as the Arab spring and Occupy. The new movement is proving again what Todd Wolfson, author of *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left*, said: "The Cyber Left is about flattening hierarchies, flattening governance processes, combined with using the logic of social networks for deep consensus building."¹⁵

Some social networking statistics are stark for the new movement and suggest that young, black Americans use social networking sites significantly: "[96%] of African-American Internet users, aged 18-29, use a social network of some kind. Forty per cent [sic] of the same group, say they use Twitter—12% more than the comparable figure for young white people."¹⁶ Based upon young African American's increased social media usage, the social media emphasis of the new movement is effective in the creation of a liberation agenda:

The new movement is powerful yet diffuse, linked not by physical closeness or even necessarily by political consensus, but by the mobilizing force of social media. A hashtag on Twitter can link the disparate fates of unarmed black men shot down by white police in a way that transcends geographical boundaries and time zones. A shared post on Facebook can organize a protest in a matter of minutes. Documentary photos and videos can be distributed on Tumblr pages and Periscope feeds, through Instagrams and Vines. Power lies in a single image. Previously unseen events become unignorable.¹⁷

Through the use of social media, the new movement is quick and adept in shaping its own narrative. While national and cable news outlets have their own perspectives, new movement people on the scene are sharing their perspectives on social media, often presenting sometimes a very different picture. Instantly the movement can write its own story anywhere, anytime. In comparison, most churches are not as social media literate and therefore are more dependent on national and cable news.

The Church and the New Movement

The four tensions between the new movement and the church underscore critical questions for preaching and religious institutions. Are religious institutions, inclusive of denominations and seminaries, relevant to these organizations? How relevant is preaching in black churches to this movement? And, if a preacher wanted to be relevant to this movement how and what would the preacher preach? Having now established these bigger subjects that require real depth and honesty, I want to discuss the aforementioned four areas of tension in regard to the church and its preaching's relevance. What is at stake is if the black church is, or will ever be again, the main

¹⁵ As cited in Elizabeth Day, "#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement," *The Guardian*, July 15, 2015, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement#img-2>.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Day, "#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement."

¹⁷ Ibid.

institution of black life and relevant to the needs and concerns of all of its constituency groups? Our main goal is truth, because as Jay-Z claims, truth is always relevant. Let's start with a discussion of the tension of black theology and disruptive tactics.

Black Theology and Disruptive Tactics

There are churches that the new movement mentions as relevant in their own writing about their movement (e.g., ministries like First Corinthian Baptist in New York City-Harlem; City of Refuge United Church of Christ in Oakland, California; and Community of Hope AME in Temple Hills, Maryland). Many more around the country are dedicated to the liberation-centered legacy of the black church, such as Trinity United Church of Christ and St. Sabina Catholic in Chicago, Illinois; Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc., Empowerment Temple in Baltimore, Maryland; and Mt. Zion Church, Nashville, Tennessee, to name a few. Actually, numerous churches root themselves in black liberation theology, and fiercely believe that the church is a tool for the empowerment of the oppressed. Jesus, for these churches, is a freedom fighter, liberator, revolutionary, and challenger of the status quo. Churches such as these participate in the new movement in various ways, such as "Hoodie Sunday" when Trayvon Martin was killed, "die-in" marches, shouting "I Can't Breathe" following the death of Eric Garner, and the "Seven Last Words" services of black people killed by police. Several churches open their doors to tear gas victims and served as sanctuaries in Ferguson and Baltimore when conflict escalated between protesters and police. Clergy in both cities organized themselves, and held protest meetings in their churches and asked their members to participate in protest marches and support. In sum, these churches are connected in visceral and tangible action-oriented ways to the agenda and resolve of the new movement. And generally, we can conclude that if congregational support is happening, it is a reflection of the effective and relevant sermons preached from the pulpit. These preachers are preaching effectively about these issues and are inspiring their people into action.

While all of the above is true, the new movement is speaking prophetically to the black church, pointing toward its silence on issues such as mass-incarceration, urban gun violence, health and food deserts, and disparities of services in low income neighborhoods, etc. Factually, there are numerous churches that support the new movement; however, only a small number of churches engage in issues of social justice. The same was true in the 1950s and 60s; then, only a small minority adopted the civil rights movement agenda. The new movement speaks prophetically and challenges the church's lack of response to organized, structural, and systemic racial inequality in black neighborhoods. Many churches, if they address the issues at all, play it safe.

For young people of the new movement, playing it safe means, for example, churches speak to issues of militarized policing in black neighborhoods, but the goal is to placate, that is, affirm the sense of injustice, and disaffirm their right to a kind of righteous rage at the injustice itself. Playing it safe are comments from many pulpits, ideas in meetings, messages in sermons, requests in the media, and practices that ask the new movement to turn down its rage. In truth, white America is, and has always been, afraid and paranoid of black rage; and so is the respectable and conservative black church. Their goal of playing it safe is to allow the protesters to "let off steam," offer prayers over them, and then send them home in order to keep the false peace.

The church has difficulty with the rage of the new movement, just as the church has difficulty with the rage of Jesus in Matthew 21:2 and John 2:15. Jesus cleans the temple of

moneychangers based on righteous rage and indignation—in the protest language of the new movement, “#ShutItDown.” The church is not comfortable with the rage of Jesus, and the rage that often produces burning buildings, violent language, disruption of business property, and the flow of commerce. It is possible to understand, sympathize, and feel the rage, and still not condone the violence that rage can produce! While not condoning violence, King said that riots are the language of the un-heard. He did not condone rage and the violence, but he understood it. Does the church understand it? Does the church try to understand it?

Can the church understand the rage of the new movement when it says a nation that does not protect its citizens should no longer be surprised when the citizens no longer believe in the idea of the nation itself? The larger context of this special issue of *Homiletic* addresses preaching on race and economics. A phrase from an earlier quote in this article brings race and economics front and center: “In the streets of Ferguson and Baltimore, the new movement for black lives was radicalized by legions of poor and working-class youth who forced the nation to grapple with black rage.” Do not miss the phrases of “legions of poor and working-class youth” and “black rage.”

I believe that every preacher who seeks to understand should read Patrick Sharkey’s *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of the Progress toward Racial Equality*.¹⁸ While researchers typically analyze the economic inequality/mobility of racial/ethnic groups by focusing on individual factors such as the home, family structure, human capital, or culture as affecting character, Sharkey rightly looks beyond the individual and the family to understand inequality/mobility in regard to the importance of place—that is, communities and neighborhoods—as sites for the transmission of racial inequality in the post-civil rights era. He believes that inequality is organized in and around space.

Sharkey argues the problem of urban poverty is not only that concentrated poverty has intensified and racial segregation has persisted, but also that those same families experience the consequences of living in disadvantaged neighborhoods over multiple generations. The ghetto is inherited. The problems and challenges of the urban ghetto have been experienced, and then passed on to children, which means generations of families experience the nation’s worst schools and most unhealthy and violent environments. Sharkey argues that white and black children grow up in entirely distinct environments. From the 1950s to 1970s, 4% of whites lived in neighborhoods with at least 20% poverty, compared to 62% of African Americans. In 1985 to 2000, it got even worse, with 2 out of 3 black children raised in neighborhoods with 20% poverty, compared to 6% of whites (13% worse for blacks and 2% worse for whites). It is devastating when 66% of African American children grow up in neighborhoods with at least 20% poverty and 31% of African American children live in neighborhoods with a poverty rate at 30%; these poverty rates far exceed those among white children). When one lives in a high poverty neighborhood that is economically depressed and therefore unhealthy and safe, there are few opportunities for mobility and success.¹⁹

Concentrations of violence go hand in hand with concentrations of poverty. Through extant maps of homicides in the city of Chicago, Sharkey demonstrates that entire sections of the city never know the most extreme form of violence—local homicide. In other neighborhoods, such homicides are normative. This tragic reality is not the result of character deficiencies of poor families. Instead, it is because neighborhoods composed of primarily poor racial and ethnic

¹⁸ See Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of the Progress toward Racial Equality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

minorities have been areas of severe disinvestment and abandonment for the most part of the past half century. Sharkey correctly contends:

If segregated neighborhoods with concentrated poverty had greater levels of political influence, amenities that are taken for granted in middle-class communities, quality public services and schools, a vibrant economic base, and effective policing, then segregation and the concentration of poverty would decline and would not necessarily be associated with gang activity, crime, and violence, teenage childbearing and high dropout rates, poor community health, joblessness, homelessness, and blight. The social problems that are prevalent in America's ghettos are the product of shortsighted policies, intentional efforts to isolate or exclude minority communities within cities, and major economic and demographic shifts.

Again, he makes the point that these problems are not the results of character deficiencies of the urban poor. Rather, there is systemic and societal neglect that makes the ghetto possible and even convenient. Can the church preach about this evil? Can we understand? I do not condone violence that is often the result of rage, but I do understand! This is the truth: we have abandoned certain neighborhoods and families, and then are surprised when they respond with destructive rage. Our ignorance and innocence is alarming when we announce, "we do not understand why they are burning their own neighborhoods." Admittedly, criminal elements and destructive fools take advantage of the opportunity to loot and make mayhem, but the majority of the people want what middle-class neighborhoods want—quality public services and schools, effective policing, jobs, and a vibrant economic base. And because no one has heard their cry, they respond with violence and rage!

Notwithstanding, a question remains: Does understanding these factors lead the church to positive and constructive involvement and action? If preaching does not lead to concrete action, then that preaching is safe. If the purpose of preaching is to support and sanction a blessed personal life within the context of the status quo—an unequal and flawed social and economic system—then that preaching is safe and not acceptable to this new movement. Millennials are seeking substantive theological reflection balanced by honest and true social critique that leads to engagement by the church and its leaders. They are looking for action and not safe words.

I am not condemning churches and suggesting that every church should preach black liberation theology, or that if churches are not directly involved in the new movement, they are not the church. My goal is not to fill this article with criticism based upon "shoulds," "oughts," and "musts" in order to manipulate people out of inactivity. Instead, what I am suggesting is that if you want to be relevant to these young people, then at the very minimum the preacher must preach and be honest about the rage. We must preach and offer critical theological reflection around Jesus throwing the moneychangers from the temple and passages that are supported by insightful social critique. If you want to reach these young people, you must find what is just in their cause and be honest about it.

It starts at the deepest levels of belief and conviction within each person. It takes honest self-reflection from each person to look at the ways that they are complicit, whether blissfully ignorant, naively innocent, callously indifferent, or willingly neglectful, and then engage oneself into the issues. The purpose here is not to lay a guilt trip on anyone or to assert what every Christian and every black church should be doing. The worst thing in the world is to preach about such issues without some level of deep inner clarity and moral conviction. To preach about

these issues out of ignorance and innocence is to do harm to oneself, one's congregation, and the new movement. If one preaches about it, it will be controversial in many places. If one preaches about it, it will not make everyone comfortable. If one preaches about it, one will be called unflattering names and some will not want to hear a word of it. To preach about it and couple it with effective action is to go against the grain of apathy and conformity and to swim upstream against the tide.

Some preachers and congregations are ready and poised for a social action agenda of systemic critique and mass protests. I would like to make a few comments to those who are not ready, and are in some kind of process possibly to get ready. In this circumstance, if you are going to preach about these issues, invite dialogue before and after the sermon, particularly if you think it is going to be controversial. Before the sermon, it might be possible to meet with Millennials in the church and those in the new movement, and dialogue with them. Bishop Joseph W. Walker III has a MAT (Millennial Advisory Team) that he meets with for ongoing discussion and input.²⁰ He describes the meetings as invaluable as they give input and tremendous suggestions to aid and assist his preaching. It is possible to be collaborative in the development of the sermon. Several Doctor of Ministry preaching programs in the country teach and advocate that laypeople be assembled and partner with preachers in the development and preaching of the sermon. We have a movement of "conversational preaching" in homiletics, a conversation that occurs before and after the sermon with Millennials. These conversations help Millennials learn about the sermon; these conversations also help Millennials to understand. The beautiful thing about this effort is that it creates room for mutual dialogue. In this environment, not only is it possible for Millennials to critique the church, but also the church can critique Millennials. It is not within the scope of this article for the church to offer a critique of Millennials, but there is one point of critique of the new movement and the church to address here. Why will we march and protest when officers shoot unarmed black people, but we will not march, protest, and create a mass movement around the vast levels of black on black murder and gun violence that happens? I know that this question often is a conservative talking point to divert the discussion from the reality of racism and police brutality. But there is some truth in this question that the church and the new movement must address. This is a big subject and it is possible that it can be a catalyst for understanding and dialogue.

The new movement offers a different leadership model, one based upon the inclusion of women and the LGBTQ community. The truth is that the leadership style of the new movement is much more collaborative than the generational leadership styles of the past. The black church must come to the table as a collaborator, as an equal with all others, willing to learn, teach, listen, and speak. If the church, because of its traditional role of leadership, attempts to exert control and dominance, then the church will find itself the only voice at the table. If the church tries to seize the mic, the agenda, and the publicity with celebrity preachers, young people will interrupt and disrupt the agenda.²¹ In truth, if the church presses conservative doctrinal positions in terms of homosexuals and women as a litmus test of who can be included in the conversation and who can exert leadership, then the church will not be held relevant.

²⁰ For more information on Bishop Joseph W. Walker II's ministry, see <http://www.fullgospelbaptist.org/bishop-joseph-w-walkers-biography/>.

²¹ See Matt Laslo, "Al Sharpton is Struggling to Control the 'Black Lives Matter,' Movement," *VICE Media* December 18, 2014, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/al-sharpton-is-struggling-to-control-the-black-lives-matter-movement-1218>.

What the church must do is learn the value of coalition building and working with people even if there is disagreement for a greater goal. I recently went to a play entitled, *April 4, 1968*, and heard this phrase, “we disagree on the same side.” What is important is that we are on the same side and not that we agree on every doctrine or tactic. The vast array of the tools of systemic oppression requires coalitions to address issues and concerns. There is no one group, church, or generation that will defeat these forces in and of themselves. We must build coalitions despite differences of opinions in matters of doctrine, style and taste, and even tactics. There are congregations that openly affirm homosexuality and others that do not, but throughout this continuum the church must be inclusive with others who have the same community interests at heart. There is always a faith-filled minority that leans into the moment of movements of social justice, and the determination of those who participate has never been based upon gender and sexual preference. Though in the civil rights movement, there were issues of gender and inclusion of homosexual people, the new movement simply makes explicit this truth: come as you are.

Finally, it is no secret that the church lags behind in methods of social media. The issue is so obvious that it is not necessary to spend much time on it other than to suggest that the church not adopt these methods without understanding how they have changed communication. As we said before, social media flattens hierarchies, flattens governance processes, and builds deep consensus. Anyone can send a text and post a message to be hip and “keep up with the young people.” The deepest issue, however, is how to share information with transparency, and build consensus for movement. Many churches use social media to brand it, connect with audiences, members, and others that value their ministry offerings. Churches use it to build consensus among the members and potential member audiences. The question here remains, Can the church use its present social media networks to build consensus in the interest of building movements to help the community gain access to quality public services and schools, effective policing, jobs and a vibrant economic base?

Taking the Long View

In the concluding section of this article, I want to take the long view and offer suggestions as to how the church can offer further value to the new movement. My hope is that this article has created a level of understanding such that Millennials would find their voices in church communities. In truth, we need partnerships that involve the creative energy and bold determinism of young people and the wisdom, experience, and longevity of the older crowd. There are many lessons that the church can learn from the new movement, and likewise numerous lessons that the new movement can learn from longevity and historical sweep of the black struggle for freedom and justice in America. The truth is always relevant and relevant for both generations.

One truth is that racism and oppression is deeply embedded in the American experiment. History has taught that each time blacks have made strides for freedom, there has been backlash, retrenchment, and new forms of subjugation that appear on the American landscape; thus the old oppression gains a new guise. The new movement is part of a long historical sweep, and it has taken many lifetimes to get to this point in the struggle. Because of the tenacity of opposition to equality of race and economics in America, we cannot “throw the baby out with the bathwater” by looking upon past struggles and tradition with disdain. Past struggles have involved sacrifices and deaths to make possible the dignity and respect of African American people. How many sacrifices and what deaths will it take in the new movement, in the words of King, to make

America what it ought to be? The truth that is relevant is that we honor those in any generation who sacrifice and lay down their lives for freedom.

Another truth that is always relevant is that social justice movements must be deeply connected with sources of spiritual enrichment and vitality. The mystic and social justice advocate, Howard Thurman, noticed a kind of despair particularly in those people who work for social justice and improving social conditions. Many activists recognized that what they were doing was good, true, and significant, but they were working against the way things fundamentally were in life. This caused a kind of commonly shared despair. Human beings, for example, are fundamentally selfish, and to improve things, people are asked to be unselfish, to be concerned about someone outside their group, and consider other persons as their sisters and brothers. And even if we demand freedom from the perspective of power politics of numbers and economic strength through boycotts, the entrenched forces of opposition mutate and find ways to maneuver and to co-opt the movement and the progress made. The truth is people who struggle for freedom can never let their guard down. The struggle for freedom is an eternal vigilance. Those who work for justice come to know the real depth of human nature and the entrenched forces against freedom and justice. Thurman was aware of this truth, and considered it susceptibility to despair.

The relevant truth here is that in the face of such potential for despair, we need spiritual resources to escape the fall into cynicism and radical violence. The new movement is finding and creating its own spiritual resources. For example, some speculate that the new black national anthem for Millennials is Kendrick Lamar's "Alright." During a Black Lives Matter protest in Cleveland, protesters were chanting lyrics from "Alright": "We gon' be alright! We gon' be alright." Aisha Harris says about "Alright":

The chorus is simple yet extraordinarily intoxicating, easy to chant, offering a kind of comfort that people of color and other oppressed communities desperately need all too often: the hope—the feeling—that despite tensions in this country growing worse and worse, in the long run, we're all gon' be all right. And more than that—the specific kind of comfort that comes from repeating that line over and over.²²

"We gon' be alright! We gon' be alright." Harris says that she listens to the song because "the world seems like a terrible place." Hearing the news of another black person shot by police, a young girl's birthday party turns into an unnecessary horrifying police encounter! A white supremacist murders black church members during a prayer session! In each instance, she says she turns on "Alright." "We gon' be alright! We gon' be alright." The truth is the church and the older generations also know repeating sounds, songs, and insightful slogans give hope in seemingly hopeless situations. The truth is that chants of Lamar's lyrics sound like a remix of "We Shall Overcome."

Actually the full lyrics are: "But if God got us – Then we gon' be alright." Reports are that Kendrick Lamar is a Christian and several of his songs have Christian lyrics. Perhaps in a very different way, hip-hop gospel, the church may provide spiritual resources of hope to those who struggle for a new world. I believe the church can be relevant if it pushes deeper and deeper

²² Aisha Harris, "Has Kendrick Lamar Recorded the New Black National Anthem?: Singing 'Alright' in a Summer of Protest, Despair, and Hope," *Slate Blog*, August 3, 2015, accessed November 20, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/08/black_lives_matter_protesters_chant_kendrick_lamar_s_alright_what_makes.html.

into the bigger subjects with real honesty. When we deal with the truth, Millennials and the church will find they have a tremendous amount in common. The truth is always relevant.

**In Search of Our Mothers' Healings:
Holistic Wellbeing, Black Women, and Preaching**

Lisa L. Thompson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Homiletics
Union Theological Seminary

Abstract: *The lives of black women in North America, historically, converge with socio-economic conditions, creating health disparities between black women and other demographic groups. These health disparities co-exist alongside narratives about black women that contribute to rendering the bodies, and subsequently the health, of black women invisible or nonessential. Many traditional approaches to preaching healing texts advocate for treating the human body as incidental to a greater aim of the text. In contrast, preaching with the lives of black women in view requires a hermeneutic that recovers the significance of the physical body, as it is grounded in theological frameworks that espouse communal belonging in conjunction with holistic existence. This essay explores the preaching of Baby Suggs, holy, from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, as a prototype for such a hermeneutic at work within preaching that makes way for healing and wholeness as real possibilities in contemporary contexts.*

For various reasons, many preachers and homileticians approach discussions about preaching that focus on biblical healing and miracle stories with care and caution. Haphazard approaches to these texts undermine concerns of pastoral care and responsibilities to listeners who live with disabilities or illnesses. With these issues in mind and some best practices, homileticians must pay careful attention to the many pitfalls associated with preaching healing narratives. These pitfalls include confused understandings of healing and cure that equate individual sin, shortcomings, and disabilities with an individual's lack of faith and prevention of desired healing.¹ Furthermore, preachers and homileticians too often are hesitant to preach these texts as genuine accounts of the miraculous. Instead, preachers and homileticians turn toward rational or non-supernatural explanations of these narratives. This practice may occur because these preachers and homileticians may consider these encounters and phenomena as events of a different era and time. While the qualifications related to preaching about healing increase, the tendency to ignore or only briefly to engage the role of the human body in healing stories also increases.

Because of minimal engagement with the bodies present in these narratives and the healing they experience, healing and the human body become a foil in the plot of larger theological themes or moral platitudes. Subsequently, those who will preach sacred texts that claim divine healing may render this phenomenon incidental and make an attempt to find other objectives. If this occurs, those preachers may potentially reinforce contemporary narratives that distance the significance of the body and the need for healing as real possibilities in present contexts. This unintended consequence requires preachers to consider interpretive frameworks that retain the body as a critical entity while also attending to "best practices" ethics in preaching about healing. In considering the lives and health of black women in the United States and a hope for their holistic wellbeing within a theological vision of preaching healing, I offer an

¹ See Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Kathy Black, "A Perspective of the Disabled: Transforming Images of God, Interdependence, and Healing" in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Christine Smith (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998).

alternative interpretive framework with implications to support my claims. What follows then is not a method of exegesis but instead a proposed hermeneutic.

Black women's wellbeing and lack thereof in the U.S. is connected to narratives that rely upon the destruction, distancing, or denial of the body's fragility for the sake of economic gain and flourishing. Race and economics, as factors that intersect with gender and sexuality, have had immediate impact on the historical and contemporary state of black women's health. History has demanded that black women become conjurers of their own healing in pursuit of thriving amidst ongoing assaults on their bodies. This self-reliant pursuit of health in conjunction with faith convictions has fostered both survival and reinforcement of narratives that distance the body. Black women's own pursuit of their wellbeing, as a practice of faith, is a viable conversation partner for frameworks of preaching healing that remains accountable to the body. To this end, Baby Suggs, *holy*, the spiritualist preacher in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, is a prototype for both the practice of preaching and a hermeneutic that attends to one's wellbeing in contexts that marginalize bodies on the basis of race and economics.

In this essay, I argue that the recovery of the human body in preaching, in sacred texts, and in contemporary literature creates the greatest opportunity for healing to occur in our time. This recovery is a hermeneutic of reversal amidst contexts and interpretive practices that erase the human body, as such a recovery claims the significance of the physical body instead of its insignificance. Moreover, such a recovery emphasizes a theological framework of communal-connectedness and aligns preaching practices with historical work related to health and wellness in black communities of faith. The lives and wisdom of black women in conversation with homiletic theory, provide a wider interpretative framework and theological vision for preaching that espouses healing as a contemporary possibility.

Shalom: Preaching and Healing

There are a few assumptions that undergird my reflection on preaching about healing that I assert are associated with the lives and faith of black women. First, I engage healing with an understanding of wholeness or wellness in the presence of chaos. This wholeness is not necessarily the absence of distress but rather a specific state of being in the presence of chaos, a type of *shalom*. Second, I consider preaching to be a faith practice. Thus, preaching brings forth new possibilities, visionary possibilities within the community's midst, while inviting the community to participate in such visionary possibilities.² Preaching does not simply engage texts on its own terms. Instead a message contains a type of veracity for the community in which it takes place. In this regard, preaching as a faith practice has the ability to create or recreate a vision of what wholeness is and brings forth a vision in which wholeness is accessible. Here, as it intersects with preaching, healing is not a longed for impossibility that is restricted to the particular instance and time of biblical narratives and beliefs.

Preaching healing, with the lives and contexts of black women in view, requires one to consider the actual conditions that breed a lack of healing and wholeness for their bodies. As we consider that history, this approach necessitates preaching healing as a viable possibility that

² Here I am framing preaching as a practice with its own theological and ethical aims. Part of this understanding of preaching draws upon both Walter Brueggemann's work related to "counternarratives" as components of prophetic imagination in preaching and to an understanding of preaching from within frameworks of social practice; See Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012); Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds. *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Lisa L. Thompson, "'Now That's Preaching!': Disruptive and Generative Preaching Practices," *Practical Matters Journal*, no. 8 (2015).

actively recovers the bodies located in texts and the bodies located in our world. Such pursuit of recovery creates opportunities for the in-breaking of alternative visions that possess Sacred quality for the ongoing lives of black women.

(In)Significant Bodies

In the United States, black women's health, including their thriving and survival, is not disconnected from the ways economics and race influence their lives in an ongoing manner. The history of black women entails bodies literally being captured and caged for profit. These historical facts parallel the transatlantic slave trade founded on economic and racial structures not intended to profit black women but to profit others. The commodification of the bodies of black women has taken various forms including: breeding grounds of slave quarters and auction blocks, laborers in fields and factories, domestic servants, and 21st century working poor.³ While the forms of commodification have varied, the results across these forms have continuity—namely, the dismissal of black women's bodies, which includes their health and wellbeing. The intersection of race and economics in a capitalist empire controls the perceived and felt erasure and invisibility of black women's bodies.⁴

Even as black women have been bartered and traded as stock shares, our societal structures simultaneously have advanced cultural narratives of bodily insignificance. These narratives are contributing factors to health disparities between black women and other demographic groups; and they jeopardize the lives of black women while reinforcing the reality that their health and wellbeing are privileged luxuries. This means that the black female body is incidental to the larger enterprise. When bodies are used as the brick and mortar of an empire, they cannot be viewed as entities that bleed, cry, have cancer, live with depression, dream, or hope. When these cultural narratives of bodily insignificance intersect with theological narratives

³ In *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus*, Grant argues that the historical realities of slavery and black women in domestic service most adequately demonstrate the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the lives of black women; Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 6. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins notes that black women's oppression has entailed a system of social control, which consists of economic, political, and ideological dimensions that result in black women being kept in an "assigned, subordinate place." Collins describes the economic, political, and ideological dimensions of this system of social control in the following way: a) The economic dimension entails "the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism, . . . the 'iron pots and kettles' symbolizing Black women's long-standing ghettoization in service occupations—represents the economic dimensions of oppression"; b) "The political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens"; c) The ideological dimension is described as "controlling images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era [that] attest to the ideological dimensions of U.S. Black women's oppression (i.e. mammy, jezebel, & breeder)"; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Rev. 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4–5.

⁴ In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers traces the absorption of the African American gendered-female in American discourse, in view of the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its reverberations on a once "free" people and their captors in "historically ordained discourse." As a captive people, Black bodies, male and female, equated to "slave," "livestock," and "property" without human, social, or sexual difference. Spillers notes that the narrative of African American women is one of "mother and mother-dispossessed." This places her "out of the traditional symbols of female gender," making her a "different social subject." The African American woman exists as a different female gendered being than women of the dominant culture as it relates to her presence in American discourse and history. See Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

of bodily insignificance, it creates a dangerous, if not deadly paradigm for the lives of black women.

Converging Narratives: Too Strong, Too Lazy

Narratives that consider the body as incidental to a larger enterprise are projected onto black women who too often internalize these flawed narratives. Albeit, the internalization of such narratives is often for survival while their projection is primarily to reinforce the status of empire. These narratives cover two primary ends of a continuum. On one end of the continuum is superior-tenacity, which is present in the trope of the *StrongBlackWoman*.⁵ On the other end of the continuum is inferior-morality, often used to dismiss the needs of poor black women. In short, these narratives range from too strong to too lazy, with both characterizations currently impacting the state of black women's wellbeing. Likewise, both narratives are connected to sociopolitics that make demands on the lives of black women and their attempts to thrive in such contexts.

Walker-Barnes in *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* describes the StrongBlackWoman as an "archetype, performance, and ideology."⁶ This mythical woman is characterized "by extraordinary capacities for caregiving and for suffering without complaint" as she is always available to others but never to/for herself.⁷ In short, this "defines and confines ways of being in the world for women of African descent."⁸ Caregiving, independence, and emotional strength are lauded features of this woman.⁹ She is a historical result. In Black women's history, she has learned to survive and thrive by living out of, within, and alongside the politics of class, race, gender, and sexuality. She is the burden placed upon black women to show strength, deny the physiological and psychological fragilities of the body, and deny the need for interdependence within community. Walker-Barnes contends that this masking of black women's vulnerabilities via mythical strength contributes to the ignored health crises facing black women. Namely, black women in the U.S. are facing widespread rates of obesity, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, anxiety, constant mild to chronic depression, and hypertension. In addition, black women "have higher morbidity and mortality rates than any other racial-gender group for nearly every major cause of death."¹⁰

What is more, strong narratives require a tax of black women's emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. The ongoing socio-economic realities create health care disparities between black women and other demographic groups. In addition, an internal and external adoption of this superior-tenacity narrative incubates conditions that ignore ramifications and strains and burdens of strength placed upon black women. Society perpetuates this myth. Communities to which black women belong also perpetuate this myth, while their bodies break under these narratives. In this framework, black women help but are not helped. And if they need help, their

⁵ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, in *Too Heavy a Yoke*, interrogates the dangerous myth of the StrongBlackWoman and the toll it takes on the physical, emotional, and mental health of black women. The connotation of black women as strong and the fluid connection between the association of black womanhood and strength is Walker-Barnes' rationale for eliminating any hyphenation or space between strong, black, and woman. Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Walker-Barnes draws these statistics from the 2005 National Health Interview Survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control; *ibid.*, 44.

faith and God are the sources of that help. Self-reliant and God-reliant theologies often serve to reinforce narratives of superior-tenacity

Ironically, an independent self-resilient motif, which renders the bodies of black women insignificant, is connected with neoliberal ideals that link individual tenacity to one's ability to thrive economically. Keri Day, in *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America*, attends to the ways in which poor black women in particular are left behind and marginalized due to the explicit role of class and economic systems in their ongoing impoverishment and deprivation.¹¹ She contends that poor black women qualitatively suffer differently than middle to upper class black women and poor women of other racial-ethnic groups.¹² This qualitative difference is due to the explicit history of racial and gendered discrimination in the lives of black women in a capitalistic society.¹³ Too often, society easily adopts tropes of personal irresponsibility when attending to the realities of poor black women, while ignoring the ways in which a post-industrial economy and social policies are hostile toward black women and how inequity in employment opportunities contribute to intergenerational cycles of desperation and poverty.¹⁴

Cultural messaging of poverty either ignores the portrait of black women's poverty or casts it as a condition of personal irresponsibility. This signaling relies upon narratives of inferior-morality. In other words, black women are too weak to "make the cut" in a free market and are creators of their own impoverishment. Narratives of inferior-morality rely on assumptions of individualism, isolation, and the depth of one's willpower; and yet again, enable the dismissal of black women's mental, emotional, and physiological wellbeing.

Seemingly, a tragic paradox occurs; both narratives of black women being too strong and too lazy actually converge as bodily insignificance. This convergence leads toward flawed assumptions of individuality, isolation, and one being solely responsible for her wellbeing or lack thereof. At their foundations, both narratives demand a counternarrative or alternative vision if we are to offer a holistic way forward.

Renegotiating Body and Self, Amidst Empire

The burden upon black religious life and religious experience is to help facilitate alternative visions, narratives, and hopes for the relationship of black women to their bodies. And most importantly, the burden involves reaffirming the capacity and right of black women to claim and define this significance while renegotiating the relationship of their bodies, within their immediate communal and familial relationships, and to the wider social sphere. This renegotiation of self and body is an act of black women's spirituality; and at its core, it is an act of healing.

In *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*, Marla Frederick explores the ways in which black women in a rural and disenfranchised county in North Carolina engage faith as a means for navigating everyday encounters that meet them at the intersections of social location.¹⁵ Frederick lifts up the agentive capacity of black women expressed in their actions on both personal and public levels. One dimension entails black women's claim of

¹¹ Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 56–57.

¹² Ibid., 56.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58, 62, 64, 148.

¹⁵ Marla Faye Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 15.

authority over their bodies as a practice of the renegotiation of self. In particular, Frederick highlights negotiations related to narratives of intimacy in a capitalist empire that has exploited the bodies of black women through sex for economic gain and racialized control.¹⁶ Frederick contends that this renegotiation of self often happens on a private level in both personal actions and theological convictions while not seeking direct impact on the public sphere, yet reverberating outward into the public and cultural sphere. Such renegotiations of one's relationship to her body are often connected to spirituality for women of faith.

Practices of negotiation of self are not new. In fact, redefining and re-scripting the self and one's body in the midst of economic and racial demoralizing conditions have been the work of black women, historically. These acts of renegotiation are connected to personal thriving and wellbeing and these are the ways in which women have been conjurers of and participants in their own healing. In this work I find possibilities for a hermeneutic that continues to recover black women's bodies in ways that promote healing, wellness, and thriving as acts of faith.

In Search of Our Mothers' Healings

How one makes listeners aware of bodies present in their preaching about healing and how this kind of preaching intersects with the ongoing work and practice of black women renegotiating self and their relationships to their bodies are important factors. These practices of renegotiation impact matters of health and wellness for women who live in ongoing cultural systems that leave their bodies deprived and invisible. Thus, the need to explore how one faithfully engages in proclamation that offers an alternative vision of a holistically-integrated life in the body. In earnest, the work of preaching that considers the wellbeing of black women requires a hermeneutic of reversal. This hermeneutic of reversal emphasizes communal belonging, affirms the fragility of bodily existence, and promotes healing as a real possibility.

When engaging sacred texts about healing, the primary questions to raise are, "What must I do with this body in the text?" and "What are the implications for the bodies in front of me?" These questions remain primary even when they are only implicitly engaged, or answered by how one does not engage the human body and the physicality of its restoration. Black women themselves have engaged these questions and the quest of holistic wellbeing while living amidst realities that contribute to their mental and physiological deterioration.

Black women's literature is a place where we might find the beginnings of a hermeneutic of reversal for preaching that faithfully considers the realities of black women's wellbeing. Literature written by black women, particularly literature that revisits the sites of slavery, is not only a resource for revisiting an often unwritten history, but Judylyn Ryan contends that it is a place that "allows a recognition of, and reaccess to, the spiritual resources needed (for a people) to withstand a continuing assault."¹⁷ Here I return to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a site for witnessing the struggle for the renegotiation of self and the body in the preaching of Baby Suggs, *holy*. The preacher and her sermon engages the conditions that disenfranchise and dismember black women as it distances the fragility and vulnerability of black women's bodies through a narrative of inhumanity, moral bankruptcy, and the burden of strength. However, the preacher does so in a manner that focuses on the physical, mental, and emotional restoration of women alongside their wider community, including children and men.

¹⁶ Ibid., 186–87.

¹⁷ Judylyn S. Ryan, "Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women's Literature: The Preaching of Maria W. Stewart And Baby Suggs, Holy," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzele & Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 274.

A Hermeneutic of Reversal

Beloved draws upon the history of Blacks in the United States and their personal lives amidst the struggles of being an enslaved or once enslaved people. When Morrison shapes the narrative through the voices, visions, and memories (which she calls “rememory”) particularly of her female protagonists, the reader experiences the complexity of what existing as a community entails—struggling for wellbeing in the midst of contexts that deny its wellbeing. The opportunity for wellbeing in the midst of everything that denies it is the opportunity for healing and the miraculous, to which we give our attention in preaching.

The preacher makes proclamation for the conditions that pervade the lives of her listeners. *[H]oly’s* listeners live in a world that does not value their flesh, thus rendering their bodies secondary and disposable. They are individuals who must figure out how to live with the tension of being objects of someone else’s narrative and the subject of one’s own narrative. As individuals are the objects within the narratives of white slave owners and the systems that support the institution, their bodies, emotions, and struggles are subjugated or erased for the good and benefit of someone else. The social and political order of the world has forced fragmentation upon the physical bodies before the preacher. The fragmentation is a split between a self that acknowledges and expresses the breadth of its embodied capacity, and a self that must compartmentalize and deny the full spectrum of that capacity.

Morrison casts Baby Suggs, *holy*, as the unassuming yet fully authoritative preacher and wisdom bearer within her community. She is scripted as the one who draws the black community of Ohio into a clearing in the woods where she preaches. As she preaches, she invites the members of the community to experience the breadth of finitude, including their weakness and strength. Through the words of Baby Suggs, *holy*, the listener envisions black women as subjects and what it means to live as fully alive.

At the height of her proclamation, Baby Suggs, *holy*, declares a hermeneutic for healing, and wellness in the midst of constant assault. She declares,

let the children come! . . . let your mothers hear you laugh . . . let the grown men come . . . let your wives and your children see you dance!¹⁸

And to the women she declares,

Cry, . . . ‘for the living and the dead. Just cry.’¹⁹

The phrases are simple, unassuming, yet in the world of *holy* and her community: women are not afforded the vulnerability to weep for children that are bartered, sold, and traded as property; children are not afforded the possibility and delight of play and laughter, as they are field hands; and men are removed from the movement and connectedness that comes through the rhythm of dance. In a world that forces bodily denial through violent and traumatic means, giving in to the body and the vulnerability of its outward expressions are marks of fragility that threaten the survival of black flesh. And yet, *holy* proclaims “laugh . . . dance . . . cry,”²⁰ while echoing out

¹⁸ Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel*, 1st Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage International, 2004), 103.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

that to be flesh that is black and thriving requires them to gather up the pieces that were forcibly scattered and attend to the body—that is, restoration.

Through her words the preacher recovers the body, in both its significance and vulnerability. However, through her words, she also recovers the body's connectedness to the larger community. In this community, even the proclaimer herself, a black woman who exudes strength, does not carry the entire burden of the community's healing and thriving solely on her shoulders; but instead with the busted "legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue" that slavery gave her, she's described as standing up with her "twisted hip" and dancing right along with the other women, children, and men.²¹ This is not a go-it-alone motif of individuality. The preacher creates the space for personal burdens and joys to find a resting place within the connectedness of community.

After Baby Suggs, *holy's* words of bidding and invitation the narrator describes, "without covering their eyes the women let loose... and then it got mixed up."²² And when it got mixed up, the community comes to end of something more.

Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the clearing damp and gasping for breath.²³

In the clearing amidst worship and the sermon is a momentary in-breaking of a holistically-integrated life, one in which the body is not incidental but central to one's life and wellbeing. And each body present experiences this in-breaking.

The preacher does not shrink back, but instead, assumes the risky gap between a moment that ushers the fullness of life as the threshold of death awaits outside of the clearing and attempts to crouch upon it. The preacher calls out and pushes toward wholeness in the midst of everything that denies wholeness. Ultimately, this is the simple yet complex and risky work of preaching healing. Somehow *holy's* affirmation of flesh and call to love black flesh cannot be untangled from the recognition of the hate of black flesh. In this understanding her utterances attend to the presence of narratives and counternarratives. In this community, proclamation occurs, physiological and psychological burdens are shared, the body is recovered, the community enters in, and healing begins.

Here, . . . in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh.²⁴

Preaching a Hermeneutic of Reversal

Preaching via a hermeneutic of reversal goes against individual heroines and has its foundation in communal connectedness as it attends to the fragility of what it means to live in a body. Healing is dislodged from esoteric non-concrete possibilities while there is the encouragement of mutual participation in healing's realization in a community's midst. The preacher offers the community an opportunity to participate in a reality they have not readily known and/or has not been fully accessible to them. The invitation makes possible the

²¹ Ibid., 104.

²² Ibid., 103–04.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

community's ability to conjure a different type of life in its midst. In this regard, what and how the preacher names in connection with healing as it relates to the lives of black women is significant.

Most importantly, in order to recover the body, and the bodies of black women, texts about healing cannot be treated solely as foils for God's ultimate story in terms of rushing past and over the role of bodies in the texts. These texts indeed contain theological visions that are after something about the Sacred. However, these theological visions are wrapped up, around, and interacting with physical bodies. Bodies and their vulnerability matter in the narratives, for they matter in our world. Healing stories attend to something about the preference for life over death and the preference for thriving over decay and decline—in association with physical bodies.

Furthermore, in order to claim healing as a real possibility, which is brought about through connectedness and communal participation, preaching healing entails locating places in which healing relates to communal belonging or at minimum locates the site through which the community enters the struggle for healing. As we locate the places of communal participation, we subvert a passive response that waits alone on an intervening God, and we also resist the heroine who is strong and unyielding while "gritting down, going it alone, and deteriorating" along the way. Instead, we create the clearings in our midst for healing to be realized, even amidst the ongoing demoralizing circumstances of our socio-economic frameworks.

Wellbeing, Faith Practices, and Black Communities

There are long-existing paradigms within black communities of faith for struggling together to make a way for health and wellbeing. This history is based on both economic disenfranchisement and theological conviction. And often, this history has constituted more attention to physical health than mental health. Nonetheless, a basis exists for collective work related to bodily wellness. Historically, economic and racial discrimination contributed to a lack of access to health care and health care facilities within black communities, while simultaneously members of these communities were banned from admissions to medical programs that trained healthcare providers.²⁵ Therefore, aspects of faith practice within black communities have included civic action and intervention for members' own health care needs including the presence of church nurses, free clinics, and wellness check-ins.²⁶ In the 21st century, these initiatives have increased alongside initiatives of healthcare reform. In varying degrees, black communities of faith participate in health initiatives as healing interventions through increased advocacy of exercise, healthier diet and nutrition, mental health care, or justice seeking measures that limit health disparities.

Conversely, many black Christian traditions in North American contexts implicitly retain aspects of spiritualist traditions and religious beliefs that are a part of their diaspora histories. These are traditions that assume connectivity between the supernatural and medicinal. These traditions also include healers, gurus, and medicine doctors as figures whose work is interwoven right alongside narratives of a Christian God.²⁷ What is more, these are narratives of God infused with Trinitarian constructs that assume the Spirit is an active and robust person right alongside

²⁵ Larry G. Murphy, "African American Churches, Health Care, and the Health Care Reform Debate," in *From Every Mountainside: Black Churches and the Broad Terrain of Civil Rights*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2013), 204–06.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

the Creator and Jesus.²⁸ In short, the option of possibility in the face of the naturally implausible, including healing, is a tenant that undergirds faith practices in black communities. And most importantly, the plausibility of the miraculous relies upon the interlocking work of individual, collective, and divine agency.

As healing holds real possibilities in the lived religion of black women, we are challenged to retain conceptual possibilities of healing when preachers engage biblical narratives. We create an increased synergy between theology proclaimed and the theology lived within black communities of faith, when we employ interpretive frameworks that recover the individual body and communal connectedness and place these alongside divine agency. These frameworks espouse bodily restoration and wellbeing. Moreover, these interpretive moves hold potential to offer alternative visions to the dangerous narratives that threaten the wellbeing of black women in a culture that still regulates their livelihoods.

So, how might these strategies look in practice? As the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings carries the distress and burden of her child's death and seeks resurrection, where Elisha enters, the community enters. As the woman who is hemorrhaging in Luke touches the garment hem of Jesus, where Jesus turns with a response of healing and peace, the community enters. Similarly, as the Canaanite woman of Matthew pushes through opposition to verbally spar with Jesus for her demon-possessed daughter, where Jesus enters, the community enters. While sharing the load, the community wrestles with the fragilities of the body entering into the distress, despair, and struggle for the miraculous and healing. Together the individual and the community enter the struggle in those ways that seek to name and pursue healing for themselves. For black women, the site of healing and restoration is at the place where the divine, individual body, and the collective body intersect.

Conclusion

Preachers need not distance the human body to preach healing or healing texts responsibly. Instead, preachers may recover the body and its significance in preaching healing. More specifically, greater attention to hermeneutics and preaching ethics recovers the relationship between bodies and the pursuit of wellbeing. Such preaching operates within a hermeneutic of reversal, particularly for the lives of black women whose overall wellbeing remains connected to the effects of racial, economic, and gendered discrimination. This hermeneutic of reversal emphasizes communal belonging, affirms the fragility of the body, and promotes wholeness as a real possibility. This interpretive framework is all the more viable when one considers the lives of those constantly deprived by historical narratives that promote disembodiment and distance bodily fragility and vulnerability.

²⁸ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes explains a Spirit theology as the impetus for the preaching of black women in history. This Spirit theology is grounded in the normative and accepted understanding of the Holy Spirit and power of the Spirit within some black faith communities. Historically, within these faith communities there has been interdependence between the community and the Spirit. The Spirit is not a later appendage but an actively engaged helper in the life of believers. See Cheryl Gilkes, "There Is a Work for Each One of Us: The Socio Theology of the Rev Florence Spearing Randolph," in *How Long This Road: Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln*, ed. Alton B. Pollard and L. H. Welchel (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 138–39.

Hector Avalos. *The Bad Jesus: The Ethics of New Testament Ethics*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015. 461 pages. \$35.

In *The Bad Jesus: The Ethics of New Testament Ethics*, Hector Avalos contends that historical and contemporary New Testament scholarship presents Jesus as a benign, paradigmatic ethical figure, a view that obscures the “bad Jesus.” By attributing ethical authority to the single figure of Jesus, Avalos argues, New Testament ethicists, and those who write about New Testament ethics, maintain a Christian imperialist practice that reproduces a benevolent human Jesus who is exempt from unethical behavior. At the core of Avalos’ argument is an interrogation of how biblical scholars interpret the full humanity of Jesus. Is the human Jesus really flawless? A self-identified agnostic on the historical Jesus, Avalos examines case studies of the ethics of Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, and asserts that scholars of the “ecclesial-academic-complex,” who interpret evidence of the unethical behaviors exhibited by Jesus as morally superior, reinforce a Christian empire agenda under the guise of religious scholarship (7).

New Testament scholars discount the unethical behavior of bad Jesus, Avalos asserts, because the point of departure for New Testament ethics is the goodness of Jesus. The presupposition of goodness, implying ethical, reveals the ways in which Christocentrism influences contemporary ethical assessments of the practices of Jesus. The tendency of biblical scholars to extract ethical norms for the contemporary world, from the world of Jesus, Avalos argues, is a practice unique to Christian religion studies. He believes New Testament ethics is vapid as a scholarly discipline because it is void of scientifically verifiable phenomena; it is based on the historically unverifiable life and practices of one person.

The Bad Jesus is loosely organized according to three “Jesus-centric” themes: the context of human relations, such as love, hate, and violence; Jesus’ attitudes toward people groups, such as women and the disabled; and Jesus’ relationship to broader phenomena such as science and ecology (27). Using source criticism, redaction criticism, textual criticism, rhetorical criticism, and other historical-critical tools, Avalos shows how writers of New Testament ethics fail to reflect critically on the unethical practices of Jesus. Thus, he holds that New Testament scholars participate in the broader Christian agenda of preserving biblical ideals. Secular ethicists, and religious scholars alike, privilege the Christian Bible over other ancient literature causing skewed views of Jesus as the acme of ethics, according to Avalos.

The monograph critiques interpretations of the human Jesus as always and ultimately good, and consequently, never unethical. According to Avalos, scholars who interpret biblical texts without confessional commitment or theological judgment discover a Jesus consumed with empire building and domination, as opposed to the Jesus traditionally characterized by solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Through thirteen chapters, Avalos exposes the unethical practices of Jesus that are interpreted as acceptable. Alternatively, he argues that the ethical principles of Jesus cannot stand the scrutiny of contemporary ethical analysis. As such, “there is no reason to regard anything Jesus taught or did as authoritative for modern ethics” (13).

The New Testament is replete with questionable ethical standards of Jesus. In the calling of the twelve disciples, the imperialist Jesus unapologetically requires that his followers abandon family responsibilities and follow him exclusively. This Jesus does not consider the economic implications and risks of leaving a family without male protection in a patriarchal society. The hateful Jesus commanded hate between family members. The violent Jesus promised eternal violence imputed to those who reject the kingdom of God. The misogynistic Jesus deferred to his

male apostles, despite the loyalty of his female disciples. Despite the reinterpreted efforts of feminist biblical scholars, Avalos contends that Jesus reinforced the patriarchal practices of his day. Similarly, by contemporary ethical standards, Jesus de-legitimized people who were disabled by connecting disabilities to sin. The case studies portray the bad Jesus that New Testament ethics is loath to admit exists.

Avalos challenges readers to critically analyze interpretations of Jesus as the moral exemplar, around whom much of New Testament ethics revolves. He leverages religious skepticism as a tool to disrupt normative interpretations of the ethics of Jesus, and thereby, to disclose the imperialist nature of New Testament ethics. *The Bad Jesus* contributes to the meta-criticism of biblical scholarship by critically evaluating the underlying suppositions of New Testament ethics from a non-religious perspective.

Courtney V. Buggs, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

James V. Brownson. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, England: Eerdmans, 2013. 312 pages. \$29.

The preacher preaches from the Bible. And when the preacher wants to preach on same sex marriage or relationships, the preacher should also want to preach from the Bible dealing with the issue in focus. Now, in the current flood of polarized arguments on same sex marriage, most of which are based on the *same* Bible, the preacher may need a biblical resource for critical discernment. Thankfully, James V. Brownson provides a fine resource in a time of great need.

As the James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan, a Reformed branch, Brownson takes the Bible seriously in making clear his case. His proposal is as follows. On the surface of the biblical writing, both Old and New Testament writers seem to stand adamantly against any kind of same sex relationship. Yet, once we begin rigorously and faithfully exploring the underlying “moral logic” of specific passages on same sex relationship, which is also demonstrated through the Bible, we will get a totally different idea on the same issue: biblical writers or even God the Divine affirms *life-long, loving, and committed relationships among same sex couples*. Brownson himself confesses that reaching this conclusion was not easy for him as a scholar-pastor belonging to a traditional Reformed denomination. Yet, he also confesses that his genuine biblical scholarship—that is, concrete biblical evidence—cannot help but underscore that conclusion.

So, how does he actually perform his biblical study toward the resulting conclusion? It is done in two ways. First, he makes critical biblical comments on two polarizing sides. To begin with, he excavates “the traditionalist case and its problems” on same sex relations. His methodology is biblical-hermeneutical since the traditionalists, who disavow same sex relationships, base their case almost solely on the Bible and its interpretation. He thus tries to prove that the same Bible says otherwise on this issue. At the same time, he reveals the lack of biblical support in the revisionists’ affirmative case on the same sex issue. He finds the revisionists’ case largely identical to the secular liberalist idea on same sex relations. Once again, the Bible itself and its honest interpretation is key.

Second, at the core of his biblical-hermeneutical methodology lies the interpretive frame of *moral logic*. He wants to figure out the fundamental moral logic underneath specific biblical lessons on same sex relations. In other words, he wants to see *why* the Bible or its writers give such lessons, in order to dig up the actual moral *meanings* of them. One example is found in Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10. Brownson finds that Paul condemns same sex relationships that occur out of human lust and misbehavior (e.g., pederasty, prostitution, abuse, sexual slavery, etc.). But, Paul does not (seem to) express the same judgment on loving and committed same sex relationships. Why not? Paul is always quick in his advocacy for genuine human sexual desire and mutual sexual commitment as essential and also “natural.” Therefore, Brownson believes, there is no reason for Paul to oppose *natural* same sex relations.

Brownson’s syllogism is explicit throughout his writing: One, the Bible affirms any genuine committed sexual relationships as natural; two, a same sex relationship can be a form of life-time, loving, and committed sexual relationship; three, therefore, committed same sex relationships are biblical and Christian. His logical argument is strong and persuasive thanks to his robust biblical scholarship and resulting evidence. What makes his argument less compelling, though, is the revisionist stance with which he identifies at the beginning. Obviously, he is not a hardcore secular revisionist, but more of a moderate biblical revisionist. The revisionist’s usual job description, is *re-interpretation* of what has already been given, not the creation of new one,

although the latter occasionally happens. This simply means his argument remains circumstantial, vulnerable to future reinterpretation of his reinterpretation. Of course, this circumstantiality does not or cannot negate the strength of his well-argued conclusion.

Overall, the book has good potential to appeal to both traditionalists and revisionists. Brownson uses the Bible as the fundamental source for his argument just as traditionalists do and reconfigures deep moral meanings of critical passages on the same sex relationships like revisionists. He seems to achieve his initial goal of “reframing the church’s debate on same sex relationships” by bridging the two polarizing and polarized parties. Then, the last question we may ask is: How are traditionalists and revisionists responding to him and his conclusion? Our Christian church has just started answering the question. Let’s see what will unfold in the near future.

Sunggu Yang, Wake Forest University School of Divinity, Winston-Salem, NC

Michael Cover. *Lifting the Veil: 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 in Light of Jewish Homiletic and Commentary Traditions*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2015. 303 pages. \$140.

In *Lifting the Veil*, Michael Cover examines Paul the Apostle's interpretation of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. Cover's text aims to situate Paul's exegetical practices in the context of first century philosophical and scriptural traditions, turning largely to the exegetical work of Philo of Alexandria as a fulcrum and point of comparison to Paul's Corinthian correspondence. The overall result is a well written and thoroughly engaging work that offers fresh insight on the unique circumstances that helped shape Paul's epistolary interpretations.

In Part One, "Paul's Exegesis of Exodus 34 in Light of the Undisputed Epistles," Cover outlines how Paul's exegesis in 2 Cor 3:7-18 has presented a recurring challenge for interpreters, given its marked difference from the rest of the epistle. Given his historical focus, Cover recounts how historians have understood the 2 Corinthians passage broadly as either a literary insertion (e.g. Hans Windisch) or an authentic epistolary component and Pauline composition (e.g. Rudolf Bultmann). Cover's asserts there is a significant link between this passage and Hellenistic commentary tradition, exemplified *via* an oft-used exegetical pattern in the work of Philo of Alexandria. The second chapter of this first section focuses on the diverse exegetical approaches found within Paul's body of work. Cover concludes that Paul's exegetical pattern in 2 Cor 3:7-18 represents a pattern of sequential exegesis that is distinct from the pattern observed in a selection of his other writings.

In Part Two, "Secondary-Level Exegesis in Hellenistic Commentaries, Homilies, and Other Exegetical Writings," Cover traces the parallels between the philosophical school commentary (particularly those by Philo of Alexandria) and the biblical commentaries of Qumran. He argues that Philo's commentary bears aesthetic and rhetorical similarity to Paul's exegesis in 2 Corinthians (133). Cover underscores the appearance of this exegetical pattern in non-scholastic genres of writing, such as homilies and Greco-Roman letters. By bringing together such a wide swath of material, Cover illuminates how secondary-level exegesis (that is, exegesis that holds the dual foci of text as well as theme/story) appeared across genres and served various purposes. This approach was often used within non-exegetical texts (particularly those directed at specific communities) as a way of producing authoritative digression (223). Cover argues that Paul's exegetical pattern in 2 Cor 3:7-18 reflects precisely this digressive aesthetic.

What is the significance of this digressive aesthetic, beyond providing evidence that Paul's pericope bears stylistic resemblance to contemporary writings of other genres? This question animates the discussion in Part Three, "Lifting the Veil: The Rhetorical Function and Theological Purpose of Paul's Exegesis of Exodus 34." Cover explores the digressive aesthetic in another slate of texts as a way of uncovering how exegetical digressions enabled writers to produce rhetorical and theological amplification. By comparing 2 Cor. 3:7-18 to contemporaneous texts from Seneca, Philo, and others, Cover produces evidence to support his belief that these authors share both a digressive compositional aesthetic and a desire to connect the content of such digressions to the larger bodies of text in which they appear (249). In other words, Paul's exegesis and its surrounding narrative (the passage of 2 Cor 2:14-4:6) are linked in ways that suggest literary unity. Cover goes further to argue that these rhetorical and thematic links suggest Paul's use of Moses' image and ministry in Exodus 34 as both a comparison and contrast to his own. Cover's final chapter underscores how Paul's exegesis of Exodus 34 in 2

Cor 3:7-18 reinforces the construction of Christian Mosaic exemplarity, wherein Moses represents an idealized model of God's revealed vision (302–3).

Though Cover's text is primarily oriented around textual and historical interests in New Testament and early Judaism, it is a valuable read for persons of various sub-disciplines with exegetical and rhetorical interests. Cover's sustained treatment of Paul's exegesis is especially helpful for explicating how stylistic and thematic influences operate across genres in meaningful ways. Part Two furnishes some intriguing insights for homiletics, particularly in light of how homiletic practices, ancient and contemporary, function as secondary exegesis of sacred texts and life themes. As a whole, Cover's volume achieves his hope for "a useful study in one of the hermeneutical faces of Paul" (26). I heartily recommend this text as an entry point not only into the study of Paul's writings, but also the exploration of broader phenomena in the realm of Jewish and Greco-Roman literary traditions.

Kyle Brooks, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

Tim MacBride. *Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric: The Promise of Rhetorical Criticism for Expository Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014. 265 pages. \$31.

This text, which could easily double as an introduction to rhetoric, provides a thorough investigation of the utility of rhetorical criticism for expository preaching. Combining homiletical theory and a deep knowledge of the history of rhetoric, MacBride provides a methodology aimed at ensuring that expository sermons perform the same rhetorical function as their scriptural sources. One of the most impressive aspects of this book is the way that MacBride makes rhetorical theory accessible to practitioner and academic alike. While I have an introductory familiarity with rhetoric, the descriptions of terminology are clear enough that someone without any previous exposure to rhetorical theory would be able to apply this methodology to their preaching. Centering his analysis on undisputed Pauline epistles, MacBride demonstrates how rhetorical criticism helps the preacher understand Paul's original rhetorical purpose in order to model that purpose in their sermons.

The move to write sermons that not only interpret a text but that also perform the same way that the biblical text performs in context predates MacBride. He acknowledges how the work of David Kelsey, David Buttrick, Tom Long and others provide a preliminary investigation into this technique. MacBride however offers a study that uses rhetorical theory to provide a methodology for crafting sermons. He argues that rhetorical criticism allows one to understand the original intent of the authors and how it would have been received in its original setting and that with this knowledge, current expository preachers would be able to craft sermons that modeled those intentions. In many ways this book also works as a guide to biblical interpretation, helping preachers account for the differences between the context of the original hearers and our current congregations.

Chapter 1 begins by arguing for the legitimacy of using rhetorical criticism, specifically as it relates to Paul's writing. Anticipating arguments that Paul's work should be examined with epistolary theory instead, MacBride provides a strong foundation for the application of rhetorical criticism to Paul's writing. In fact, he limits this particular study to Paul's undisputed writings because he believes them to be the closest things to actual speeches found in the Bible. Chapter 2 continues with a survey of the field of rhetorical criticism that is purposely limited to works that support its utility for expository preaching. This directed survey demonstrates that that rhetorical criticism is quite useful for expository preaching precisely because this methodology emphasizes the function of a text, the same way that expository preaching intends. Chapter 3 begins the actual movement into rhetorical criticism by discussing the different rhetorical species (genres), namely deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. MacBride shows how the species of a biblical passage informs how a sermon might be preached from the text. For MacBride, figuring out the species of a text is not mere categorization but instead "an epistemological tool for unlocking meaning in individual texts" (53).

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to rhetorical arrangement and demonstrates how a familiarity with this aspect of rhetorical theory informs preaching. This chapter contains an illustrative example of the kind of depth found in this work and how it aids preachers. In this chapter MacBride describes how Paul's exordiums (introductions) had the purpose of informing the audience of the intent of the speech. He then names how these elaborate introductions are often used as "launching pads" for topical messages by today's preachers. He cautions against this use because it is so different than Paul's original intent. This kind of detail exemplifies the work that MacBride does in this text. Chapter 5 serves as an introduction to the Means of Persuasion that

are more closely detailed in chapters 6–8. In these chapters he gives a history of the uses of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* and how identifying these proofs within the New Testament authors informs preaching. Chapter 6 uses the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians as a source for a potential preaching series based on the methodology offered in this book.

This book serves as an effective, logical, and detailed extension of the move within homiletic theory to match the function of the Biblical text with the function of the sermon. Using the reemerging field of rhetorical criticism, MacBride's profound analysis provides a clear understanding of how to craft expository sermons that are faithful to the original intent of Paul, a learned rhetorician.

Timothy Jones, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Todd Penner and Davina C. Lopez. *De-Introducing the New Testament: Texts, Worlds, Methods, Stories*. Oxford, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. 242 pages. \$99.95.

This book discusses many elements of discourse to show the ways that New Testament (NT) scholarship changes the present even while illuminating the past. It is not meant to offend or to replace, but to enhance and offer new insight and perspective into what NT scholarship is and can be in our contemporary context. Penner and Lopez ensure that it is accessible for individuals unfamiliar with the work in NT by using robust descriptions and in-depth stories at the beginning of each chapter to break down the more complex discussions into concrete examples.

The introduction opens with a story of Lady Justice, a statue that sits at the intersection of five New York boroughs in front of what was once the Bronx Borough Courthouse. The statue is now sprayed with graffiti, invoking debates on whether the previously valued statue is still important. This illustration invites the readers to consider the complexities of maintenance of the old versus creation of the new. Penner and Lopez use this metaphor to position NT scholarship with the statue and this book with the graffiti. The authors hope to “underscore the point that the study of the NT is not simply about the texts themselves, but also concerns what people do with the texts in different time periods, cultures, and media forms” (15).

Chapter 1 focuses on the episteme of NT scholarship and the way that methodology is shaped. They discuss a bone-box, “an ossuary used for the second burial of Jewish remains in antiquity” (25), which was discovered with an inscription pointing back to the presence of Jesus. Debates surrounding origins of the box and how we determine its authenticity invoke the question, “How do we know what we know?” The chapter explores four different categories of knowing with this example as the backdrop. Building on this treatment, Chapter 2 highlights the importance of contexts and backgrounds as a lens of knowing and the many elements that create different perspectives for meaning making.

Chapter 3 introduces “excavating discourse” as a methodological tool for writing based upon the field of archaeology. This method focuses on understanding the many discourses around an object or event and not just the facts or “truth” of what happened. This method also pays careful attention to those elements that contribute to understanding the past and considers how the ways we unpack ancient contexts impact our understanding of the world today.

The final chapter focuses on the scholar as a critical part of NT scholarship and its development. The authors posit the affect that neoliberal subjectivity has on the scholar and scholarship. Its focus on “freedom of expression through performances of authenticity and difference” (177) as a marker of the identity economy has a profound impact. An NT scholar constantly navigates who they are, what are they doing and for whom, while creating narrative based upon the answers to these questions. The scholar is continually participating in branding as they navigate their identity and in turn the identity of their scholarship. The book concludes by inviting the reader to consider a new role of NT scholarship as a tool to take a critical and expansive look at the past as a means to consider the present differently and to look into the future in new ways.

The content of *De-Introducing the New Testament* is focused on NT scholarship, however the perspective that they offer is also beneficial to related fields such as: Hebrew Bible, Homiletics, and Liturgics. It is particularly interesting for preachers because it offers an in-depth look into how we put together and offer information in the public sphere. The methodological tool of excavating discourse is important for any homiletician considering how texts are used,

interpreted, and re-interpreted for contemporary preaching. In addition, the role of neoliberal subjectivity in identity construction is helpful. It is important to consider how culture, politics, and other markers of our society contribute to our constructions of identity and the construction of what we proclaim to the public. I highly recommend this text not only as an in-depth look into the impact of New Testament scholarship, but also as a tool for other disciplines to examine their epistemology, scholarship, and scholars.

Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr., eds. *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock; 2013. 264 pages. \$29.

The editors and authors of this volume have given a gift to the Church through this collection of reflections on what it means to invite, listen to, and contribute to the process of conversation both within and outside of the congregational context. The title refers to the story from Genesis 18:1-15 where Sarah and Abraham encounter three visitors as they sojourn at the oaks of Mamre. Because of their intentional hospitality toward the strangers (even in the midst of their incredulity at the announcement of Sarah's impending pregnancy), they open themselves to a divine conversation that changes them and, consequently, the community around them. It is this extended metaphor that forms the basis of the premise of the book; that is, a conversational approach to theology, ecclesiology, ministry, and life in Christian community "seeks to interpret God, the world, and self through reciprocal give-and-take, speaking and listening, with the full range of others in and beyond the church" (xiv).

Part One consists of three chapters that provide the foundation for the conversational model in terms of how we understand the church, the minister, and God. The authors explore give-and-take between the Bible, tradition, culture, technology and social media, minoritized individuals and communities, and interfaith partners from the perspective of the church's as well as the minister's self-understanding. And all of these voices are both valued and critically engaged by the Triune God's welcoming and transforming presence. Divine presence provides the assurance that even in the midst of difficult conversations and serious disagreements, we may discover shared values and construct bridges of partnership. As John McClure reminds us, "Truth is always a matter of seeking *new* ground, rather than insisting on *my* ground" (36).

Part Two, "The Tasks of Ministry," applies the conversational approach to eight different aspects of ministry: preaching, worship, Christian education, evangelism, pastoral care, mission and ecumenism, social witness, and interfaith relationships. The format of each chapter follows a shared pattern. Each begins with a brief historical sketch of how theologians and church scholars have understood this particular area of ministry through doctrine. This format follows up with a snapshot of the current conception and practice within the ministry area. The author then explores what it means to apply the "conversation" model to this area of ministry, and its implications for reconceiving how we might be church in and among the world. They also suggest practical applications, allowing the reader to move from theory to ideas for praxis. A section containing cautions and possible critiques of this conversational approach follows, helping the reader troubleshoot and think through the inherent obstacles that one may encounter. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for further reading and questions for discussion.

These questions make the book an obvious choice for clergy groups looking for a volume to engage for study and continuing education. As well, seminary professors and their students will find this a useful book for heuristically opening a way to think about and discuss ministry within many different spheres. It would be especially well suited for students in the latter stages of seminary training who are looking to experiment with new approaches to ministry in internship and field education settings.

But, the reflections of this book should not be reserved only for pastoral professionals in academic settings. Groups of lay leaders and thoughtful study groups looking to expand their repertoire for engaging the culture, society, and interfaith context around them would be well served by this book. As a pastor, I could see myself using the chapters and discussion questions

of this book for a 12-week study with parishioners, or a 12-month series of discussions with the church's governing board. While some chapters are a bit heavy on the academic side, the majority of the writing is accessible for lay readers. And the insights gained from engaging the topics from the conversational perspective would be well worth the time and effort to engage the content.

As a pastor and social justice activist with particular interest in the role of the preacher and faith community in the public square, I see this book as making an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue about what it means to reclaim the public dimension of our faith and our role in society. While the church and the pastoral leader's contribution to the public conversation is certainly provisional and must be submitted with humility and openness to be transformed even as we seek Christ's transformation, the need for our voices is without doubt. This book is exactly what is needed for a Church in the midst of re-forming itself to address an age and planet in desperate need of deliberative dialogue about how we shall live, provide for "the least of these," and serve God through worship, invitation, service, and deep theological and spiritual reflection. The cool shade of the oak tree awaits us.

Leah D. Schade

Cody J. Sanders and Angela Yarber. *Microaggressions in Ministry: Confronting the Hidden Violence of Everyday Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 172 pages. \$20.

One of the things I know as a clergyperson and pastor is that aggressive behavior occurs in the church often. I teach my seminary students that the best thing about working in the church is the people. But the worst thing about working in the church is also the people. In this book, the authors look at some of the “microaggressions” that occur in the church when people do not live up to their best selves when dealing with one another. Blatant acts of bigotry, oppression, and discrimination are often condemned, but small acts continue in the church, often unabated and unchallenged.

According to Sanders and Yarber,

Underhanded slights that assault the souls of oppressed groups still rage from the pulpit, the pew, the Sunday school class, the hymnal, the seminary curriculum, the ordination process, and in pastoral counseling. These everyday slights, insults, and invalidations are called microaggressions, and they accost the spirits of women, persons of color, and LGBTQs on a regular basis in our churches, seminaries, and denominations (2).

This helpful description of microaggression sets up the book well for the reader. The authors divide the book into three sections. The first part, Chapters 1 and 2, delves more fully into the reality of and definition of microaggressions. The second section, Chapters 3, 4 and 5, explores the persons and groups that are typically targets of these occurrences, especially around race, gender, and sexuality and gender expression. The final part of the book, Chapters 6, 7 and 8, looks at the specific ways that microaggressions take place in elements of ministry: “preaching and education, worship and spirituality, and care and counseling” (6).

One of the sections that I found especially intriguing was the authors’ explanation of the reasons why perpetrators exhibit microaggressions. These include: being unaware, acting unintentionally, and preserving one’s self-image (15–18). They couple these reasons with the responses of targets of these microaggressions: ambiguity about what happened, questioning one’s action as a result of these instances, and assessing the impact of these behaviors (18–22). Looking at both sides of each issue was an excellent choice.

The second section of the book (Chapters 3–5) specifically examines the issues related to microaggressions around race, gender, and sexual orientation and gender expression. The use of case studies by the authors is helpful in relating the ways microaggressions occur in ministry. These real world scenarios are both aggravating and inspiring. I can hear the pain in the experiences of folks who have been the victims of these microaggressions, but I also sense a desire on the part of the authors to teach their readers how to react more intentionally and with a deeper passion of justice. Understanding the harm that microaggressions inflict on persons who are marginalized is important. But an interesting thing to note about this book is that the authors reflect on the ways that perpetrators are also harmed by their own behavior (55). “In order to remain in good conscience, perpetrators must engage in a great deal of denial and live with a constructed false reality that ultimately diminishes their ability to understand the experience of marginalized groups” (55). This kind of balance is intriguing and adds a deeper level of authenticity to the book.

Addressing white privilege, pastoral authority and race, and raising/supporting minority communities for resistance and resiliency are important to the work of avoiding microaggressions in race (Chapter 3). The next chapter on gender microaggressions addresses the issues that clergywomen and laywomen experience in ministry, the importance of the use of gender neutral language, and the ways male privilege impacts the church. The authors in this chapter, like the others, offer action steps to address microaggressions in gender roles in a four-pronged move. These include: individual, organizational, theological, and societal changes (75).

LGBTQ persons experience significant prejudice on a daily basis in many significantly painful ways. The microaggressions occurring in the church are another way they experience pain and violence due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Some of the ways microaggressions occur include: heterosexist and transphobic language, “the endorsement of heteronormative or gender-normative culture and behaviors,” assuming a universal or normative LGBTQ experience, making the LGBTQ experience seem exotic or odd, the disapproval or assuming an abnormality of LGBTQ persons’ lives and experience, or denying heterosexism or transphobia (85–89).

The final section of this book looks specifically at the ways microaggressions occur in the midst of ministry. Authors Sanders and Yarber examine the microaggressions that occur in the midst of proclaiming the word, choosing music and liturgy, crafting prayers, setting up liturgical space, and in pastoral care and counseling. The authors provide helpful insights that can bring congregations, ministry partners, and the congregants into a deeper and more intentional relationship with an astute awareness to avoid and/or diminish the microaggressions that happen all around.

The organization of the book is well thought-out and helps move the reader forward in an efficient and effective manner. The authors provide sufficient evidence and examples for the reader to gain insights into the intentional and unintentional behavior of members of their ministry communities that can cause harm both to others and to themselves. I believe that this book would be helpful for both laity and clergy in any size congregation or ministry and I recommend it wholeheartedly.

Karyn L. Wiseman, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

Choi Hee An. *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015. 185 pages. \$75.

This book claims that the Korean Immigrant Church and its theology help its people not only overcome their marginalized self-image, but also form a new transformative, individual, and collective identity that can lead to a better life in America where immigrants, especially nonwhites and women, have to maneuver challenges of many “toxic” prejudices like racism and sexism. Defining colonialism as “a physical, psychological, and even spiritual exercise of a nation’s sovereign power beyond its borders, involving physical, geographical dominion; psychological oppression and spiritual manipulation,” the author says, “Immigrant experiences in America are a result of direct colonial influence” (2). She also says that racism, sexism, and classism on nonwhite immigrants in contemporary America accelerate the negative impact of such (post)colonial influences.

Drawing mainly upon postcolonial criticism and feminist/womanist perspectives, the author describes and analyzes how the awareness of self-identity of first-generation Korean immigrants is compromised by the pressure of dominant white culture in America and shows how their native patriarchal culture aggravates women’s self-image in Korean immigrant churches. Nonetheless, the author “found hope” (ix) in the Korean immigrant church because the church has the unique quality of family-like radical hospitality and mutual sharing and provides through its activities and programs not just “a psychological and spiritual force that can transform their despair into new hope and faith” but also “a socio-political force” (135) that can motivate and equip them to join wider communities beyond their own to be part of American society. One of the key phrases for this work is “a postcolonial self” for Korean immigrants, which the author hopes can be a model for other ethnic communities to adopt not only to overcome the marginalized self, but also to have a “life transformation” in our multiracial immigrant society (5).

The book has three chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the meaning of *Woori* (we), a Korean communal ethnic self, from historical, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Drawing on Descartes, Nietzsche, and Ricoeur, the author brings the Western understanding of self, “I,” which is individualistic and independent from others, to compare with Korean concept of “I,” which is part of “we” and cannot be weighed separately; in most Korean women’s cases, “self is a disowned self . . . but at the same, it is an owned self, owned already by the community in which the ‘we’ and the ‘I’ belong together” (45).

Chapter 2 describes how this ethnic communal identity is viewed negatively in American individualistic culture and how Korean immigrants feel compartmentalized into three identities: the Korean ethnic self (we), the social ideal self (I) of Western individualism, and the marginalized self (I as the other and we as the other) from prejudices and discrimination (71).

Chapter 3 suggests that the Korean immigrant church, as a cultural and theological agent of formation, helps immigrants “make a transition from I as the other/we as the other to the I and we,” through which they not only overcome marginalization but transform their self-consciousness to the inclusiveness and togetherness of “we with others.” This transformation potentially offers an integral resource to reach out to other ethnic groups (129, 131, 154).

Throughout the book, the author mentions Korean immigrant theology and its positive role in the church. The subtitle of this book is “Korean Immigrant Theology and Church.” However, the text does not deal fully with or clearly define that theology in detail. Similarly, many complex words such as racism, sexism, classism, and postcolonialism are repeatedly

mentioned throughout the book but specific examples are not always given for each of them. Notwithstanding, this book may be good for students and teachers who need an in-depth study of immigrants in America from psychological, sociological, linguistical, and cultural perspectives. Many readers will appreciate the interdisciplinary aspect of this work.

Sangyil Sam Park, American Baptist Seminary of the West, Berkeley, CA

Jared E. Alcántara. *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015. 309 pages. \$32.

In his timely book, *Crossover Preaching*, Jared E. Alcántara addresses a matter of dire importance for the theological academy and the church, namely, preaching that honors difference. In light of projected demographic shifts already taking shape in North America, Alcántara convincingly makes the case that preachers need to develop (or deepen) their intercultural competencies and employ such in their preaching ministries.

Written primarily for North American preaching professors, this book posits two central claims. First, in light of the tectonic shifts taking place in North American Christianity, preachers must develop the capacity to “crossover”; that is, “to foster dispositional commitment to improvisational-intercultural proficiency as a way of being and acting” (28). Second, Alcántara argues that the unique social location and preaching style of Gardner C. Taylor models just such a “crossover homiletic.”

Following an Introduction that highlights sociological shifts on the ecclesial horizon, Alcántara’s argument unfolds over five chapters. Chapter 1 presents Taylor as a “case study” for crossover preaching, with Alcántara defending his claim that Taylor’s preaching style anticipates the needs of 21st century preaching. Chapter 2 stresses the importance of performative improvisation, highlighting such in Taylor’s preaching.

In Chapter 3, Alcántara directs the reader to contemporary developments in race theory in route to a helpful typology of African American homiletics that resists reductionism by honoring the plurivocality of this rich tradition. Alcántara’s four-fold typology includes *structuralists* (Harris, Massey, Moyd), *experimentalists* (Crawford, Mitchell—I would add Frank Thomas), *hermeneuts* (LaRue, Jones, Gilbert), and *improvisationalists* (Taylor, Forbes, King Jr.). As helpful as this typology is, Alcántara’s “survey” of African American homiletics (171) calls for expansion (no mention is made of Teresa Fry Brown, Gennifer Brooks, Otis Moss III, or Brian Blount—to name but a few).

Chapters 4 and 5 engage the work of intercultural competency and improvisation theorists, respectively. These lay the theoretical groundwork for Alcántara’s practical contributions to preaching instruction. It is in his final chapter that I find Alcántara most helpful. He offers numerous homiletical strategies for developing an intercultural-improvisational disposition in preaching students—strategies I will soon employ in my own teaching ministry.

Even as I celebrate the aim of Alcántara’s text, I find his thesis unconvincing. For theological as well as sociological reasons, homileticians must equip preaching students to respect difference in and through their preaching ministries. Regrettably, Alcántara fails to substantiate his thesis that Taylor’s intercultural-improvisational homiletic epitomizes Taylor’s contemporary importance (238). At day’s end, this is a problem of method. Alcántara does not present enough evidence of Taylor’s actual preaching to demonstrate how Taylor is the crossover preacher *sine pari*. Similarly, Alcántara does not demonstrate clearly how Taylor’s delivery style is altogether different or exceptional in comparison to other great African American preachers.

Alcántara’s text leaves me with additional concerns. First, he contends that literature on preaching and intercultural competence is “*nonexistent*,” a deficiency that his book aims to remedy (89). A case could be made, however, that the work of John McClure, Eunjoo Kim, Christine Smith, and Donna Allen provide just such a framework. Curiously, Alcántara overlooks such homiletical contributions. Second, he notes in passing that at one point Taylor’s

church had 14,000 members; but by the time Taylor retired, Concord Baptist had only 5000 members (50). By no means would I wish to challenge Taylor's homiletical significance, nor question his status as "the Prince of the *American* pulpit" (Mitchell's phrase); and yet, such attenuation raises potential questions regarding the extent of Taylor's intercultural "effectiveness." It seems that factors beyond Taylor's "negotiation of blackness" (164) merit consideration. Third, I am disturbed by Alcántara's characterization of manuscript preachers (136, 252). I would not necessarily characterize my own preaching as "crossover preaching," even less would I laud my intercultural intelligence as a paragon, but neither do I blithely regurgitate my sermon manuscript verbatim. Fourth, Alcántara is right to articulate a certain nuance in the way in which Taylor "wields blackness," but no mention is made about how Taylor wields his gender, sexuality, or other identity markers. Even more troubling is the implicit claim that to be an "effective" preacher—to *crossover* like Taylor—is to assimilate one's thinking and speaking to the dominant culture. This ignores the fact that the onus of responsibility has been placed historically upon men and women of color to "crossover" to hegemonic modes of discourse, discourses that are often resistant to liberation.

Jacob D. Myers, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA

Kate Bruce. *Igniting the Heart: Preaching and Imagination*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2015. 206 pages. \$27.

Kate Bruce is an ordained Anglican priest and Deputy Warden and Tutor in homiletics at Cranmore Hall in Durham, United Kingdom. *Igniting the Heart* is based on her 2013 Ph.D. thesis at Durham University. She calls for preachers to ignite faith by sparking imaginative connections with the hearer. Her focus on creativity and the sacramental nature of preaching is an invitation for preachers to honor God's Word with their best use of words and images.

Even Bruce's description of the kind of preaching she opposes is laced with sufficient imagination to improve the posture of complacent preachers. Too much preaching she says is, "poorly conceived, ill-prepared, dull, disconnected, boring, irrelevant, authoritarian, yawn-inducing, patronizing, pontificating, pointless and badly delivered" (xiii). Imaginative preaching has power to challenge and change.

She treats imagination not as a polar opposite to intellect and reason, but as a resource for reason to use that has four functions: sensory (imagistic), intuitive (seeing in new ways), affective (empathetic) and intellectual. The latter "is the willingness to notice anomalies and to risk and question the 'irrefutable' evidence of the old paradigm" (19). Imagination has a subversive role, challenging the status quo and inviting people to faith through asking, "*What if the gospel accounts of the nature of God are true? Were they to be true, then what?*" (19). She maintains a distinction too often lost on the subject of human creativity: God creates *ex nihilo* and humans create "out of something" (48).

Imagination in Bruce's proposal is playful and poetic. She advocates "preaching in the lyrical voice" (55–84). This consists of poetic and imagistic expression; placing old symbols in new contexts; creating new similes, analogies, metaphors; use of sensory and experiential language; attending to scriptural detail and genre; employing repetition and musicality in speech; and numerous other items she offers in chart form (61–62). These are helpful reminders and a good guide to preachers stuck in excessively rational ways of thought. Only occasionally is the advice puzzling, as with one example that employs corny conversation and assails listeners with too many questions (63–64).

Bruce devotes a chapter to the sacramental potential of preaching, that is, its ability to disclose the self-revealing light of God and thereby to reorder how listeners see the world. The linguistic and performative gifts of the preacher have no inherent revelatory power, but God nonetheless uses the preacher's imagination "to break open the scriptural word and point to the reality of the incarnate Word, who by grace breathes through the event of the sermon" (105). Bruce grounds her understanding of sacramentality in the goodness of God as revealed in Creation and Incarnation (86–93). She acknowledges that grace is more powerful than sin, yet strangely the cross, resurrection and the Spirit at Pentecost play next to no role in the articulation of her thought. This is unfortunate since for many of her target readers, her argument would be strengthened if God in Jesus Christ, in his identity as the One who died and rose to give others life, were who is communicated in the sacramental.

By way of homiletic praxis, Bruce suggests that lament and/or grace are appropriate for the sermon (104–105). She generally cites authors from many areas, yet she seems unaware of the "trouble/grace" school of homiletics, or of what various people in homiletics (as opposed to other areas) have said about imagination, or indeed of the New Homiletic as a movement that for forty years has been advocating many of the things Bruce says, for instance about the power of image and metaphor, performative language, conversational preaching, and making connections

between the Scripture and the real lives of the hearers. The New Homiletic also explored many things relevant to her topic that she does not discuss, like the importance of narrative, inductive sermons, organic form, specific varieties of sermon structure, focusing on God's action in or behind the text if grace is to be communicated, or the value of proclamation, understood as God's direct liberating speech to the people.

At times Bruce may only be doing what many people are guilty of who write about preaching, a kind of reinvention of the wheel *ex nihilo*, as it were. On the other hand, imagination for the pulpit is an essential topic that needs to be revisited. Bruce brings to it an infectious passion and energy that cannot help but ignite the heart of preachers and listeners, and encourage more engaging and dynamic sermons.

Paul Scott Wilson, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, ON

Winterbourne L. Harrison-Jones, ed. *From Generation to Generation: A Commemorative Collection of African American Millennial Sermons from the Festivals of Young Preachers 2010–2015*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2015. 368 pages. \$25.99.

From Generation to Generation presents sermons from six annual volumes published by Chalice Press (352). The sermons were preached at six Festivals of Young Preachers and are available on YouTube (353). “What this book represents, more than anything, is the Black millennials’ counter-cultural commitment to the work of the ministry” (4), specifically the ministry of preaching.

The Academy of Preachers (AoP) sponsors the Festivals of Young Preachers. The editor of this volume is a 2010 product of the AoP and “has been a part of the Academy of Preachers since its inception in 2008” (back cover). The AoP “is a national non-profit, transdenominational organization with a mission to ‘identify, network, support, and inspire young people in the call to gospel preaching’” (359).

The collection contains manuscripts of sixty-six sermons preached at the AoP’s Festivals of Young Preachers. Sixty of the sermons are by young preachers, perhaps between the ages of 14 and 28 years (359); and six are by senior preachers. Fifteen of the sixty-six sermons are by women, including homiletician Teresa Fry Brown. Harrison-Jones organizes the young preachers’ sermons into six thematic sections.

Lyvonne “Proverbs” Briggs cites an African proverb, “When you pray, move your feet” (48), to proclaim an active dimension of love. That active orientation takes center stage in the sermons that address social justice in the book’s sixth section. Brandon Jamar Perkins exemplifies the role of social justice rhetoric in preaching by young African Americans as he proclaims, “Until we reach our own Sinai filled with the promise of God’s enduring presence, let us not grow weary in the fight against our stories of terror and oppression. May we continue to work, cry, struggle, and pray together so that our story, our collective story, our redeeming story, our comforting story, our salvific story, our liberating story, can be told” (267–268). In alignment with more expansive anthologies of African American rhetoric, such as *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (edited by Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, 1998) and *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (edited by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, 2010), Perkins combines diverse dimensions of the African American experience(s) and uses the juxtaposition to call for ongoing action toward social justice.

The sermons demonstrate a variety of preaching methodologies, bringing biblical texts and contemporary situations into conversation, and contain a range of interactions with the Bible, theological scholarship, cultural traditions, and popular music. Theological conflict appears occasionally, and a preacher might even struggle with a text (e.g. Gary F. Green II on Exodus 20:18-21). Several of the sermons end with personal applications; a few offer communal implications.

Marvin McMickle writes in the foreword that the book “will be an important contribution to the study and celebration of preaching as an oral art form and as a structural science” (xiv). The volume celebrates preaching, especially by young African Americans. An anthology like this, however, leaves the study part of McMickle’s prediction to scholars. Therefore I encourage homiletics and rhetoricians to study these sermons, exploring the intersections of religion, race, and rhetoric and magnifying a few voices from faith communities that have received limited consideration in the academic study of Christian proclamation.

In addition to recommending this volume to scholars, I recommend it to preachers, especially those in African American and culturally diverse communities. I also recommend the book to Christians who are not preachers or scholars but welcome spiritual nourishment. Finally, both religious and nonreligious readers can learn about race-conscious Christian rhetoric through this anthology.

Steven Tramel Gaines, The University of Memphis, Memphis, TN

Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Viking, 2015. 309 pages. \$16.

Timothy Keller is an evangelical and a pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. He has authored numerous books that call for a reformed Christianity. In this book Keller turns his attention to the task of preaching and addresses the need to communicate the Gospel in a way that connects with both Christians and non-Christians who want not only to hear a word from God but also to see it embodied in the lives of those who proclaim it. The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 describes the commitment to preaching Scripture, defines expository preaching, and identifies it as the most effective way of communicating God's word. Part 2 explores the culture in which we live and offers guidelines on how to preach to this "late modern culture," as he calls it (122–123). Part 3 turns the reader's attention to the importance of the character and passion of the preacher.

Keller's homiletic theory and practice is based on evangelical writers like William Perkins, Alan Stibbs, Haddon Robinson, Brian Chapell, David Helm, and others (294–295). Since he believes expository preaching is the best way of communicating Scripture, he devotes time to identifying what it is. He defines it in the following way: "Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that the sermon's points are points in the text, and it majors in the text's major ideas" (32). His preaching heroes are John Stott and Dick Lucas. They are "clear teachers of the text" (41). He believes, however, that expository preaching cannot focus exclusively on explaining and sharing information. It also must touch the heart and elicit emotion in order to move people to change.

Keller takes issue with some mainline perspectives on preaching. He disagrees with Craddock's philosophy of preaching that leaves the sermon open ended in order to allow listeners to "draw their own conclusions" since we live in a culture that does not accept the Bible (45). In contrast to that perspective, Keller's practice is simply to let the Bible defend itself by preaching the Bible (46). In one lengthy endnote, he tracks the mainline Protestant critique of the traditional sermon outline (305). In that same note he traces the development of the new homiletic basically relying on Tom Long's book *Witness of Preaching* to critique the different voices in that movement. Mainline homiletics were "scornful" of traditional expository preaching because it turned Scripture into a "box of ideas" (305). He agrees with Tom Long's critique of Eugene Lowry's emphasis on concentrating on the rhetorical impact of a text over its content. Taking his cue from Long, Keller argues that while the power of a text "is more than its content, it can't be less" (307).

He concludes that mainline homileticians still do not escape the need for an outline. "'Moves' are still points in an outline that must be thought out and that give structure to the address" (307). He believes that there are "many missteps and mistakes of the narrative preaching movement" (308). What evangelical and mainline preachers can agree on, however, is that sermons must not only engage listeners' minds, but their hearts as well. Both can agree on the importance of movement in the sermon. The sermon should take the congregation somewhere. He agrees with Eugene Lowry that the sermon should create some kind of tension. "A narrative begins when something knocks life off balance" (229).

Keller hits hard the idea of preaching Christ from every text. Every sermon must end with a reference to Christ (184–185): "we must preach Christ from every text, which is the same as saying we must preach the gospel every time and not just settle for general inspiration or moralizing" (48). Keller argues whether you are talking about Joseph and Potiphar's wife or

David and Goliath, “If you don’t *every time* emphatically and clearly fit that text into Christ’s salvation and show how he saved us through resisting temptation, . . . then you are only confirming moralists in their moralism” (61–62). The major problem with this perspective is that Scripture is primarily Theocentric and not Christocentric. God is the author and the source of all things. Prayer and praise and worship are almost exclusively directed to God. Christ is the agent through whom God works. Christ is the “anointed one,” meaning he was selected by God. To insist that all sermons be Christocentric is to miscommunicate a central message of Scripture.

One of the strengths of the book is that Keller takes a holistic approach to preaching, arguing that it is about preparing the preacher more than preparing the sermon (205). Preaching, therefore, is not just about possessing natural talent and learning techniques. Rather, as he puts it, “You may not have strong public-speaking gifts, but if you are godly, your wisdom and love and courage will make you an interesting preacher” (196). Character will “make up for certain shortcomings in gifts” (196). Half the book is dedicated to preparing the heart and character of the preacher. This is a refreshing perspective on the task of preaching. In other words, preaching is a lifestyle. It is not just something we do on Sunday but it is a part of the spiritual formation of the preacher. Keller’s book is a thoughtful reflection on preaching from an evangelical perspective and makes an honest effort to find some common ground between evangelical and mainline homileticians.

Dave Bland, Harding School of Theology, Memphis, TN

John D. Caputo. *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. 214 pages. \$14.99.

Once again philosopher John Caputo has ventured into the world of theology, but not just as he did in *The Weakness of God* (2006) and *The Insistence of God* (2014) or even his provocative *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (2007). In those earlier works Caputo establishes his interest particularly in a radical notion of divine weakness not far from some of the more daring theologies of the cross in the Christian tradition. However, in *Hoping Against Hope* he takes a more autobiographical tack to explore a wide range of theological loci. In this book, we get a more far-reaching vision of what it means to be a hybrid philosopher/theologian and, therefore, to envision a more daring deconstructive postmodern theology.

The autobiographical component, related through the voices of three of John Caputo's selves, already begins to loosen the grip of any overly settled sense of self, world, or God. The first voice, Jackie, is that of Caputo as a young boy whose wonder at the stars in the sky already begins to push back against the fixities of the Baltimore Catechism of his youth. The second voice, Brother Paul, is that of Caputo as a novice, who had tried to hold together the questioning he wished to do as a scholar and the vocational life he envisioned within the Catholic Church. The third is the Professor who lives through his own contradictions of recognizing the intrinsic gift that is his academic life, but still wishing to be paid for it at the university. It is through his conversation with these three voices that Caputo describes his postmodern pilgrimage that is the subtitle of the book.

Along the way, Caputo has his lover's quarrel with theology. As a deconstructive postmodernist he pushes back against the classical theistic notions of God—omnipotence, in particular. This move is in kind with his earlier work in radical theology that embraces God's weakness and argues for God's insistence rather than God's existence. Notwithstanding, Caputo wants to relate the conditional and the Unconditional in a different way than does the tradition of the Omni-God with its dichotomized view of time and eternity. Indeed, it is this desire to see the Unconditional irrupting into the conditional and a refusal to turn the present into a kind of transactional trade-off for a neo-Platonist eternity that drives Caputo to rethink what hope itself is. Along the way, Caputo also embraces what he calls the nihilism of grace, the strangeness of gift over against the so-called "economy of salvation," the demise of heaven along with its largely transactional scheme in the name of the gift, and a revisioning of eschatology as "life before death." What Caputo offers through his nihilistic grace is his vision of the rose, whose blooming is without why or wherefore—a strange kind of cosmic smile that the universe offers on its way to utter extinction. This smile is a harbinger of the very irruption of the Unconditional into the conditional, which, like God, does not so much exist but insists.

The book is written in a passionate style and is full of the kind of wry recognition that you would expect from a hybrid philosopher/theologian who thinks both with the Catholic Church of his youth and the other "Jackie," the Jewish Algerian French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. I say passionate not just for the reasons you would expect, but also for the high place Caputo affords praying, hoping, and tears.

This book may seem like an odd one to recommend to homileticians, but I do in fact do so. From time to time, Caputo winks at preachers and tries to help theology see the mystery it desires to name in all its complexity and unknowability. There is a Lyotardian incredulity to what we preach that goes beyond mere unsettled epistemologies and a loss of metanarratives. This incredulity itself requires a humility in the pulpit that goes far beyond a mere chastening of

authority or a democratizing of the pulpit. Yet for homileticians, in particular, this book is important for the way in which it calls into question the kinds of limited projects with which we have engaged postmodernism generally and deconstruction particularly, thus far. This work of theology, without God, without heaven, and without any transcendental form of hope does far more than simply drive homiletic theories that wish to be intellectually plausible spaces for faith (Lose) or offer ethical and responsible practices for preaching in the face of others (Rose, McClure, Allen). Instead, it presses us further to a more daring *and weaker* homiletical theology itself.

David Schnasa Jacobsen, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Zachary Guiliano and Cameron E. Partridge, eds. *Preaching and the Theological Imagination*. Studies in Episcopal and Anglican Theology, vol. 9. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. 345 pages. \$96.95.

This stimulating collection of essays opens up with an introduction that sets the terms for Guiliano and Partridge's investigation of preaching and theological imagination in the Anglican tradition. Through their very arrangement of the sections of the book, the editors give especially important attention to sacraments and liturgy for forming the Anglican theological imagination. As one would expect, the relationship of Word and Sacrament and the importance of liturgy for Anglican theological reflection are given pride of place throughout the whole collection. Elements of preaching practice also enter the dialogue, however—especially the history of Anglican preaching, the problem of preaching to “complex constituencies,” difficult theological topics, the problem of authority and power, as well as some concluding sermons.

On the whole, the collection is well-rounded. The essays by Ruthanna Hooke and Matthew Potts in the opening section, “Preaching Presence: Sacrament, Narrative, Embodiment,” were strong. Hooke builds on Carl Daw's work in relating Gregory Dix's four-fold structure of the Eucharist to an understanding of presence in preaching—and in the process adds an important reflection on performance, voice, and embodiment in this more sacramental vision of preaching. Potts uses the work of Adriana Caverero and Judith Butler on narrative, identity, and vulnerability to complexify notions of divine action in Barth, and Christ's identity in Hans Frei. Potts succeeds in drawing new insights on sacramental presence in preaching—especially with reference to Christ's own vulnerability in “allowing us to speak on his behalf.”

The editors' own essays are also quite strong. Partridge offers a “homiletic theology of the Christian year” that draws on the hinges of the calendar (e.g., Transfiguration) and in the process deepens our understanding of the same through an insightful use of anthropological and postcolonial theory. Guiliano makes a nice case for retrieving patristic allegorical preaching through Foucault and Girard, arguing that allegory can be a means of encouraging a kind of aesthetic imitation for the Christian moral life. I was not convinced that Guiliano adequately deals with the full range of problems that Christian supersessionism offers in the troubled history of such figural readings, but he anticipates objections fairly well and makes a strong, consistent case for his vision—and with a strong, compelling connection to Anglican theology.

The many essays that follow are largely strong. Denise Yarbrough's work in “Practicing the Theology of Companionship: Preaching an Interreligious Gospel” was an especially nice surprise. The section devoted to “Difficult Topics, Preaching Angles” was of special interest for anyone who wants preaching to deal more deeply with theology in light of the situations that call forth pulpit speech. I expect to be assigning a couple of these essays for my classes.

Naturally, some essays make the volume as a whole at least a little uneven. Occasionally the topic of “preaching and the theological imagination” fades just a little from view in this sprawling volume of essays. Nonetheless, the ongoing interest in linking preaching and Anglican theology comes through with great consistency and surprising vision.

David Schnasa Jacobsen, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Otis Moss, III. *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 127 pages. \$18.

Intentionally written in an aural style so as to feel as close as possible to the Beecher lectures, which served as its inspiration, this book sits stylistically as a hybrid or as Moss might say, a “creole cross” between lecture and sermon. Moss includes cues (like “Can I get a witness?”) that many authors might remove from a printed version. As a nod to the digital age in which we live, Moss also includes a QR code at the end of each chapter that when scanned by the proper app on a smart phone will take the reader directly to the video of that particular lecture. These stylistic elements are important to foreground because Moss models through his lecture the kind of preaching that he believes has the ability to speak to this current generation, a “360 [degree] liturgical narrative” (57) that engages the congregation on multiple levels of knowing.

The heart of Moss’ work is a call for “Blue Note” preaching that takes seriously the sadness and tragedy of our world while also creatively imagining hope in the midst of this blues. Moss grounds this work in sources not always privileged in the academy. Demonstrating a broad familiarity with both classic homiletic literature and American literary traditions, Moss beautifully dances back and forth between authors and homileticians as epistemological sources for his work, allowing August Wilson and Zora Neale Hurston to share equal footing with Nora Tubbs Tisdale and Frank Thomas.

Chapter one begins by describing the current homiletical landscape as one that is found quite lacking of prophets. Moss suggests that the ability to deal with the blues of life has gone missing from much of preaching and that this ability to speak the blues must be recovered in order to offer real hope. Relying heavily on Wilson and Hurston, Moss names the call of the preacher as the ability “to stare in the darkness and speak the Blues with authority and witness the work of God in darkness and even in the abyss” (9). Chapter two shifts to a discussion of the hermeneutic necessary to preach the Blue Note Gospel. The Blue Note preacher must, according to Moss, understand the inherent blues in the Biblical text and “read the Bible with a Blue Note lens” (27). This hermeneutic merges artistic imagination with contextualization in order to understand a text that was written by those that were oppressed. Chapter three situates Blue Note preaching as the kind of preaching that is translatable to the postmodern and post soul world. Blue Note preaching then is the kind of preaching that can speak to both the “analog” and “digital” generations by using different ways of knowing. Moss suggests that the four pillars of hip hop (graffiti, breakdancing, Djing, and rapping) offer a way of thinking about both preaching and liturgy that speak to the many different kinds of people found within any congregation. The merging of both method and generation is done through what Moss calls a “Jazz methodology” as individuals are allowed to have their own solos while still playing together as a group. One of the most vivid examples is found within this third lecture, when Moss has two musicians play “Amazing Grace,” first one on an acoustic guitar and then the other on an electric guitar. Then without any rehearsal they play the song together, modeling how different genres and generations can improvise together when guided by the Spirit. The book concludes with four sermons preached by Moss that exemplify this Blue Note homiletic.

This text works quite well in concert with Luke Powery’s *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* as a corrective to the current trajectory of prosperity laden preaching found in black preaching traditions and more generally across the homiletical spectrum. Both authors call for a serious consideration of the reality of people’s existence before moving to joy

and celebration. I also hear echoes of Tom Troeger's *So That All Might Know: Preaching that Engages the Entire Congregation* that champions the use of multiple intelligences in preaching.

The Beecher Lectures have again called forth excellent work from one of the world's most renowned preachers. I appreciate how these lectures both model a merging of preaching and lecturing without sacrificing academic depth and how Moss is able to make these lectures accessible to both practitioners and academics. By cultivating an experience of this work instead of simply reading a book, Moss embodies the best of the Black prophetic tradition, inviting all to come along and hear the blues.

Timothy L. Jones, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

André Resner. *Living In-Between: Lament, Justice, and the Persistence of the Gospel*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015. 132 pages. \$18.

The apocalyptic construal of gospel situates every Christian community in the gap between Christ's first coming and second coming, promise and its fulfillment (already and not-yet), so waiting for the latter with hope and faith. However, its existential reality is under the influence of the struggle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, thus full of suffering, pain, loss, and grief in the community and the larger world. These realities bring about many theological questions about experiences that sometimes remain unsatisfactorily explained or even unaddressed. What and how should we as preachers speak to those who are crying, groaning, and sighing? In his honest struggle with these issues, Resner, drawing on his own perspective on prophetic preaching and the apocalyptic gospel, provides us with his brilliant and insightful meditations, reflections, and essays collected in this book *Living-In-Between: Lament, Justice, and the Persistence of the Gospel*.

This book is comprised of two main parts with four articles each. They deal with multiple means of speaking to the community and the world: 1) faithful lament, 2) unmasking the powers of evil in church and world, 3) establishing justice for the least of these among us, and 4) standing up to proclaim the truth of a Kingdom (8). The first part mostly relates to the task of preaching as *lament* for the sake of *strengthening* individuals and communities in the midst of suffering. The author acknowledges that unlike the modern age, when persuasive and often manipulative discourses prevailed, our postmodern age requires different forms of discourses. Therefore, he unearths one of the most significant but relatively hidden discourses, that is, lament as a form of proclamation. Reflecting on several Bible passages, Resner vividly illuminates lament from various angles. The author first asserts that the language of lament is honest language in the face of suffering, loss, and grief, to do the work of God in the world (18). Preachers are called to become *weeping* prophets to give a voice to people's tears, anger, hope, and expectation, living in the gap between painful experience and hopeful promise (28). However, preachers as weeping prophets should be cautious not to hope and expect for things that the gospel never promised. Rather, they are commissioned to see what God sees and recalibrate their hopes and expectations accordingly, putting the loss and grief within a new frame of perspective (36). Resner also suggests that preachers should cooperate and persist with the Holy Spirit in face of all creation's in-between-time predicament by crying, groaning, sighing, and breathing as different forms of lament (43).

The second part of this book explains our task of preaching as *justice-making and justice-keeping*, in alignment with God's predilection for justice, for the sake of *changing* the world as God's creation. While interpreting Bible passages through the lens of justice, the author asserts that preachers are called to become *protesting* prophets as well. Preachers need to be equipped with two crucial components of prophetic preaching: the preacher's working gospel and the hermeneutic of suspicion (or first naïveté-critical period-second naïveté) to see things differently (à la Tracy, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Heschel). In other words, every engagement with text and context should be done through the lens of the hermeneutic of suspicion, namely, a prophetic interpretive approach that trusts God is present, has not abandoned us, and is working toward ultimate justice and righteousness (66). In this sense, it is important to engage in the creative conversation between the preacher's working gospel, the biblical text, and the concrete situation (72). Resner then describes four possible paths for doing so (irony, indirection, soft-sell, and scribal traditioning) and indicates that prophetic preaching will eventually elicit heightened

awareness and possible incremental change (87). In a nutshell, prophetic/just preaching in a mode of lament is a participation in the Spirit's groaning toward redemption, an apocalyptic act to reveal the advent of the New Age, and an act of repentance, humility, and silent solidarity with all those who suffer and are afflicted.

The uniqueness of this book lies in its two-fold structure: lament and justice. At this point, readers may wonder if there is any chapter directly related to the third part of the book's title: *The Persistence of the Gospel*. In fact, it sets the overall tone of this book, which is in itself Resner's confessional response. Thus, the author implicitly provides us with *confession* as another postmodern form of discourse, along with lament. Though this book seems to be roughly organized to modern eyes, it reads as a perfect example of the beautifully harmonized mixture of theory and practice for our postmodern context.

I highly recommend this book for homileticians and preachers alike. Readers will benefit from Resner's embodiment of two modes of prophetic discourse. Moreover, they will gain a new insight by seeing how the author engages the text in each chapter from the perspective of the apocalyptic gospel and re-illuminates them with his fresh readings and interpretations. Indeed, this review reveals only a small portion of his wise, prophetic book. There is much more wisdom yet to be found by any readers who do a close reading of each of its chapters.

Duse Lee, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

William Willimon. *How Odd of God: Chosen for the Curious Vocation of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 193 pages. \$20.

It might come across as a surprise for many to get a glimpse of William Willimon, a former bishop of the United Methodist Church, engaging in theological reflection on election in this new work, *How Odd of God*. After all, election has been conventionally considered as a theological inheritance of St. Augustine and John Calvin: in God's sovereignty, God has already elected who would be saved and condemned. As a post-liberal theologian, Willimon, however, carefully bases his argument on Karl Barth's work in *Church Dogmatics*, and defines election as "God's act whereby our lives are wrenched out of our control and we are commandeered to witness, thereby enabling the joy of talking about something more important than ourselves, our families, or our churches" (ix). He believes that election is not a matter of individual eternal salvation. Rather, it is about the very identity of who God is and what God does (23).

As the title of his work indicates, Willimon argues that God is radically different from all God's creation. While progressive or liberal Christians have also emphasized the "otherness" of God, he holds that they have ignored God's immanence, therefore leading to atheism (7). The God they support is based on a subjectivism that truncates the God whom we can only encounter through the gracious act of revelation through Christ in God so that God makes sense to us. However, God chooses to reveal who God is and what God does through Christ. For Willimon, the scripture is the primary, or the only means through which we can encounter and understand the identity of God through Christ. While secularism creates a god who is non-threatening to the status quo of the world, he believes that God, whom we encounter in the scripture, is the One who speaks, reveals, and elects to be God for us, and us to be for God (31).

For Willimon, being elected by God does not make one a merely passive participant in the history of God. Rather, as Barth argues, it calls one to "respond in gratitude to the gracious God and to become repetitions and representation of the divine glory" (56). Election is the theological basis for our vocation in Chapter 3, mission in Chapter 4, and preaching in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. It is not one's own decision to choose a vocation. It is God who calls us out of our sense of control so that we give ourselves to God in God's gracious election. Election also provides a reason for church to go out the world in mission. As God chose and sent Abraham, God still elects us and sends us out to the world. God chooses one also so that one can faithfully witness to the words of God. While many contemporary preaching seems concerned about making the Christian message relevant to the culture of the listeners, Willimon believes that the best a preacher can do is to witness to the event in which God speaks to God's church directly.

I believe that, in view of Willimon's Barthian definition, many ethnic minority churches that emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching have practiced preaching as witness. Willimon argues, "Sermon preparation is the practice of various forms of begging; holding out empty hands, praying for the discipline to set no limits on what God can tell us to preach" (118). In other words, preaching begins with listening to the Holy Spirit and ends with letting God continue to speak to the congregation. Many Korean preachers already know what Willimon means as they flock into their churches early in the morning, kneel at the altar, and pray for God to take control of their ministries. Also, "Let go, Let God" is a song cherished in many black churches in the U.S. as they faithfully follow God who goes before them in battle against injustice, racism, and inequality.

Nevertheless, as a United Methodist pastor and Wesleyan homiletician, I find Willimon's work therapeutic. As many churches in the U.S. are declining, it may be true that the minds and

hearts of many preachers seem often occupied with how to please their listeners and maintain the status quo of their denominations. They often try to find ways to make their sermons more entertaining, proverbial, and insightful. However, Willimon reminds us that it is eventually God who has called us to this messy business of preaching. He claims that the gospel produces more conflict than peace because we proclaim the God who is out of control. It is God who sows the seeds and bears fruit. It is encouraging for many preachers to be reminded that it is God who owns us rather than we ourselves.

Song Bok (Bob) Jon, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Kathryn T. McClymond. *Ritual Gone Wrong: What We Learn from Ritual Disruption*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 256 pages. \$35.

In *Ritual Gone Wrong*, Kathryn T. McClymond, chair and professor of religious studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia, seeks to “address the gap” in ritual studies between what “has been observed in ritual events and what has been imagined about the nature of ritual more broadly” (10). She focuses in particular upon “ritual disruptions” or ritual “mistakes.” For McClymond, “no single characteristic defines ritual” (3). With a nod to Jonathan Z. Smith’s culturally dexterous understanding of the term “religion,” McClymond takes a “polythetic” approach to her understanding of rituals. For her, rituals encompass a spectrum of routinized activities that include “normative participant roles, specified materials, prescribed times and locations, preferred gestures and language, and shared understandings of the short- and long-term results for individuals and communities” (4). Ritual results entail changes in communities and individuals with respect to religion and culture, and they occur with concern for social goals and expectations, both detailed and vague, like the common good. The notion of ritual results also entails ritual standards because communities have goals and idealized procedures in mind when they perform rituals.

Communities establish ritual standards, according to McClymond. When standards are not met or the ritually unexpected happens, a ritual disruption or mistake occurs; the ritual goes wrong. McClymond’s *Ritual Gone Wrong* examines five case studies of ritual disruption from differing historical, geographical, social, and material contexts. She analyzes: 1) the Vedic *śrautasūtras* (c. 1500–500 BCE), advice for priests to prepare and correct for ritual mistakes; 2) the tractate Zevachim in the Mishnah (~220 CE), curiously recording rabbis correcting obsolete ritual practices of priests; 3) the misrepresentation of blood libel, or Christian accusations of Jewish communities killing non-Jews (usually Christians) to acquire blood for use in ritual ceremony; 4) disruptions in opening and awards ceremonies of the Olympic games; and 5) the unaddressed national and international missteps in the trial and execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006.

McClymond notes that she could have magnified one or two events for a thick description but says that she opted instead for a sample to exhibit the thoughtfulness of her argument (12). She also defends her use of texts rather than ethnographic or anthropological study, stating that she wants to show how, in “virtually any source material,” ritual scholars can find ritual gone wrong. The selection of case studies may seem unconnected. Yet, just as rituals have no singular characteristic, ritual disruptions also manifest in multiplicity. In that regard, she does not present her case studies as comprehensive, but rather as illustrative of how ritual disruptions might occur in any number of ways.

For teachers and researchers of preaching and worship, McClymond’s introductory pages will probably be most helpful as resource material for developing an introductory lecture or supporting material for an essay or chapter that would benefit from discussion about the unpredictability of rituals and their susceptibility to the everyday stuff of life, like mistakes. Put another way, her argument in the introduction that we should pay attention to ritual error as a means of bridging what is ritually lived and imagined is clearest and most provocative. Yet each exemplary case study also includes intricate facts and explanations that offer wider ways of considering what ritual is and what it does with respect to religious pluralism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, sport, Islamophobia, and geopolitics, to name a few. One might also choose to isolate one case study for a class reading and develop an accompanying assignment, set of

questions, or in-class exercise for students to identify other instances of ritual gone wrong. Or, *Ritual Gone Wrong* might serve as a rich departure point for thinking about how to accommodate ritual mistakes and recalibration in praxis-based coursework for aspiring leaders of ritual practices.

When McClymond challenges Jonathan Z. Smith, her argument especially shines for scholars of ritual study. McClymond contests his idea that rituals portray what ought to be in contrast to how things are (60–61). She asserts instead that, by close reading of ancient texts like the Mishnah, communities not only made room for ritual disruption but also understood rituals to include disorientation and error as a connection to the elasticity and dynamism of ordinary life.

McClymond's work successfully blurs the division between lived and imagined ritual experiences by bringing into view the scholarly significance of ritual disruption. Her emphasis upon textual sources also highlights how even speculative interpretations of ritual subversion and disruption that are represented rather than performed will complement and extend ethnographic and anthropological descriptions of ritual practices.

Gerald C. Liu, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

Robin Meyers. *Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015. 168 pages. \$16.

Faced with waning social influence, mainline Christian faith must reconsider the meaning of discipleship. An honest faith cannot but be a defiant faith. But defiance cannot happen in the abstract. Whom, or to what, does a defiant Christian faith resist? And what will be its relevance? In *Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance*, Robin Meyers responds to these questions.

This monograph expands his 2013 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School, and further develops his previous work like *Saving Jesus from the Church: How to Stop Worshiping Christ and Start Following Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) and *The Underground Church: Reclaiming the Subversive Way of Jesus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012). What distinguishes *Spiritual Defiance* is Meyers' sharper focus and address to the diversity of moderate Christians and preachers to live out an honest faith. Meyers calls moderate Christians to seek inspiration in the spirit that birthed the early church through acts of collective defiance, and that nurtured it into a community actively engaged in resistance to imperial power (87). Meyers calls preachers to "collapse piety and policy into a single obligation," and fight back against the illusion "that faith can be personally redemptive without being socially responsible" (105).

The three main chapters of this work explore defiance as a faith lived out through acts of resistance against the self (ego), culture, and empire. Meyers argues that the renewal of Christian faith is possible not through a return to the unquestionable authority of orthodoxy, or an unassailable faith of unquestionable convictions, but in a radical posture that strives to be "beloved community of defiance, joyful but resilient colony of dissenters from the forces of death...that destroy and marginalize creation" (6). These forces of death take physical and spiritual forms. Whether visible or revealed, the practice of spiritual resistance Meyers proposes "must always be self-conscious and intentional decision to obey, as a disciple, the radical demands of the kingdom of God" (7–8).

Preachers play an important role in stocking spiritual defiance in church-goers as long as preachers shift from seeking to impress to embracing the objective "to draw forth the truth that lies slumbering in all us" (14). For Meyers, resistance is personal—"ministers need to resist self-infatuation." It must also be theological—pushing back against reducing Christianity to assent to doctrinal systems of belief. Finally, it must also be cultural—pushing back against *empire* (42). It is not intellectual dissatisfaction, but the misalignment between belief and action that drives people to occupy other spaces rather than pews. People are leaving the churches, Meyers concludes, not by their lack of spiritual hunger but "they are fleeing because so many churches now seem bereft of the very spirit that birthed them" (115). A faith marked by "*believing through actions*," the deeds of "actors who believe" more than assent to a correct system of belief (51) signals the presence of committed disciples.

Meyers does not call for vague forms of resistance steeped in facile spiritual exercises, he makes bold suggestions. They include daring to remove the American flag out the sanctuary, giving up tax-exempt status to be open to debate political issues in non-patrician ways, claiming the Sabbath as a work-stoppage day in resistance to unbridled capitalism, being conscious consumers and daring to be morally engaged in democratic process apart from personal gain. He asks his readers to push against the preservation of a narrow conception of morality and instead to love in ways that preserve dignity. He asks that Christian adherents and proclaimers resist the media's constant push for distraction and be mindfully present (113–124). The single most

significant challenge Meyers launches at those wishing to live out of a *spirituality of defiance* is to cultivate a radical orthopraxis of three qualities spoken about in churches but often absent: hospitality, diversity, and reflection (132).

In the homiletics classroom, Meyers's book will open a dialogical space for serious consideration of the task of preaching in the 21st century. If the ego has to be overcome for true discipleship and if interpretations of orthodoxy need to transform into efforts to *collapse piety and policy into a single obligation* for proclamation against imperial power and religious entertainment or reductionism, then preachers will find a pulpit and an audience in every place. In so doing, a renewal of Christianity as Jesus followers, more than the embrace of Jesus ethics, is all but certain; not because of intellectual assent but radical living.

Elías Ortega-Aponte, Drew University Theological School, Madison, NJ

Michael Peppard. *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. 336 pages. \$50.

Where can preachers find inspiration for reformation in this post-Christian century? If we ask Augustine, he might advise: “Remember. Remember into the future.” (Confessions: 3.7.12) The title of this innovative study in art, ritual, and Bible invites us to do just that. It is a text that stirs up the cry of the humanists and reformers of the 14th century, “Ad Fontes! Back to the sources.” The source, in this case, is the world’s oldest house church, once located on the Roman frontier in an ancient military town in Syria. This is a breathtaking adventure in theological archeology, ritual studies, and art history as Peppard leads us, like new believers, deeper into the mysteries of Christian initiation as practiced in one place, at one time, in early Christianity.

This text requires a “robust historical imagination” (218)—and that is not a paradoxical request! The author pays rigorous attention to the disciplines of biblical studies, early church history, archeology, art history, and ritual studies as they relate to this famous Christian site. This kind of insightful review would be valuable in and of itself for those scholars of the word who find pure oxygen through analytical study. Peppard’s inductive approach to the question of Christian identity is prompted by the possible interpretations that these ancient rooms and the congregation inside these much-studied walls provide. His cumulative and relational insights provide breathing room for those of us who need to walk around a text or a context before we get to the if/then normative application, if, in truth, we ever do.

What if this congregation did not identify with “being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to new life” (Romans 6) as their primary understanding of their initiation? What if their anointing and baptism were seen as preparation for battle, for empowerment, for illumination, and for healing? How might our preaching be re-formed by recovering a vision of the Table as a wedding feast, and water, not as a source of death, but as the primordial symbol of God’s care now and in a restored creation rightly named paradise?

If the painted images of David and Goliath, and the Good Shepherd are connected to a militarized and Christian community facing overwhelming odds from an enemy army, does the Dura-Europos baptismal connection to the 23rd Psalm offer insights that we need to unearth again? Narratives of war and suffering pour from our news sources these days like the Syrian refugees themselves. Peppard dedicates his book to the people of Syria with a note: “This book about the oldest church building in Syria was thus written under a dark cloud of despair. I read daily about tragedies both large and small throughout contemporary Syria, even as I wrote daily about its ancient beliefs and cultures” (x). Might it assist a 21st century US congregation to be immersed again in the wisdom and the otherness of this witness of a community that followed Christ centuries before our own?

Christian initiation is best understood as a life-long process; and the walls of this once house, now church, communicate that understanding. A procession of women, now understood to be carrying torches of flaming oil, line the walls leading to the place that the Table once stood. They were the faithful, the watchful; they are painted as waiting for Christ’s return. They represented both men and women, holy, anointed, baptized, preparing to celebrate the mystery of the holy meal. That insight alone might lead to a consideration of a reformed table practice that is more celebratory and eschatological.

What might happen to our preaching of the biblical passages in John 4, the Samaritan woman at the well, if the case can be made that the image of woman/well in this oldest of Christian churches is not one of sin and conversion, but incarnation. Mary was often associated

in early Syrian Christian hymns and images as drawing water from a well or a spring when Gabriel greets her. Peppard proposes a still startling thesis that these images symbolized an understanding of Christian initiation that we have yet to incarnate into our understanding of the radical discipleship initiated in our baptism.

Scholars of the early church, such as Paul Bradshaw, in his classic work, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, caution against a generalist reading of early church worship that leads to an uncritical acceptance of uniformity and a desire to impose it in a false sense of authenticity. *Sanctum Catholicam Apostolicam* “always everywhere, by all Christians” (*The Commonitory of Vincent of Lerins* 2:1, Baltimore, MD: Joseph Robinson, 1847) is the ecumenical consensus and affirmation of God’s self-disclosure, not the prescription for practice. The contribution of this text to the field of homiletics and liturgics is both memory and imagination. The world’s oldest church continues to illuminate a way to nurture new believers. As Peppard writes, “Preserved under duress, rediscovered by chance, and restored with great toil, the remains grant us only a keyhole’s view into a cityscape as full as it is foreign. Regarding this unique church building, then, we would be wise to keep our oil of interpretation burning—and to leave the door open” (219).

Heather Murray Elkins, Drew University Theological School, Madison, NJ

Wendy L. Porter, ed. *Rediscovering Worship: Past, Present, and Future*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015. 359 pages. \$29.

Rediscovering Worship: Past, Present, and Future is an edited work of papers presented at the H. H. Bingham Colloquium at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in 2010. The work reflects the evangelical Baptist tradition from which this Colloquium has sprung, as well as the Canadian context in which it took place. In her Introduction, Wendy L. Porter interweaves theory from Old Testament and New Testament scholars with praxis from worship and music scholars.

The first three chapters examine some theological and practical models for worship found in the Hebrew Bible. Daniel Block's chapter and Gordon Adnams' response is concerned about evangelicals decreasing attention to the theology of worship in the scriptures. Block examines the importance of rituals found in Deuteronomy for building community. He provides an accessible model for 21st century communities to explore further the way in which they view their meal rituals (13–14). Paul S. Evans provides an overview of temple worship and a historical critical review of the book of Chronicles with implications for community identity and worship including the importance of public worship and the role of music for getting the word across (40–41). Porter expands upon the work of Evans by considering the practical implications for worship design and content. Her chapter could be a useful supplement for congregations wanting to transition to a new kind of worship by providing common ground for those who have different opinions about styles of worship. Mark Boda's chapter surveys the Psalms. His study, as well as the response to it, could provide an easily accessible supplement for preaching professors or worship leaders to begin the examination of multiple points of view in worship liturgy and music "that reflect the realities of the human experience of those who participate in worship" (71).

The second three chapters and responses concern worship considerations from the New Testament. Stanley E. Porter engages John 4:20-24 as a "prescription for worship," stressing the importance of spiritual worship and a critique modern worship movements that revere past rituals and liturgies over spiritual substance (97, 100). Adnams' response expounds upon Porter's use of "in spirit and truth" and explores the very worshipper's being as a space for worship renewal. Cynthia Long Westfall and Adnams' responses draw comparisons between the 21st century and the early church by acknowledging the influence from Greco-Roman practices and Judaism upon Christian praxis. Westfall uses this multivalent approach to encourage worship development. Her work provides a useful opening to explore aspects of the multiple origins of our modern worship, even though she makes some assumptions that have been questioned by recent scholarship (125, 133; especially her treatment of Eucharist and the Passover). Grant R. Osborne interprets worship in the book of Revelation. He views the text as a result of internal schism within the community concerning false worship and true, and builds his arguments based upon detailed analyses regarding the location and categorization of prayers and hymns in the text worship (142–143). Porter's response advocates for the exploration of the eschatological implications of Revelation with worship teams.

Porter's gift for storytelling and musical expertise shines most in the final chapter. Acknowledging that her survey of worship history may be an ambitious undertaking for one paper, she hopes it will spur further study (179). Inevitably she leaves out some points. However, her sociological overview stressing the multiplicity of liturgical practice through the centuries and her mention of Hildegard should pique further reflection by worship leaders (200). Her

treatment of the musical additions by Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther are also refreshing (201, 208).

This volume achieves the goals set forth to model a conversation between theoreticians and practitioners. However, some of the interpretive lenses and voices presented may limit its scope and use. For example, the book views Hebrew texts “in the light of Jesus Christ” (87). While I agree with Porter that the Christological designation can be illuminating when examining hymn writers such as Isaac Watts, in other ways the claim becomes unnecessary interpolation into biblical arguments that were strong enough to “stand on their own.” Also, Porter’s volume would be stronger with more diverse voices. Still, placed alongside other authors dealing with these passages and themes such as Ruth Duck, Kathleen Black, Cláudio Carvalhaes, Pedrito Maynard-Reid, Dennis E. Smith, Hall Taussig, and Andrew McGowan, it has promise to invigorate classroom discussion.

Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne, Drew University, Madison, NJ