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SUNDAYS IN EAST NEW YORK: 1948–1960

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Abstract: *In the mid-twentieth century, New York City experienced a renaissance of Protestant preaching. William B. Lawrence identifies four preachers who won acclaim: Harry Emerson Fosdick, Ralph Sockman, George A. Buttrick, and Paul W. Scherer. Lawrence argues rightly that these preachers were popular and influential; however, his research delimits the renaissance to white Mainline ministers. Preachers from minoritized churches also maintained vibrant preaching ministries in the city. In this paper, I consider the ministries of Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Sandy F. Ray, and Gardner C. Taylor, three black Baptist pastors that ministered in “East” New York, to expand the contributions to preaching’s renaissance in the city as well as bring their stories closer to the center of homiletical-historical inquiry.*

Introduction

When Gardner C. Taylor started his ministry at Concord Baptist in 1948, New York City already had a strong reputation for having several nationally known, widely-regarded preachers. At that time, Taylor claims, New York was “the center of the greatest concentration of preaching that this country, and perhaps the world, has ever known in one city at one time.”¹ In *Sundays in New York*, William B. Lawrence claims that at least four preachers—Harry Emerson Fosdick of the Riverside Church, Ralph W. Sockman of Christ Church Methodist Episcopal, George A. Buttrick of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, and Paul E. Scherer of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church—won acclaim in their churches, in itinerant ministry, and in radio preaching.² According to Lawrence, “Their influence extended well beyond the congregations and the city in which they served.”³ Fosdick had the greatest name recognition. From 1927-1946, Fosdick preached radio sermons for the *NBC National Radio Vespers Hour* at a time when religious radio reached “130 million faithful weekly listeners.”⁴ Fosdick’s program alone attracted two million listeners.⁵ Robert Moats Miller claims, “Fosdick’s national influence cannot be understood without reference to ‘National Vespers.’”⁶

No doubt Lawrence’s book sheds new light on liberal American Protestant preaching at its zenith. Even so, it delimits New York’s mid-twentieth century preaching renaissance to a subset of preachers. “Sundays in New York” means “Sundays in *Manhattan*,” and “great preachers” means “great *white* Mainline preachers.” Some of New York’s largest and most dynamic churches were minoritized black churches outside Manhattan. Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem had a much larger membership than the churches pastored by Fosdick, Sockman, Scherer, or Buttrick.

¹ See “Great Preachers Remembered,” The E.K. Bailey Conference on Expository Preaching, Dallas, Texas, 1996, in Gardner C. Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor: Lectures, Essays, and Interviews*, ed. Edward L. Taylor, vol. 5 (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004), 113.

² The only preacher who did not pursue radio ministry was George A. Buttrick. He opted to pursue publishing instead. He also delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale in 1939. See William B. Lawrence, *Sundays in New York: Pulpit Theology at the Crest of the Protestant Mainstream, 1930-1955* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 10.

³ Lawrence, *Sundays in New York*, 18.

⁴ Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 380.

⁵ Fosdick drew two million listeners “including Larry Williams and the teenage M. L. King Jr.” See Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 48.

⁶ Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*, 380.

In 1950, Abyssinian had approximately 15,000 members, and it competed with Olivet Baptist in Chicago in its claim to be the “largest Protestant church in the world.”⁷ Black pastors in “East New York” had preaching ministries that rivaled and, in some cases, surpassed that of their peers even though they did not get the same opportunities in radio preaching.⁸ Three preachers in particular stand out as exemplars: Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of Abyssinian Baptist in Harlem, Sandy F. Ray of Cornerstone Baptist in Brooklyn, and Gardner C. Taylor of Concord Baptist in Brooklyn. To be sure, other vibrant black Baptist churches and non-Baptist churches maintained strong ministries.⁹ That stated, these churches were notably large and known for preaching in the 1940s and 1950s.

In this article, I will assess the preaching ministries of Powell, Ray, and Taylor from 1948 to 1960. Although their stories and trajectories are more dynamic than this time frame permits, 1948 to 1960 aligns their ministries with the dates of the preaching renaissance described by Taylor.¹⁰ In the conclusion, I will consider historical-homiletical implications in dialogue with these figures.

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (1908-1972)

According to Harlem historian Herb Boyd, “No name is revered in the history of Harlem as Adam Clayton Powell Jr.”¹¹ His work as pastor at the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church and later in the cause of civil rights as a U. S. congressman made him a figure of national and international prominence. To many, he was a symbol. “As minister to more than ten thousand people,” Henry J. Young writes, “[Powell] emerged as a significant spokesman in Harlem by the time he was twenty-three.”¹² In *Black Religious Leaders*, Peter J. Paris describes Powell’s widespread influence this way: “For over a quarter of a century the names Abyssinian Baptist Church and Adam Clayton Powell Jr., were virtually household terms throughout Black America. In many respects the religious institution and its pastor had come to symbolize the political struggle

⁷ Nora Holt, “Abyssinian Baptist Largest Protestant Church in The World,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 2, 1950, 16. Others claimed that Olivet Baptist in Chicago, also numbering close to 15,000, was “the largest Protestant church of any race in the world.” See Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 46; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, vol. 1 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 55–56; Wallace D. Best, “‘The Right Achieved and the Wrong Way Conquered’: J. H. Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Conflict over Civil Rights,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 16, no. 2 (2006): 200.

⁸ The phrase “East New York” has a literal and a symbolic connotation. It describes a neighborhood in Brooklyn that still exists today. In the early part of the twentieth century, its residents consisted of mainly Italian and Jewish immigrants. In the 1950s, the area was plagued by crime. Then, in the 1960s, city planners and real estate developers collaborated to transform it into a ghetto. See Walter Thabit, *How East New York Became a Ghetto* (New York: NYU Press, 2003). I use the phrase “East New York” as more of a symbolic rather than a geographical category. “East New York” has sometimes been used symbolically and even colloquially to communicate “the other side of town” that has been neglected by the city, by the press, or by the official histories.

⁹ For a discussion of strategic and influential non-Baptist black churches in Harlem in the first half of the twentieth century, churches such as St. Mark’s Methodist Episcopal, Mother Zion Church, and St. Phillip’s Protestant Episcopal, see Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen, *Black Church in the Sixties* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 21–32. See also Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto; Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 115. For more on Pentecostal Holiness churches in Brooklyn, see Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 5:113.

¹¹ Editor’s Note in Adam Clayton Powell Jr., “The Abyssinian Baptist Church,” in *The Harlem Reader: A Celebration of New York’s Most Famous Neighborhood, from the Renaissance Years to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Herb Boyd (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 89.

¹² Henry J. Young, *Major Black Religious Leaders Since 1940* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 64.

for racial justice in this country.”¹³ Before Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X arrived on the scene, Powell “earned the reputation of being Mr. Civil Rights.”¹⁴ In 1944, he became only the second African American to win a seat in Congress.¹⁵ In his autobiography *Adam by Adam*, Powell recalls how heavy the burden felt when he began working in Congress. He writes: “Millions were depending on me to do a task for them, and not just the people in my District.”¹⁶ Especially in the early years, Powell received countless bags of letters from African Americans in other parts of the country suffering under segregation and looking to him to be their advocate in Washington.¹⁷

Before rising to prominence in Washington DC, Powell distinguished himself as the pastor of the prestigious Abyssinian Baptist Church, a beacon for civil rights since its founding in 1808.¹⁸ His father, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., had pastored there from 1908 to 1937 and had seen the church through a season of extraordinary growth in membership, financial support, a new church building, and extensive land acquisition. The church had seven hundred members when Powell Sr. began and twelve thousand members when he retired.¹⁹ As a child, Powell Jr. recounted watching his father preach to thousands under a large canvas during the new church building’s construction: “For two summers, under that canvas,” he writes, “thousands were packed in every night as he preached.”²⁰ His father held a close friendship with black Nationalist Marcus Garvey. Powell Jr. listened to Garvey’s teachings with great enthusiasm as a little boy.²¹ Powell Sr. built the new church building next door to Garvey’s Black Freedom Hall as a statement of solidarity with Garvey’s movement. In addition, Powell Sr. made the church more “Harlem-minded.”²²

Blacks in New York struggled greatly during the Great Depression on account of segregated housing, job losses, and other forms of racial discrimination due to Jim Crow laws. The needs of the working poor were different than the needs of upper-class intellectuals at the Riverside church. Hence, when Powell Jr. assumed his pastorate in 1937, Abyssinian was *more* than a Sunday morning church. It had a community center “packed from basement to gymnasium to rooftop, morning and night, throughout the week.”²³ By 1948, Powell Jr. had grown the church from twelve thousand to fifteen thousand.²⁴ The church owned property; it had five choirs, a famous pastor emeritus, and a well-known pastor. It was thriving. To get a sense of the scale of Abyssinian’s influence, consider that in the year 1959 approximately 13,000 young people attended the church’s Youth Emphasis Week.²⁵

¹³ Peter J. Paris, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 152.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵ The first black congressional leader was Representative William L. Dawson (1886–1970) of Chicago, a Democrat who served in the House of Representatives from 1943–1970. For more on Dawson, see Committee on House Administration of the U.S. House of Representatives, “William Levi Dawson,” in *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (Washington DC: United States Congress, 2008), 292–98.

¹⁶ Adam Clayton Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell Jr.* (New York: Kensington, 2002), 73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁸ For more on the founding of Abyssinian in 1808, see Paris, *Black Religious Leaders*, 153.

¹⁹ Powell Jr., “The Abyssinian Baptist Church,” 93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Powell writes: “Father kept pushing to make the Abyssinian Church more Harlem-minded.” *Ibid.*

²³ Osofsky, *Harlem*, 92.

²⁴ Holt, “Abyssinian Baptist Largest Protestant Church in The World,” 16.

²⁵ “13,000 Youngsters Attend Abyssinian’s Youth Emphasis Week,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb 7, 1959, 8.

Powell Jr. gained notoriety for reasons other than the growth of the church. Early on, he built a reputation as a controversial figure. His first wife, Isabel Washington, was a divorced nightclub singer whom he married in 1933, a choice that did not sit well with older parishioners at Abyssinian.²⁶ In 1944, he divorced her because of an extramarital affair with Hazel Scott, a popular jazz pianist and nightclub singer from Trinidad.²⁷ They married in August 1945. In November 1960, they divorced and, less than three weeks after his divorce was finalized, on December 15, 1960, Powell married a 29-year-old from Puerto Rico named Yvette Diego in a private ceremony. Diego was a young divorcee whose father owned a cockfight arena. Powell introduced her to his congregation at Abyssinian at the New Year's Day service on January 1, 1961.²⁸

Powell's theological positions also strayed far from black church orthodoxy at that time. Had it not been for his father, it is unlikely that Powell Jr. would have been offered the job at Abyssinian. In his autobiography, Powell Jr. writes: "We do not believe in the Bible as the word of God. It is too filled with contradictions. We believe in the Thomas Jefferson Bible...that brilliant Founding Father cut from the New Testament only those words that Jesus spoke. This is the Bible from which I preach."²⁹ According to Paris, "Powell was not an orthodox Christian thinker. He did not believe in the traditional doctrines of hell."³⁰ Heaven and hell, Powell argued, were "right here in the span of years that we spend in this body on earth."³¹ Powell also emphasized the teachings of Jesus as a guidebook over the sacrifice of Jesus for salvation.³² To be a Christian meant to usher in the kingdom here and now by living a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life of peace and justice. This way of conceiving of the gospel was similar to but not the same as Martin Luther King Jr.'s model of Christian discipleship.³³ For Powell, to be a Christian meant "bringing more beauty, truth, and goodness into the world and into the lives of others—of all peoples in all places, wherever one can find them or their need."³⁴ Young describes Powell's theology this way: "His eschatology was geared toward the realization of God's possibilities for mankind within existence itself."³⁵

As a congressman in Washington, D.C., Powell also picked fights with political opponents. In the mid- to late- 1940s, he engaged in an ugly verbal altercation with President Harry Truman after his wife Hazel, a professional musician, was denied the use of Constitution Hall for a performance because she was black. Powell insisted that Truman take a stand. When Truman's wife decided to attend a tea sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Powell insulted Truman's wife as a way to return the favor. Furious, Truman referred to Powell at a private staff meeting as "that damned n[---]r preacher."³⁶ For the remainder of his presidency, six more years, Truman refused to invite Powell to White House functions and channeled all patronage jobs through Powell's political rival, black congressman William L. Dawson from

²⁶ Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁸ "Adam Powell's Wife to Face His Church," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 31, 1960, 1.

²⁹ Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 43.

³⁰ Paris, *Black Religious Leaders*, 146.

³¹ Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 39.

³² *Ibid.*, 44.

³³ For instance, see Martin Luther King Jr., "Unfulfilled Dreams," in *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner, 2000), 191–200.

³⁴ Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 43.

³⁵ Young, *Major Black Religious Leaders Since 1940*, 59.

³⁶ As cited in Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell Jr.*, 165.

Chicago.³⁷ In 1956, Powell surprised Democrats by supporting Dwight D. Eisenhower for president.³⁸ He had collaborated with Eisenhower over desegregation laws at the local and regional levels and had no problem breaking ranks with the Democratic Party through offering his endorsement.

In 1952, at a gathering of civil rights leaders at Abyssinian, an event Gardner C. Taylor attended, Powell called the U.S. the “the most hated nation on earth” because it was “export[ing] Jim Crow along with democracy.” He said that hypocrisy in the ‘white church’ and ‘Negro church’ was the “underlying reason for most of our chaotic racial and democratic life.”³⁹ In his autobiography, he writes: “America is not a Christian country. It is a country of pretensions, of ‘churchianity’ . . . perverted into an instrument to perpetuate if not to propagate, directly and indirectly, anti-Christian doctrines of segregation and discrimination.”⁴⁰ According to Paris, Powell had this side of him as well, a side that was impatient with America for its failure to keep its promises to the black community and impatient with the church for its collusion with the powers and principalities of the world. Paris writes: “In fits of anger Powell often leveled blanket statements of condemnation at America.”⁴¹ In 1960, Powell challenged America again through a highly unpopular move: he supported Fidel Castro’s regime in Cuba citing the failures of the U.S.-backed Batista government. He praised Castro for his willingness to nominate Black Cubans to high government posts, and he chided the U.S. for meddling in Cuban affairs. These statements did not play well at a time when accusations of Communism were directed at ordinary Americans in the age of McCarthyism.⁴²

Early in the 1960s, Powell faced numerous trials for tax evasion and ethics violations and, in January 1967, he was censured by Congress. After receiving a public rebuke on the floor of the House of Representatives, Powell walked outside, stood defiantly on the steps of the Capitol, and exclaimed to thousands of supporters: “Behind me in this Congress is the biggest bunch of elected hypocrites the world has ever known.”⁴³ Some saw Powell’s bluntness and crassness as a flaw, but his constituents in Harlem found his candor refreshing rather than troublesome. After several legal battles and a triumphant return to Congress in 1968, Powell lost his seat in a Democratic primary in 1970 to a young politician named Charles Rangel. He lost the seat that he had held since 1944 by a total of 150 votes. Powell retired from Abyssinian in 1971. On April 4, 1972, in Bimini, the Bahamas, he died after experiencing complications from prostate cancer surgery.

In a 1996-lecture on great preachers, Taylor recounted two memories of Powell’s preaching. First, he remembered hearing Powell preach shortly after the first assassination attempt on Martin Luther King Jr. in September 1958, an event we will discuss in our section on Sandy F. Ray. Shortly after the assassination attempt, Powell preached a sermon titled, “‘They came to slay the dreamer,’ going back to Joseph. It was a tremendous presentation.”⁴⁴ Secondly, Taylor

³⁷ Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.*, 20. For more on the confrontation between Truman, Truman’s wife, and Powell Jr., see also Tracy D. Snipe, “The Role of African American Males in Politics and Government,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 569 (2000): 20.

³⁸ Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.*, 277.

³⁹ “America Most Hated Nation on Earth- Powell,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 16, 1952, M2.

⁴⁰ Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 42.

⁴¹ Paris, *Black Religious Leaders*, 175.

⁴² See Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2020).

⁴³ Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell Jr.*, 21.

⁴⁴ Many black preachers ascribed typological significance to King’s ministry, especially after his death. Powell linked him back to Joseph “the dreamer.” Other preachers linked him to Moses. Some linked him typologically to John the Baptist’s ministry in the wilderness. For the Powell story, see Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 5:114.

remembered Powell's tone: "There was an anger about him, but it was an anger all tied up with Jesus Christ, and it came out in his preaching."⁴⁵ Powell believed that Jesus came to overturn power structures and to usher in a revolution of radical inclusion. In his own words, "Any church that in any way preaches or practices anything that will exclude anyone from membership is negating the power of Christ."⁴⁶

Powell had remarkable gifts as a leader and public servant. Although some of his personal and political decisions and actions were controversial and remain so to this day, his impact on Abyssinian continues to be felt, and his legislative legacy on civil rights endures. Moreover, he influenced an entire generation of pastors and public servants including the Rev. Al Sharpton.⁴⁷

Sandy F. Ray (1898-1979)

In 1948, Sandy F. Ray already had a vibrant preaching ministry. Taylor describes him as "in the glory of his noonday powers...People were attracted to hear him from all over that city and all over the country."⁴⁸ Born and raised in Palestine, Texas, Ray studied at Morehouse College where he built a lifelong friendship with his classmate Martin Luther King Sr. Prior to Cornerstone, Ray served three other churches, two in Georgia and one in Ohio. Immediately before Cornerstone, he pastored for seven years at the prestigious Shiloh Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, where he became an acclaimed Sunday radio preacher. In 1942, he became the first black representative "elected to the legislature in the state of Ohio."⁴⁹ When he went to New York in 1944, he arrived at a "small, unattractive edifice in a declining neighborhood, a church that offered no prestige."⁵⁰

Cornerstone Baptist experienced extraordinary growth under Ray's leadership. Five years into his ministry, Ray held memberships in close to twenty-five community organizations including the NAACP. At ten years, Cornerstone had more than doubled in size from 2,500 to 5,500 members. It added a day care and credit union during a time when legalized segregation was the norm. Ray joined the preaching circuit. In so doing, he became "one of the great contemporary pulpites" of his day.⁵¹ He ascended the ranks of his denomination serving as president of the Empire Missionary Baptist Convention of New York (1954–1979) and as the first vice president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc. (1968–1979).

In 1954, his first wife Katherine, an accomplished musician and piano teacher to whom he had been married for twenty-five years, initiated a legal separation citing irreconcilable differences.⁵² Later, he married Victoria McPherson, a cosmetician, who died in 1966.⁵³

Ray also acquired political capital. A vocal Republican, he campaigned for Governor Thomas E. Dewey in 1950 and Nelson D. Rockefeller years later. According to Brooklyn church biographer Clarence Taylor, "Rockefeller was a frequent visitor to Cornerstone."⁵⁴ Most black

⁴⁵ Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 5:114.

⁴⁶ Powell Jr., *Adam by Adam*, 45.

⁴⁷ The well-known preacher and political activist Al Sharpton met Powell when he was twelve years old. Powell nurtured and counseled him. Sharpton later told the *New York Times* that, on account of Powell's influence, he became an activist like the militant pastor from Harlem. See Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*, 211.

⁴⁸ Gardner C. Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor: Special Occasion and Expository Sermons*, ed. Edward L. Taylor, vol. 4 (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004), 113.

⁴⁹ J. Zamgba Browne, "5,000 at Rev. Ray's Rites," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 21, 1979, 10.

⁵⁰ Pastor W. Franklin Richardson, "Introduction," in Sandy F. Ray, *Journeying Through a Jungle* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 20.

⁵¹ "Know Your Pastor," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 20, 1954, 16.

⁵² "Sandy Ray Separation Now Official," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 11, 1954, 1–2.

⁵³ "Mrs. Sandy F. Ray (Obituary)," *New York Times*, January 5, 1966, 31.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*, 118.

pastors in Brooklyn were Republicans at that time with Gardner Taylor being one of the exceptions.⁵⁵ Of course, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was a leading Democratic figure, but he was in Harlem.⁵⁶ Some of his supporters wanted Ray to run for a Republican congressional seat, but he decided against it.

In 1949, Ray and Dodgers baseball star Jackie Robinson had to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in Washington, D.C.⁵⁷ At the hearing, they refuted claims by Paul Robeson that “American Negroes would never take up arms against the Soviet Union.”⁵⁸ In addition to reaffirming his patriotism, Ray used the spectacle to speak publicly against the evils of segregation. He exclaimed: “We believe that the pattern of segregation in our National Capital itself gives comfort to our enemies and weakens our position in world councils... We believe that those who lead in democracy should be criticized and prodded by citizens of that democracy.”⁵⁹

In July 1957, Cornerstone hosted the famous young evangelist Billy Graham. That same summer, Graham had been preaching to 18,000-plus crowds at Madison Square Garden. Ray personally invited Graham to preach on the steps of Cornerstone on a Sunday afternoon and Graham accepted. That Sunday, Graham preached a surprising politically charged sermon in which he spoke out against racist and segregationist laws and called for national changes in legislation, a move that no doubt alienated segregationist members of his constituency.⁶⁰ Over twenty local pastors and leaders supported the event, including Gardner C. Taylor. More than 3,000 people attended.⁶¹

In the late 1950s, Ray’s friendship with the King family took on political overtones when Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested during the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Ray not only rebuked southern white supremacists in the aftermath of King Jr.’s arrest; he also flew to Alabama whenever he could to attend the meetings and participate in trainings and anniversaries. Whenever King Jr. came to New York, Ray also supported “Mike” (King’s birth name) by raising money and providing hospitality. King looked up to Ray and referred to him as “Uncle Sandy.” In an address delivered to three thousand people in Brooklyn in 1956, King Jr. said: “You know, for years, he was ‘Uncle Sandy’ to me. I did not know he was not related to me by blood until I was 12 years old.”⁶² According to Richard Lischer, King looked up to Ray as one of his top three role models in preaching and pastoring, the other two being William Holmes Borders and Gardner C. Taylor.⁶³

⁵⁵ For more on black Republicanism in the mid twentieth century, see Joshua D. Farrington, *Black Republicans and the Transformation of the GOP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*, 118.

⁵⁷ It is unclear what led to Ray and Robinson having to appear at a hearing in the first place. They were not involved in any Communist-friendly activities at the time. See Chequita Cynthia, “‘Race Dissatisfied, Not Disloyal’- Ray,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 16, 1949, 9–10. Also, in 1949, on the occasion of his five-year anniversary at Cornerstone, his church had become large enough to throw him a twelve-day celebration including the renowned Rev. C. L. Franklin of Mount Lebanon Baptist Church and an up-and-coming young preacher who had been in Brooklyn for less than one year at Concord Baptist: Gardner C. Taylor.

⁵⁸ Cynthia, “‘Race Dissatisfied, Not Disloyal’- Ray,” 9.

⁵⁹ “Billy Graham: Heaven Won’t Let Racists In,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1957, 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cholly Herndon, “Sidelights of A ‘Kingly’ Meeting In Brooklyn,” *New York Amsterdam News*, March 31, 1956, 20.

⁶³ Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39.

In 1958, the King and Ray connection grew stronger when a mentally unwell woman named Izola Ware Curry stabbed King with a letter opener during a book signing in New York. After his release from the hospital, King convalesced for three weeks in the Ray family home.⁶⁴ Then, in 1966, when Cornerstone opened a new community center, King delivered his famous sermon, “Guidelines for a Constructive Church,” in the church sanctuary.⁶⁵ The friendship that began with “Daddy King” at Morehouse in the late 1920s continued for decades. In 1974, Ray gave the funeral eulogy for King’s mother, Alberta Williams King.⁶⁶

During his life, Ray preached several famous sermons such as “The Challenge of the Wood Country” and “A Voice in the Wilderness.”⁶⁷ He also published a sermon collection titled *Journeying through the Jungle*.⁶⁸ He died on April 11, 1979. In the eulogy, his close friend Gardner C. Taylor delivered a eulogy in which he called him a “president of preaching” and a “crown prince of the pulpit.” “This pulpit was his throne,” Taylor said, “and he made it to ring with good news and glad tidings.”⁶⁹ Recalling the quality of his preaching, Taylor said, “[I]t was hard to tell whether one heard music half spoken or speech half sung. And when the glad thunders of that voice reached its climactic theme, the heavens seemed to open, and we could see the Lord God on his throne.”⁷⁰ Taylor also remembered, “[Ray] had an amazing gift for taking the most ordinary circumstances and enlarging them. That was the way Jesus did, enlarging small things into eternal meanings.”⁷¹ Milton K. Curry assesses Ray’s lasting impact on Cornerstone: “He transformed it into one of the truly great churches of the nation while remaining active in politics and developing a close personal friendship with top government officials.”⁷² Curry, Taylor, and others who knew Ray had an abiding affection for him as a pastor, preacher, and person.

Gardner C. Taylor (1918-2015)

Gardner C. Taylor served three congregations prior to coming to Concord in Brooklyn. He came to his first pastorate, Bethany Baptist Church in Ohio, while a student at Oberlin College, his second pastorate in New Orleans, Louisiana, at Beulah Baptist Church, and his third in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the same church his father, Washington Taylor, had pastored. His father was one of the great preachers in the South. “Wash” died suddenly in 1931 when his son was just under 13 years of age.⁷³ In Baton Rouge, Taylor gained a large following of students and professors at Southern University, he established a radio ministry, and he spoke at churches, chapels, and graduations. According to Gerald Lamont Thomas, “The preaching success

⁶⁴ A fuller account of this story can be found in David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Quill, 1999), 109–11.

⁶⁵ See Martin Luther King Jr., “Guidelines for a Constructive Church,” in *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner Books, 2000), 101–16.

⁶⁶ Clayborne Carson et al., “Sandy F. Ray,” in *The Martin Luther King Jr. Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), 284.

⁶⁷ Ray, *Journeying Through a Jungle*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “A President of Preaching: For Sandy F. Ray, New York, April 21, 1979,” Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 4:140.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4:141.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5:114.

⁷² Milton K. Curry Jr., “Foreword,” in Ray, *Journeying Through a Jungle*, 12.

⁷³ Taylor describes the loss of his father at such a young age this way: “The large place which he had held in my mind and heart was suddenly made empty.” See Gardner C. Taylor, “Why I Believe There Is a God,” in *Why I Believe There Is a God; Sixteen Essays by Negro Clergymen*, ed. Howard Thurman (Chicago: Johnson, 1965), 104.

of Taylor along with his instant popularity took the Mt. Zion congregation to higher heights, as the largest church in the city.”⁷⁴

In 1948, Concord called him to be its new pastor. At the 1948 Louisiana convention meeting, Taylor told the delegates, “God has called me to preach at the crossroads of the world. I must go.”⁷⁵ The news devastated the church in Baton Rouge. At his farewell sermon, the church was standing room only, and radios throughout the black community were tuned to his weekly radio program.⁷⁶

When Taylor arrived in New York, Concord already had five thousand members, a large facility, a proud history, strong ministry programs, a solid record on civil rights, and a long tradition of preaching pastors. According to Timothy George, Taylor was stepping into “one of the most prestigious pulpits in the country.”⁷⁷ Although most thirty year-olds would be intimidated by this assignment, Taylor recounts: “the more I preached the more they began to trust me and realize my talents not only as a preacher but also as a pastor.”⁷⁸ One church congregant named Anna Belle recalled his first sermon: “When he came that first Sunday morning, he electrified the congregation with his mastery of the English language...He had us on our feet.”⁷⁹

Taylor became politically active right away. Less than a year in, he was nominated to serve on the local school board.⁸⁰ Soon after, he became just the second African American to serve on the citywide Board of Education. Later, he served as a member of the Commission for Integrated Schools. For a time, he also chaired the Democratic Party in King’s County, one of the most powerful county organizations in the United States at that time (after Cook County in Chicago).⁸¹ As was stated before, many black pastors in Brooklyn were Republican. Historian Clarence Taylor observes that Taylor “was one of the few Democrats among the active black clergy in Brooklyn. Taylor became the most noted black minister in the Democratic Party.”⁸² Taylor attended civil rights functions at Abyssinian for his friend Adam Clayton Powell Jr., also a Democrat, and he supported Powell, even in disagreement, during the Eisenhower re-election controversy.⁸³

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Taylor was arrested several times for his participation in civil rights demonstrations along with other clergy.⁸⁴ Supporters encouraged Taylor to run for office as his church grew larger and his influence expanded. However, so the story goes, he refused to run

⁷⁴ Gerald Lamont Thomas, *African American Preaching: The Contribution of Dr. Gardner C. Taylor* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 96.

⁷⁵ Gardner C. Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor: NBC Radio Sermons, 1959-1970*, ed. Edward L. Taylor, vol. 1 (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2004), 4.

⁷⁶ Timothy George, “Introduction: Honor to Whom Honor Is Due,” in *Our Sufficiency Is of God: Essays on Preaching in Honor of Gardner C. Taylor*, ed. Timothy George, James Earl Massey, and Robert Smith Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), xiv.

⁷⁷ Ibid., xiv.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *African American Preaching*, 98.

⁷⁹ “Interview with Gardner C. Taylor,” in Thomas, *African American Preaching*, 98.

⁸⁰ “Concord Pastor Sworn in as School Board Member,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 7, 1949, 7.

⁸¹ Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 1:5.

⁸² Taylor, *Black Churches of Brooklyn*, 118.

⁸³ Referring to attempts to discipline Powell after the Eisenhower spectacle, Hamilton writes, “The Reverend Gardner C. Taylor of New York joined a group from that city in telegrams to the New York political leaders saying: ‘The Negro community may not agree with Congressman Powell but will look upon this as an anti-Negro move.’ They threatened retaliation at the polls in future elections.” See Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.*, 277.

⁸⁴ McFadden writes: “In New York, Mr. Taylor organized civil rights marches and was arrested three times in the 1960s.” Robert D. McFadden, “Rev. Gardner C. Taylor, Powerful Voice for Civil Rights, Dies at 96 (Obituary),” *New York Times*, April 6, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/07/us/rev-gardner-c-taylor-powerful-voice-for-civil-rights-dies-at-96.html>.

after his wife Laura Scott Taylor told him his preaching was “getting very thin.”⁸⁵ Like Ray and unlike Powell, Taylor decided *not* to go into politics. He believed he could “make a greater difference in the lives of his people through his ministry of influence as their pastor.”⁸⁶

On October 2, 1952, Taylor faced one of his biggest challenges when Concord’s sanctuary was destroyed in a fire. Some thought it was a freak accident while others believed it was outdated electrical wiring. On one night, Concord went from being a large, successful church to being homeless. However, within days, fifteen Protestant churches and leaders of other faiths not only offered their condolences and prayers; they also provided financial support to help rebuild.⁸⁷ When the church was denied a loan by the local bank, Taylor advised all members who were customers there to withdraw their funds, and they did.⁸⁸ At a meeting in his home shortly after the fire, Taylor said, “We are going to go forward because I have a community of baptized believers who believe in me and in what I have said in the four years of my preaching here and with them and their faith in God and my leadership, we cannot fail.”⁸⁹ When the church broke ground on July 19, 1953, Ray was one of the guest preachers.⁹⁰ On April 1, 1956, the people of Concord marched into their \$1.7 million facility at 833 Marcy Avenue with great celebration. Again, Ray was a guest preacher.⁹¹

Taylor’s star continued to rise from 1958 to 1960. At his ten-year anniversary at Concord in 1958, the local newspaper described him as a “born leader” who “towered as a giant” in the rebuilding of his church, one who held “esteem among his members and the citizens of Brooklyn and New York.”⁹² In 1958, he became the first black president of the Protestant Council of Churches in New York.⁹³ In 1959, he became the first African American to participate in the NBC radio pulpit broadcasts joining Sockman, Scherer, and Fosdick.⁹⁴ He befriended each of these older pastors and gained from his friendships with them during this time period.⁹⁵ By January 1960, Concord counted 13,500 people among its membership, a net growth of 8,500 in a twelve-year span.

Although the years after 1960 are beyond the scope of this article, at least a few post-1960 highlights are worthy of mention. After 1960, Taylor’s ministry at Concord continued to prosper. In addition to his vibrant preaching ministry, he and his wife established the Concord Elementary School for grades 1–6. Drawing no salary, his wife served with distinction as the school’s principal for thirty-two years. Concord also oversaw the construction of a 121-bed nursing home, a seniors’ residence, and a credit union with assets exceeding \$1.8 million. Toward the end of his tenure at Concord, Taylor established the “Christfund Endowment” for African American children and community uplift in Brooklyn, and he remained socially and politically active.⁹⁶

A personal friend of King Sr. (“Daddy King”), Taylor supported and raised money for King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He counted “Mike” a close

⁸⁵ George, “Introduction: Honor to Whom Honor Is Due,” xv.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁸⁷ “Aid Offered to Church,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1952, 12.

⁸⁸ Thomas, *African American Preaching*, 99.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, “Interview with Anna Belle.”

⁹⁰ “To Break Ground for New Church,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1953, 14.

⁹¹ Daphne Sheppard, “2,800 at Concord Dedication Service,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 7, 1956, 19.

⁹² “Taylor Completes Decade at Concord,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 31, 1958, 20.

⁹³ “Dr. Gardner Taylor Heads NYC Protestant Council,” *New Journal and Guide*, February 15, 1958, C15.

⁹⁴ “Dr. Taylor on Radio Pulpit for 13 Weeks,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 27, 1959, 25.

⁹⁵ Taylor preached intermittently for NBC religious radio programs from 1959 to 1970.

⁹⁶ Taylor discusses the vision and work of the Christfund Endowment in Taylor, *The Words of Gardner Taylor*, 5:71.

friend. Their families vacationed together.⁹⁷ In 1960 and again in 1961, Taylor ran for the presidency of the National Baptist Convention (NBC). He lost the election to then-president J. H. Jackson amidst a swirl of controversy, denominational in-fighting, violence, and accusations of an unfair process and vote count in the election. In the months after the 1960 election, both Taylor in New York and Jackson in Chicago claimed to be the duly elected president of the NBC. After the election of 1961, the denomination split primarily over the matter of presidential tenure. When L. Venchael Booth founded the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), both Taylor and King offered their support.⁹⁸ Taylor served as the second president of the PNBC (1966-1969). At his insistence, the PNBC invited King to speak to delegates at their annual meeting in 1966. Taylor retired from Concord in 1990 after serving forty-two years as the church's pastor. He died in 2015.

Conclusion

If you have not heard of Taylor, Ray, or Powell, then you are not alone. Little attention is paid to them in books on the history of preaching. In his 870-page *A History of Preaching*, O. C. Edwards devotes three pages to Taylor, Powell gets one sentence, and Ray is not mentioned.⁹⁹ In Hughes Oliphant Old's seven-volume work, Taylor and Powell get two sentences and Ray is not mentioned.¹⁰⁰

At one level, this article highlights the biographies of Powell, Ray, and Taylor to center the stories of three "hidden figures" who do not appear in most of the historical accounts of Protestant preaching in the United States. In doing so, it creates opportunities for readers to learn more about names that are not as familiar in academic circles. At another level, this article reveals the assumptions that are often made whenever preaching's history is written about or discussed in academic guilds. What does one *mean* by preaching's history, and how does one mean it? Do those doing the history interrogate their assumptions about which histories are most important to re-tell? Do they offer non-innocent accounts? Do they explore unexcavated histories?

No doubt Lawrence concludes rightly that Sundays in New York in the mid-twentieth century were sacrosanct in the churches of Fosdick, Buttrick, Scherer, and Sockman. Even so, this article offers a much-needed reminder that Sundays were also sacrosanct in the churches of Powell, Ray, and Taylor. These pastor-preachers received less recognition than their counterparts despite

⁹⁷ In a 2008-interview, Taylor claims: "[King] and I vacationed in this country and in Jamaica and Puerto Rico, and once in Brazil." See "Gardner Calvin Taylor: Oral History Memoir, Interview 2," Interview by Joel C. Gregory, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, March 17, 2008, 15.

⁹⁸ See William D. Booth, *A Call to Greatness: The Story of the Founding of the Progressive National Baptist Convention* (Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick, 2001). Taylor and King did not offer their support initially. At first, they both tried to preserve ties with the National Baptist Convention. For more on Taylor and King's initial reluctance, see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 37; Booth, *A Call to Greatness*, 11; Lewis Baldwin, *The Voice of Conscience: The Church in the Mind of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177–78.

⁹⁹ O.C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 714–16, 721. To be fair to Edwards, his summary of Taylor's preaching ministry is part of a larger chapter entitled, "A Homiletical Epiphany: The Emergence of African American Preaching in Majority Consciousness," starting on p. 703.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Our Own Time*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 356, 360, 367, 385. To Oliphant Old's credit, he devotes a chapter to black preaching in vol. 7 and to black preaching's origins in vol. 6. He also writes about preachers such as T. D. Jakes. I am not suggesting that Edwards or Old were willfully or strategically neglectful of minoritized preaching in the United States or abroad but, rather, asserting that on account of the absence of these hidden figures from preaching history books, the risk remains high that their legacies will be neglected or, worse yet, forgotten. The work of historical recovery is critical to offering more accurate and faithful historical accounts.

playing major roles in the preaching renaissance in the city. Indeed, one cannot understand the renaissance rightly without shining a brighter spotlight on Sundays in East New York.

**Listening to Listeners in a Digital Culture:
The Practice of Listening to Digitally-Mediated Sermons**
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Abstract: *This study examines digitally-mediated sermon listening practices by interviewing twenty-nine listeners from Swedish Protestant congregations. The analysis draws on Theodore Schatzki's practice theory, focusing on the entanglement of human activity, material arrangements surrounding the preaching event, and the ends of practices—including how changes to any or all of the above impact the practice in question. The study found that listeners strove to uphold the listening practices they were accustomed to from their respective churches and attempted to carry these over into the digitally-mediated preaching event. To a large extent, they succeeded in opening and managing a "third room of preaching." Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of knowing the ends of these listening practices. The study also demonstrated the significance of material arrangements and how changes in these arrangements sometimes led to the obstruction—or even breakdown—of listening practices. However, changes in material arrangements also inspired new practices—pointing to the need to rethink listening practices that are merely borrowed from in-church services.*

Introduction

During the last few decades, homiletics has seen a turn to sermon listeners.² An exemplary work of scholarship is the 2004 landmark study *Listening to Listeners*.³ In recent years, homileticians have begun to describe the practice of listening in more detail—for example, Theo Pleizier's empirical study of religious involvement in hearing sermons.⁴ The turn to listeners has also affected the field of homiletics in Scandinavia, including several recent qualitative studies. Marianne Gaarden interviewed listeners about their interaction with sermons and their meaning-making processes in her *Third Room of Preaching*.⁵ Together with Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, Gaarden has argued that, in a sense, listeners function as primary authors of their own sermons as they interact with the preacher's words.⁶ Another notable Scandinavian example is Linn Sæbø Rystad's work on children as listeners.⁷ These Scandinavian homileticians emphasize the importance of materiality in the meaning-making process of listeners. Gaarden shows how the preacher's person and physicality are

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² For overviews of empirical research that focuses on the listener, see David Rietveld, "A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching," *Homiletic* 38, no. 2 (2013) and Marianne Gaarden, *Third Room of Preaching: A New Empirical Approach* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications 2021), 7–21.

³ John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Mosely, and G. Lee Ramsey, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). See also Ronald J. Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan, "Listening to listeners: five years later," *Homiletic* 34, no. 2 (2009), 4–17.

⁴ Theo Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft: Eibon Academic Publishers, 2010).

⁵ Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*, 55–106.

⁶ Gaarden, Marianne & Lorensen Ringgaard, Marlene, "Listeners as Authors in Preaching: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Homiletic* 38, no. 2 (2013), 28–45.

⁷ Linn Sæbø Rystad, "I Wish We Could Fast Forward It – Negotiating the Practice of Preaching," *Homiletic* 44, no. 2 (2019), 18–42.

essential for meaning-making.⁸ Lorensen and Gitte Buch-Hansen observe that the presence of other listeners affects how the sermons are heard.⁹ Furthermore, Rystad uses practice theory to show how “mediational means” such as artifacts, clothing, and narratives play an integral part in the preaching event. She concludes that it is essential to include perspectives that consider the materiality of the preaching event.¹⁰

What happens, then, when the material conditions for the practice of listening are radically altered? What happens when the preaching event is digitally mediated? What would we homileticsians discover if we listened to listeners in digital contexts and cultures?

While the number of online and/or digitally-mediated preaching studies is rapidly increasing, these studies focus solely on the preacher and/or the specific digital medium involved.¹¹ In-depth analyses of the *listeners’* perspectives on digitally-mediated preaching are virtually non-existent.¹² This article examines the practice of listening to digitally-mediated sermons and, since there is a lacuna in research, suggests some areas in which this research can be further developed.

I will argue that listeners are able to uphold their listening practices in the digitally-mediated preaching event; this supports the hypothesis that listeners are interactive co-authors of the sermon and preachers have limited control over their listeners’ meaning-making. Yet important differences between the local preaching event and the digitally-mediated service can also make it difficult for listeners to uphold what they think are the proper ends to the listening practice. Changes in material arrangements may lead to the obstruction, or even the destruction, of listening practices. However, new material arrangements may also inspire new listening practices.

An analysis of group interviews with twenty-nine active members from Protestant congregations in the South of Sweden, drawing on the practice theory of Theodore Schatzki, serves as the foundation for this work. The results will be discussed in light of recent homiletical studies about the practice of listening to sermons.

Concepts, Material, and Methods

This is a study of digitally-mediated practices of listening to a sermon. Accordingly, two key concepts are essential for this article: “digitally mediated” and “practices.” As I present the two key concepts, I will also describe the source material and the theoretical approach used in the analysis.

Digitally-mediated Source Material

For this article, I have chosen the “digitally-mediated” concept instead of the more frequently used term, “online preaching.” “Digitally-mediated” discloses important assumptions

⁸ Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*, 51–68.

⁹ Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen and Gitte Buch-Hansen, “Listening to the voices: refugees as co-authors of practical theology,” *Practical Theology* 11 (2018), 29–41.

¹⁰ Linn Sæbø Rystad, “Preaching at the thresholds – Bakhtinian polyphony in preaching for children” in *Practice, Practice Theory and Theology: Scandinavian and German Perspectives*, eds. Kristine Helboe Johansen and Ulla Schmidt (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 165–184.

¹¹ See for example Sunggu A. Yang, “The Word Digitalized: A Techno-Theological Reflection on Online Preaching and Its Types,” *Homiletic* 46, no 1 (2020), 75–89; Anna-Katharina Lienau, “Kommunikation des Evangeliums in social media,” *ZThK* (2019) 117: 489–522, Michael P. Knowles “E-Word? McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Verisimilitude in Preaching,” *Religions* 13, no. 12:1131 (2022), 1–16.

¹² I stand ready to be corrected, but I have not found anyone.

that impact how the source material is created and understood. As the editors of *Digital Religion* point out, digital media and technology are intertwined with everyday life, including religious practices. There are no clear distinctions between being online and offline anymore.¹³ The term “online” may also imply that “un-mediated” preaching exists. However, as Teresa Berger has acknowledged: all religion is mediated in some way.¹⁴

As scholars in digital ethnography highlight, digital mediation is characterized by multiplicity and can be experienced in a million different ways, depending on the software, hardware, context, and how a person chooses to interact with them.¹⁵ This insight has prompted attempts to categorize digitally-mediated sermons.¹⁶ For example, Tripp Hudgins offers three categories: *social media platform sermons*, where the preaching event in the local church is recorded and disseminated afterward in social media; *live from the pulpit sermons*, where the preaching is live-streamed from the local church; and *online sermons for online churches*, in which there is no congregation gathered in a local church.¹⁷ The listeners in this study have engaged in all three categories—on occasion, even experiencing all of them within the same community, as their digitally-mediated practices and those of their local congregation changed during different stages of the pandemic.

As discussed by Jonas Kurlberg and Alexander Chow, the development of digital transition strategies on the part of churches was influenced by governmental restrictions at the local level.¹⁸ Unlike many other countries, a complete lockdown was never imposed in Sweden. Instead, there were fluctuating and varied restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather for local events, including worship services. These changed from five hundred people on March 12th, 2020, to fifty people two weeks later, to eight in November 2020. In June 2021, the restrictions were lifted—only to be lowered back to fifty in December 2021. As a result of these shifting limitations, congregations generally moved from *social media platforms* and *live from the pulpit sermons*, with up to fifty people present in the local church, to *online sermons for the online churches* when the restrictions hardened.

However, the format was not the only change. There are many ways to be a digitally-mediated church. John Dyer makes a distinction between “broadcast church” (via one-way mediums like YouTube) and “interactive church” (which uses two-way interactive mediums like Zoom).¹⁹ In Swedish Protestant congregations, the transition from digital platforms that only utilized one-way broadcasting to the adoption of platforms that allowed for a higher degree of

¹³ Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, “Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religion in a Digital Age* (2nd edition), ed. Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, (London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–22.

¹⁴ Teresa Berger, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (London/New York: Routledge, 2018), 7.

¹⁵ Sarah Pink, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis and Jo Tacchi, *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practices* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2016), 10; Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 26–30.

¹⁶ Yang, “The Word Digitalized,” 83.

¹⁷ Tripp Hudgins, “Preaching Online,” *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (2019), 79–88.

¹⁸ Jonas Kurlberg and Alexander Chow, “Two or Three Gathered Online: Asian and European Responses to COVID-19 and the Digital Church,” *Studies in World Christianity* 26, no. 3 (2020), 299–318.

¹⁹ John Dyer, “Exploring Mediated *Ekklesia*: How We Talk about Church in the Digital Age,” in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, ed. Heidi Campbell and John Dyer (London: SCM Press, 2022), 5–8.

interaction was quite common.²⁰ Some of the listeners in this study reported that their congregations made such a change.

The fourteen interviews analyzed here are part of the source material that was created in the framework for a larger research project in which four researchers followed twenty-four local congregations from five Protestant denominations in the region of Småland (in the south of Sweden) during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020-June 2021). The interviews were conducted at the end of this period, in the spring of 2021.²¹ To protect the identity of the participants, listeners were interviewed in groups of 2–3 people and are subsequently referred to as a group.²²

A total of twenty-nine persons were interviewed. Half of the interviewees (15) belong to the Lutheran majority church, the Church of Sweden (CoS), and half (14) belong to four so-called Free church denominations.²³ These include the Uniting Church (UC, a merger of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, the United Methodist Church of Sweden, and the Baptist Union of Sweden); the Swedish Pentecostal Movement (PM); Interact; and the Swedish Mission Alliance (SMA). The sampling was made within the overarching research project's framework, which dealt with comparisons between the CoS and the Free churches. While further comparisons may also be relevant, these are not the main focus of this article.

The interviews covered a wide range of topics related to the entire life of the congregation during the first year of the pandemic and not just digitally-mediated preaching. This context affects what they say in their responses. Like Theo Pleizier, I found that “there is some *vagueness* in how listeners distinguish between the worship service as a whole and the sermon in particular.”²⁴ According to Pleizier, this is because listeners often experience the service and sermon as an inseparable whole.²⁵ Because of this, the analysis also necessarily includes what listeners say about the worship service considered in its entirety.

Listening Practices

The second key concept is “listening practice.” Here, I follow the lead of several Scandinavian homileticians who draw on practice theories in the analysis. As previously stated, practice theories may be useful in the field of homiletics as they draw attention to how

²⁰ Frida Mannerfelt, “Old and New Habits: The Transition to Digitally-Mediated Worship in Four Swedish Free Church Denominations during COVID-19,” in *Svensk frikyrklighet i pandemin: En studie av församlingen i corona och corona i församlingen*, eds. Ulrik Josefsson and Magnus Wahlström, (Research report from the Institute of Pentecostal Studies No. 9, 2022), 81–82.

²¹ The author of this article was responsible for conducting interviews with employees and members of the congregations; in total, 40 interviews with 64 persons. The employees served as gatekeepers who provided names of active members who might be suitable participants. Each person was contacted individually and 2–3 persons were selected for participation. The project has been approved 2021-02-16 by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (SERA). Dnr. 2020-06823.

²² Throughout the article, the shared interviews are referred to as “groups,” the letter “S” (for Church of Sweden) or “F” (for Free churches), and a number accompanies each.

²³ In Sweden, these protestant churches are often referred to – and self-identify – as “Free churches,” where “free” signals an emphasis on relative freedom of structure, leadership, and liturgical forms as opposed to the structures in the CoS. For a discussion of the concept “Free churches,” see Joel Halldorf and Fredrik Wenell, *Between the State and the Eucharist: Free Church Theology in Conversation with William T. Cavanaugh* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 6.

²⁴ Pleizier, Theo, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010), 165.

²⁵ Ibid.

materiality plays an essential role in the complex process of the interpretation and communication of the preaching event.²⁶

Practice theories are not only advocated by homileticians but are often also referred to in handbooks on digital ethnography as beneficial for empirical studies. Since digital technology is embedded in human life, it tends to become invisible and therefore ignored in analysis. Practice theories draw attention to the materiality of digitality and its implications, while at the same time enabling an approach that acknowledges but does not overemphasize the significance of media.²⁷ In other words, practice theories provide a productive approach to the study of the practice of listening to digitally-mediated sermons.

In the analysis put forth in this article, the practice theory of Theodore Schatzki has informed the analytical questions explored throughout. According to Schatzki, “the social” consists of *nexuses of bundles of practices*. These “bundles” consist of the entanglement of *human activity* and *material entities*, often as a sequence of actions (*chain of events*) in relationship to entities grouped as *material arrangements*. Schatzki underlines the importance of not overlooking material entities’ part in practices.²⁸ Accordingly, an analysis of listening practices must pay careful attention to both human activity and the material arrangements involved.

The bundles of practice are *organized* through *rules*, *pools of understanding*, and *teleoaffective structures*. Rules are explicit directives and instructions, often written down. Pools of understanding are a combination of practical and general understandings—for example, the practical knowledge of where to tap your finger on the mobile phone to download and launch Zoom, as well as the more generalized knowledge that it is possible in the first place to participate in worship via Zoom.²⁹ Teleoaffective structures are an important concept in Schatzki’s thinking. According to Schatzki, human activity is teleological, that is, directed toward an end. People act for desired *ways of being* or the expectation of a particular *state of affairs*.³⁰ This means that an analysis of listening practices needs to attend to the organization of the practices, particularly the question of which *ends* the listeners are involved in when they engage in the practice.

Social changes occur when: a) humans engage in *chains of activity*; and/or b) through *material events and processes*. Schatzki underlines that human activity is always the principal generator of social change. A classic example is technological innovation which comes about primarily through human activity.³¹ However, while material entities are intertwined with human activity, they may also sometimes engage in their own events and processes without the involvement of humans and these may also lead to social change. Schatzki’s example from his

²⁶ Rystad, “I Wish We Could Fast Forward It”, 18–42; Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 21–40; Tone Stangeland Kaufman and H.O. Mosdøl, “More than Words: A Multimodal and Socio-material Approach to Understanding the Preaching Event” in *Preaching Promises within the Paradoxes of Life*, eds. Johan Cilliers and Len Hansen (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2018), 123–132; Linn Sæbø Rystad, *Overestimated and underestimated: A Case Study of the Practice of Preaching for Children with an Emphasis on Children’s Role as Listeners*, PhD Thesis (Oslo: MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2020); Tone Stangeland Kaufman (ed.), *Forkynnelse for barn og voksne* (Oslo: Prismet bok, 2021).

²⁷ Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography*, 41–58.

²⁸ Theodore Schatzki, *Social Change in a Material World* (London & New York: Routledge, 2019) 26–27.

²⁹ Schatzki, *Social Change in a Material World*, 30–32.

³⁰ Theodore Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 111–115.

³¹ Schatzki, *Social Change in a Material World*, 78–104.

2019 book seems prophetic in retrospect: that is, it is based on a biological infection. Finally, due to the entanglement of human activity and material entities, it is often difficult to decide which factors ultimately brought about particular changes.³² Following Schatzki, therefore, any analysis of the practice of listening to digitally-mediated sermons must pay attention to changes in all of the above: chains of activity, material events and processes, and their organization.

With practice theory as a framework, the research questions guiding the analysis in this study are: How do the listeners describe their listening practices? What kind of activities and material arrangements make up that practice? To what ends are they engaging in the practice? Do the listeners describe changes to their listening practices, and if so, what kinds of changes do they describe? And how might the results be understood in dialogue with recent homiletical research on the practice of listening to sermons? The findings will be discussed through the prism of a final research question: How can the results of this study be informed by recent studies on listening practices?

Results

[Interviewer]: It is Sunday; it is time for a digitally-mediated worship service. What do you do?

[Interviewee 1]: I usually broadcast from the phone to the TV. Often it is just the children and me. And earlier in this period we lit some candles and things like that. I think we have stopped doing that lately, and perhaps we have become less motivated to participate as time passed. A little less focus and things like that. But otherwise, it has been on the TV, and the hymnbook on the table, and some crafts for my youngest daughter, and my eldest has her own Bible and takes notes. [laughs] Well, the children usually come directly from the bed, and sometimes we eat breakfast at the same time [as the service].

[Interviewer]: What do *you* do?

[Interviewee 2]: Well, I want to participate, so I sit down. I only use my phone, so I sit in a place where I can put it down and still hear and see well. Because now it is worship, and I want to participate, of course the hymnbook is out, and in the beginning, I lit candles too. I even stood up for the creed. But lately—neither candles nor standing. But no crafts or things like that because it is worship, and I want to participate.

[Interviewee 1]: It has become a standing joke in our house when the pastor says “*Please be seated,*” we are already seated! [laughs] And every time it happens, someone says “*Thank you,*” and then we laugh at it. It is not entirely as it used to be.

There are several important things expressed in this quote from group F8. First, the listeners uphold their usual practices for a Sunday morning: they attend a worship service. Second, to uphold this practice, they not only engage in their regular activities; they also use

³² Ibid. 106.

material entities and arrangements that they are used to from the local church (candles, hymnbooks, Bibles) or they try to replicate the material arrangements of the church space. Third, they express a clearly desired way of being, or state of affairs, with the practice: participation in the worship service. Fourth, they mention new material arrangements; these include primarily digital technologies but because of the nature of digital mediation, other new material arrangements may be introduced into the practice, like the couch or the breakfast table. These material arrangements vary, depending on the kind of technology the listeners use. And fifth, the practices gradually change in relation to these new material arrangements. Practices like standing up no longer make sense. Instead, they begin to engage in new practices, such as eating breakfast together while listening. These themes run through the fourteen group interviews and will structure the presentation of the results.

Upholding Familiar Listening Practices through Activities

The practice of attending a worship service and listening to a sermon was considered necessary to the listeners in this study. They were accustomed to doing both and frequently mentioned the importance of upholding these vital routines and habits. Most felt that upholding these practices was best done through digitally-mediated worship services. For example, the listeners in group S1 reported that they had been offered printed orders for home worship on their own but never used them. When asked why, they said it was “the power of habit.” The digitally-mediated worship felt closer to what they were used to.

Upholding these familiar practices was done in several ways. Listeners commonly mentioned worshipping “at the proper time” on Sunday morning. Although digital mediation often permitted them to listen whenever they wanted, quite a few agreed that gathering at the same time was important. So was the service’s order. Listeners expressed a preference for the order typically followed by their local church. Notably, several of the Free church listeners also expressed this same preference. Typically, they would claim, as did group F1, that “it is important to keep the things we can have the same way as before for everyone to feel at home.”

Upholding Familiar Listening Practices through Material Arrangements

When the listeners were asked about their practices, it was striking how frequently material arrangements were mentioned—for example, in their choice of preacher. When asked which preachers they chose to listen to—especially in light of having digital access to nearly all the preachers in the world—the listeners almost always stated that they preferred listening to their own preacher from their own local church. When asked why, they frequently mentioned the preacher as being part and parcel of a combination of material arrangements that they were used to interacting with. Often, when asked why they chose a particular preacher, listeners answered by talking about their community and church instead. Like the listeners in focus group S8:

[Interviewee 2]: I have mostly stuck with the community I belong to. That sense of belonging has been important and is important, so it is my choice to listen to the [local service I am used to]. I have listened to other broadcasts too. But to me, it is important to belong to a community.

[Interviewee 1]: I would probably have done [the same] if the community I belong to had broadcasted [from the church we typically attended]. I would have followed that [broadcast], especially for the sake of the children. I am more

flexible myself. But to them, at least for my youngest, it is important to recognize the church. To know that I have been there for real many times, to feel at home.

The quotes above show that the preacher is associated with the community and the church. These things are important to listeners, especially for the listener whose congregation chose to broadcast from only one of the church locations in the denomination and not from the location the listener typically attended before the pandemic. Earlier in the interview, the listener talked about disappointment and “homelessness.” This is a recurring theme in many of the interviews: they chose preachers from their own congregation since they considered that community “family” and “home.” Even if their preacher wasn’t the “best,” they nevertheless felt committed to their community and church. These quotes also show another recurring theme: while some listeners do listen to other preachers, they tend to do it afterward, once their own local digitally-mediated service has concluded.

Notably, one group of listeners also mentioned that they listened to their own preacher because it was the most convenient option. This group consisted of older CoS listeners who found digital technology difficult to navigate. It was more convenient since they knew where to find the link on the community home page, and sometimes even got reminders on their smartphones (“[name of the congregation] has started a live stream. Do you want to join?”).

As mentioned earlier, continuing to uphold the practices listeners were used to was sometimes also related to the church building. Listeners mentioned two reasons for this. First, the church building itself was tied to the experience of community. They not only wanted to recognize the people; they wanted to recognize the church, also. Second, recognizing the church made falling into the routine of proper practices much easier.

Several listeners mentioned that they now realized how important the local church space had been for their ability to listen and participate. It helped them to focus. Furthermore, listeners realized that the material space of the local church also contributed to their meaning-making. Such was the case for this listener in group S4:

I like being able to sit and watch the altarpiece, the cross, the paintings—to sink into them. [...] If my mind strays away, I can watch the altarpiece and Jesus who kneels there, and the focus is [on] something else [than it is at home]. The *words* might be the same, but their experience and strength are stronger in the church space.

This aspect was also mentioned by Free church listeners who usually have fewer embellishments in their churches. The significance of the church building points to the role that material arrangements play in upholding practices. When listeners did not have access to the material arrangement of their church buildings, they made other material arrangements that were in accordance with what they would normally see and use in a worship service in their local church. They lit candles and put out icons, brought out Bibles and pillows for kneeling (Free church listeners) and hymnbooks (CoS listeners), and in general tried to arrange a space in their home that resembled the conditions found in their local church. Both CoS and the Free church listeners also commonly mentioned changing into Sunday clothes.

Upholding the Familiar Ends of Listening Practices?

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that listeners engaged in activities related to material arrangements that they were familiar with in order to uphold the familiar ends. Notably, many of them stated that they succeeded. They reached the expected and desired ends of the practice, often expressed as “reacting,” “being moved,” “getting nourishment,” and “being transformed.” If this happened, the sermon had “worked.”

The fact that preaching “worked” is particularly interesting since the interviews are replete with statements indicating that digital mediation had caused a massive change. Some interviewees even cried at the thought of what had been lost: a sense of community that came from the constitutive elements of gathering, communal singing, holy communion, the imposition of hands during prayer, and so on. But there were no significant changes regarding the element of preaching. Preaching was the one thing that “worked”—or, at least, listening did. Several Free church interviewees were lay preachers and had experienced preaching “from both ends.” While they thought digital mediation led to significant differences in the practice of *delivering* a sermon, they felt the practice of listening to a sermon remained substantially the same.

Notably, when asked why preaching “works,” the most common answer was that preaching is—mostly, but not entirely—a one-way communication. But there were some minor differences, and these differences often affected the listeners’ ability to uphold the ends they desired. When asked to describe the difference, they typically mentioned three things. First, the presence of other listeners in the room was thought to create a unique atmosphere that impacted their meaning-making. A listener from Group F5 stated: “I think it is different to be in the local church then because you can hear others react even if you do not react yourself.” Words were experienced as “stronger” when they saw that others were moved by them, also. Listeners mentioned this from both CoS and Free church denominations.

However, there were some differences that seemed to be specific to particular denominations. CoS listeners typically mentioned that they could not be seen by the preacher and/or other congregants. One listener in focus group S5 elaborated on this by stating that if the preacher only sought eye contact with the people in the church and not with the listeners behind the camera, this listener could not “see—feel—that it is given to *me*.”

Like the listeners in focus group F3, listeners from Free churches sometimes debated where there was a difference. When asked if there was a difference when it came to preaching, they stated:

[Interviewee 1]: No, I do not think so. Because—well, how do I say this [laughs]—it might be for better or worse, but I mean—in reality, the sermon is one-way communication, at least in our church. Not like a conversation in a cell group when you can twist and turn different angles, like in a Bible study. But it is one person who is preaching, and the others sit quietly, no matter if it is digital or not. That is why I do not think that there is a difference.

[Interviewee 2]: No, I disagree. The difference is smaller, but I would not say it is insignificant. [...] And that is probably connected to the singing, because the element of worship songs that comes afterward is often a moment when you reflect on the sermon and respond in singing or prayer. [...] God is speaking something in the sermon, and I get to respond afterward. But I have not done that in the same way during this period. [...] It becomes slightly more like just a transfer of information.

While the first listener described the sermon as “one-way communication” and saw no differences between digitally-mediated sermons and local preaching, the second thought that *singing* is connected to the preaching event in a special way, as the moment when the listener *responds* to the sermon. The second listener also mentioned “transfer of information” as an undesired end.

The listeners in this study were generally clear on what they thought were the wrong ends of the listening practice. Several of the listeners mentioned watching TV to explain the difference. The purpose of watching TV is to be entertained, which is not the purpose of listening to a sermon. Furthermore, when watching TV, you are a mere spectator. When you listen to a sermon, you are expected to engage on a deeper level, not as a distant onlooker. Some of the listeners found this difficult and stated that they had to consciously decide to listen to a sermon in order to not slip into the role of a spectator simply looking for entertainment.

The listeners mentioned two things that increased the risk of becoming a spectator. The first was to worship alone. As group F3 puts it: “You easily become a mere spectator when you sit by a screen [...] if you are alone in front of the TV, I think it becomes more difficult.” The second reason relates to the medium’s degree of interactivity and the platform used in the digitally-mediated service. The listeners who had experiences with both broadcasted and interactive digital platforms stated that the latter makes you less of a spectator. As group S6 stated:

It works if you run it on Discord, Zoom, Teams, or something like that. But just sitting there and watching on YouTube, it feels like—well, when you do a service, you usually have a congregation. Everyone participates, and we answer and things like that. But if you watch YouTube or something, you become an audience.

Simply put, according to group S6, it is easier to achieve the ends of the practice of listening to a sermon if you are not entirely alone, and if the sermon is mediated from a digital platform that allows for interaction. However, the listener's mindset was also crucial to ensuring that the listening practices were not performed to the wrong ends. As group S5 noted:

There is a risk that it becomes a performance at home because it is up to *you* what you make of it if you can shut out everything else and make it your own. And if you can, it can be wonderful. But it can also become like any other TV show: something that you watch. It is up to you when you sit there in front of your screen.

Here, the listener thinks that the practice of listening can be performed to different ends—and that it is up to the listener to make sure that they engage with the right approach and mindset.

Upholding Familiar Practices in Relation to New Material Arrangements

As previously mentioned, the differences the listeners experienced also related to a change in material arrangements. Some arrangements (like the church building) were lost, some were reproduced (like candles and hymnbooks), and some were entirely new. In digitally-mediated preaching events, digital technology and media, unsurprisingly, play a prominent role.

The interviews made it apparent that there were various kinds of digital material arrangements, including multiple ways a worship service and sermon might be mediated. The listeners engaged with different hardware and software, using them differently in their various contexts. There was a fascinating interplay between the choice of technology and the social conditions of the listener. The listeners' descriptions of their practices showed a clear pattern. Generally, if there were more than one listener at the location (often a family), they would broadcast the service on the TV screen in front of the couch in the living room. If the listener were in a single household, they would usually be seated comfortably (for example, in an armchair), using an iPad or a smartphone. Sometimes the listener already had a designated place for prayer in their home, where they would also sit for services. In cases where the listener was part of a larger household in which they were the only Christian, they would sit in their bedrooms with the door closed, using a laptop or a smartphone. As indicated above, listeners who were alone found it more difficult to engage in the practice of listening. Furthermore, the ones who were the only Christians in their family described how the new material arrangements made it impossible to perform the practice to the desired degree. This listener from group S4 describes their difficulty:

I have been sitting with my laptop in my bed or on the couch [...] and decided to watch this, but it is futile. [...] Or, it is possible, but it is—you try to replicate something irreplaceable, and it always ends with me feeling disappointed and lonely.”

Here, new material arrangements caused listening practices to break down. Notably, for one of the listeners in group S6, the breakdown led to the invention of *new practices*. They went out into the garden to pray and listen to music—using songs that functioned as sermons or messages to the listener. Interestingly, since the songs were played on Spotify, the listener still used the same material arrangements as they had before in the digitally-mediated service (a smartphone and headphones). But in the new practices described above they were now being used differently, resulting in the listener reaching the desired end: “I realized this is wonderful. I had found something of the thing that disappeared.”

There is an interesting denominational difference in the setup of material arrangements. The Free Church listeners mostly belonged to the category of those who worshipped on the couch in front of the TV with the family. There were, of course, exceptions, as in the case of listeners who used Zoom. Because many of those using Zoom felt they needed access to a camera or webcam to share their own video, they used their laptops. The CoS listeners often belonged to the category of listeners who worshipped alone.

The new digital material arrangements did not only impact and reflect the social life of the listeners; they also led to entirely new material arrangements. Most commonly mentioned were the couch and the kitchen table. Notably, several of the listeners reported that they moved from the couch to the kitchen table over time. A few of the listeners who worshipped alone also reported moving to the kitchen or dining table over time. The reason for this transition is a new practice: drinking and eating. In the next section, I will return to these changes in practice and explore their relation to the new material arrangements.

Many of the listeners also mentioned how material arrangements that relate to everyday life became included in the practice. Since the listeners were “worshipping amid the chaos of life,” as one of them put it, everyday material arrangements such as laundry, plants that need to be watered, visitors, and the sound of the microwave were all drawn into the listening practice.

These were often described as distracting and contrasted with the features of the local church building. Typically, it was these everyday material arrangements that prompted the listeners' insights into how important the church building had been to their listening practices.

New Material Arrangements in Relation to Changes to Listening Practice

As indicated in the previous section, new material arrangements sometimes led to changes in listening practices. One of the new practices relates to the kitchen table. Several listeners stated that, as time passed, they started having coffee, tea, or breakfast during worship services. Listeners in group F4 said:

In the beginning, we had breakfast before [the service], but after a while, [...] we had “fika.” We always set the table. I think we did it partly for our teenagers' sake. It became something extra to sit and eat together in front of the TV; it became a thing that we thought was positive. It is a little different from what you usually do, but it was a way to gather.

This group's quote represents the listeners' positive view of this new practice. This kitchen table-focused practice was seen as connected to the practice of gathering that they were used to in church. Some listeners also made parallels to the practice of having a cup of coffee after the service and stated that the two “rituals”—the worship service and the gathering afterward—had blended into each other. In this quote, the listener also describes how the practice of having breakfast facilitated the participation of teenagers. Other parents of teenagers reported the same phenomenon. Young people, usually characterized as reluctant to go to church, participated more willingly from the kitchen table.

As mentioned earlier, parents of younger children thought that digitally-mediated worship facilitated participation for them too. The children could behave like children—make noises, play, or even throw tantrums—and see the service elements better than they usually would have when seated in the children's corner in the back of the church. However, parents of smaller children whose community offered Sunday School for children were not as keen. They felt that their children missed out on something: learning the practices of the Christian faith.

Another change due to the new material arrangements was the ability to participate on occasions when the listeners would not have been able to otherwise. Two of the listeners described how their chronic pain sometimes made them unable to attend church. One of them cried with joy as they spoke about how they could now access God's comforting word in their suffering. Other listeners described how they were now able to listen afterward to the service on occasions when they would otherwise have missed out entirely. In these cases, it was primarily the sermon they were interested in.

A third change was that the listeners started to listen to more sermons—in addition to the sermon they had already heard. They found it enriching to hear different interpretations of the same biblical text. When asked who these preachers were, several mentioned preachers from congregations with whom they had some other previous relationship. They also chose “famous and skilled” preachers in notable ecclesial leadership positions. Notably, there seemed to be pronounced ecumenical crossover as denominational borders were frequently breached. One listener was critical of this new practice and wondered if it might not be performed to the right end. Did listening to different sermons and preachers really “make you transform your life” or was it just entertainment?

Interestingly, the listeners that listened to more than one sermon from different sources sometimes reported that they engaged somewhat differently in the practice of listening while doing so. They did not try to copy the practices of the local church at all. Instead, they would listen while engaging in activities that included everyday material arrangements like cleaning, driving, walking, and cooking. They did not think these arrangements disrupted the listening practices in these cases. Instead, they helped facilitate the experience, just as with the practice of eating breakfast and drinking coffee.

Listening to other preachers could be a conscious choice, but it is noteworthy that some listeners reported they sometimes “got stuck” watching YouTube and engaged with new sermons somewhat by happenstance. After the particular service they had decided to watch was finished, they sometimes received further suggestions from the platform’s algorithm: “If you liked this video, perhaps you would like to watch another one like this?”—and then a new worship service would start rolling.

Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the findings in light of recent homiletical research on listening practices that I presented at the beginning of the article. This research offers several frameworks for understanding the results and suggests an orientation for research on sermon listeners in a digital culture.

To the listeners in this study, it was essential to uphold the practices of participation in worship and listening to sermons. They upheld these practices through the same activities they were used to from local church services, including gathering at a particular time, following liturgical practices, and using familiar material arrangements such as candles and hymnbooks. They also chose their regular preacher, community, and church building. The listeners could also reach the desired and expected ends of their listening practices: they found that preaching “works” in the digitally-mediated preaching event.

The fact that generally preaching “worked” but nevertheless broke down for some, and that many listeners perceived differences between local services and digitally-mediated services, might be helpfully understood through Theo Pleizier’s model of listening religiously to a sermon. Based on his own interviews with listeners, Pleizier describes three listening stages necessary for a sermon to “work”: opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and actualizing faith. To Pleizier, the word “dwelling” is essential since his listeners describe their interaction with the sermon as a spatial experience in which they become part of a religious world performed by the preacher in the preaching event. In other words, the sermon is a space in which they can perceive something.³³

According to Pleizier, there is a communal dimension to all three stages of the practice of listening. The presence of the community plays a part in the opening stage when the listeners prepare for listening through liturgy and being in the community; as well as in the dwelling stage, when they sometimes dwell in the sermon on behalf of others; and also in the final stage, when faith is actualized in remembrance.³⁴ As I have shown, the differences the listeners experienced all pertain to this communal dimension. They missed the church building, the preacher’s gaze, and the community’s reactions. Furthermore, the listening practices tended to break down the most when the listener was alone. A general principle thus emerges: when the communal dimension is weakened, the practices become more fragile and prone to interruption.

³³ Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons*, 188.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

When the communal aspect is enhanced through actions and arrangements that facilitate greater connection, such as interactive digital platforms, listening together with others, and the entangled triad of their usual preachers, churches, and communities, the practice of listening is easier to uphold.

This study has also pointed to the importance of knowing the ends of listening practices. “It is up to you when you sit there in front of your screen”—that is, the listener must listen with the proper purpose or risk becoming a distanced spectator. These descriptions of the importance of intentionality, of knowing the ends, alongside the fact that listeners reported being able to uphold their listening practices even in a digitally-mediated preaching event, support Gaarden and Ringgaard Lorensen’s claim that listeners can be understood as authors of the sermon as they interact with the preacher’s words to create meaning.³⁵ Listening to listeners in a digital culture underlines their insight: listeners are indeed authors of the sermon.

However, the importance of knowing the ends of the practice raises the question: what about people who have not yet learned the *telos* of these listening practices? What about the children mentioned in this study whose parents voiced concern that they might not learn the practices of the Christian faith in a digitally-mediated environment? Linn Sæbø Rystad’s study of children’s listening practices confirms that these fears may have some basis. Rystad found that children did not always know that one of the ends of listening was *transformation*, including the application of what had been said to their own lives. Instead, they connected the activity to an end they were familiar with from school: taking in information. Rystad points to the importance of teaching listeners the practice of listening, including the intended ends.³⁶ While Rystad agrees with Pleizier that preaching is a social activity involving preachers and listeners, she believes Pleizier is wrong to assume that both of them share an understanding of preaching as a religious event. Her study shows this is not necessarily the case.³⁷

However, as Gaarden has demonstrated in her empirical study, listeners still interact with the sermon even if they do not listen religiously. Like Pleizier, she uses spatial categories to describe what happens when a sermon works: a “third room of preaching” is erected, and meaning-making occurs in the interaction between the preacher’s outer words and the listener’s inner experience.³⁸ According to Ilona Nord, there is reason to believe that this spatial feature of the sermon is enhanced by digital mediation. In a discussion on “the virtual dimension of homiletics,” Nord makes the case that the experience of living in a digital culture and inhabiting virtual worlds that are entangled with the real world might facilitate this creative function of the sermon. Drawing on Albrecht Grözinger’s idea that the sermon’s task is to “imagine mankind into God’s horizon of possibility,” Nord argues that preachers ought to make use of digital mediation to invite listeners to a life that is centered on God’s possibilities and make the sermon a “creative space” where they might imagine these possibilities.³⁹

All these points suggest a need for future research into the practices of listeners who are not regular (“religious”) church-goers but who listen to digitally-mediated sermons. A digitally-mediated sermon is, in a sense, even more public than a sermon held in a local church due to the nature of digital media. The possibility exists to reach listeners who have never heard a sermon

³⁵ Gaarden & Lorensen, “Listeners as Authors in Preaching: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives,” 28–45.

³⁶ Linn Sæbø Rystad, *Overestimated and underestimated*, 89–90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 88. Gaarden also raises this issue in the Danish version of *The Third Room of Preaching*. Marianne Gaarden, *Prædiken som det tredje rum*, København: Anis, 2015.

³⁸ Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*, 55–106.

³⁹ Ilona Nord, “Experiment with Freedom Every Day: Regarding the Virtual Dimension of Homiletics,” *Homiletic* 36, no. 2 (2011), 31–37.

before. Because of this, digitally-mediated sermons are sometimes thought to have missional potential. But will sermons fill a missional purpose if the listeners do not know to what ends they are listening? Or will they—as Gaarden and Nord suggest—still know what to do, since they have already been taught by previous experiences of digital spaces to “imagine God’s possibilities”?

As I have shown, listeners’ statements about the ends of listening also included strong opinions on what they thought were the wrong ends: being a spectator and being entertained. The question then arises: why are these ends unacceptable?

I would argue that a contributing reason for the negative view of being a spectator stems from the ideals of interaction and participation that permeate both digital culture and Swedish Protestant churches.⁴⁰ As for the negative view of entertainment, Katrin Kusmierz offers a clue in her discussion on digitally-mediated preaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Kusmierz, the fear of entertainment stems from a (Reformed/Protestant) ideal that content is the thing that matters most and that preachers should avoid anything that might distract from that.⁴¹

Kusmierz identifies a recurring theme in debates on online preaching: the fear that preachers will succumb to the shorter, hyperactive style of new media to attract listeners and in the process become “just entertainment.” By taking on a listener’s perspective, Kusmierz problematizes this idea. Drawing on Albrecht Grözinger and Harald Schroter-Wittke, she asks whether it might not in fact be a good thing if preaching was entertainment. Of course, entertainment can be shallow, brutal, and mere distraction, but it can also be nutritive, offer sustenance, facilitate conversations between equals, and is often delectable. In her argument, Kusmierz identifies a paradox: when the content is the sole focus, the face-to-face sermon-from-the-pulpit often, and perhaps paradoxically, creates distance. On the other hand, online preaching creates intimacy and closeness that the onsite counterpart often lacks by means of a shorter format and more direct style of speech.⁴² Kusmierz’s argument points to how further inquiry into digitally-mediated listening practices could contribute to a discussion on homiletical ideals and paradigms.

As I have shown, materiality is an important part of the practice of listening to digitally-mediated sermons (or any sermon). They contribute to upholding familiar practices, and changes in material arrangements can lead to obstructed or even disrupted listening practices. Listeners themselves acknowledged the importance of material arrangements, including the church building. As I have shown in this study, material arrangements may also contribute to the creation of new practices. The material arrangements of digital technology, for example, allow listeners to listen to more sermons than they would otherwise be able to. In addition, digital mediation leads to the involvement of new material arrangements, for example, the kitchen table. In short: the “third room of preaching” clearly comes into being in relation to material arrangements, not just human activity. The involvement of material arrangements, both in the local and digital settings, would be an interesting field for further investigation—including a phenomenon that the listeners in this study only hinted at: how algorithms affect listening practices.

⁴⁰ Mannerfelt, Frida and & Roitto, Rikard, “Mellan rit och reklam del 2: Interaktion, synkronicitet och integritet i digitalt förmedlade förinspelade andakter,” in *Kyrka i digitala rum: Ett aktionsforskningsprojekt om församlingsliv online i Svenska kyrkan*, ed. Sara Garpe and Jonas Idestrom (Uppsala: enheten för forskning och analys, 2022), 71–73; Mannerfelt, “Old and New Habits,” 110–112.

⁴¹ Katrin Kusmierz, “Predigt als Unterhaltung 2.0,”

https://www.liturgik.unibe.ch/ueber_uns/liturgie_in_virtuellen_raeumen/index_ger.html [accessed 22.12.19]

⁴² Ibid.

Finally, this study has shown how digital technology led to the involvement of further new material arrangements: arrangements of everyday life. Depending on which activities listeners engaged in, these everyday arrangements could be experienced as both distractions and facilitators to listening. When listeners tried to copy their usual listening practices from church, the new material arrangements were seen as a distraction. But when listeners let go of their notion of “proper” listening practices and incorporated the everyday material arrangements into their experience, listening was facilitated. In light of these findings, I would argue for the need to rethink practices. While it may seem possible to copy-paste the sermon listening practices from the local church setting (such as sitting quietly in a pew) and still reach the same ends, perhaps there are ways to reach these ends by better cooperation with the new material arrangements in which digitally-mediated sermon listeners find themselves. The example of eating and drinking shows how fruitful that approach can be.

Summary

This study aimed to examine the practice of listening to digitally-mediated sermons and, since it has rarely been done before, suggest some areas in which this research might be further developed. The source material under consideration included 14 group interviews with 29 listeners from Protestant congregations in the south of Sweden conducted in the spring of 2021, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent digital transition of the churches these listeners attended.

The interviews were analyzed with questions inspired by Theodore Schatzki’s practice theory in relation to the elements that practices consist of—activities, material arrangements, and ends—as well as any changes to these elements.

I found that the listeners could reach the desired ends of the practice of sermon listening since the digitally-mediated practices were “mostly the same.” However, there were slight differences due to changes in material arrangements that impacted the communal aspect of the listening practice. To most listeners, the differences interfered with their listening practices and put them at risk of engaging in the practice to the wrong ends: entertainment and spectatorship. For some, the differences even led to a breakdown of listening practices. However, new material arrangements could also lead to new listening practices. These new practices related both to the material arrangements of digital technology, but also to everyday material arrangements such as the kitchen table which inspired the listeners to include eating and drinking as part of their listening practices.

Finally, I discussed the results in light of recent homiletical research on the practice of listening to sermons and argued that: a) material arrangements play a pivotal part in listening practices; b) listening practices may be affected positively by the spatial experiences of digital mediation; c) the differences that obstructed and disrupted the listening practice were due to changes in material arrangements that affected the communal aspect of listening; d) the importance of knowing the ends of the listening practice raises questions about listeners who might not know the proper ends and points to the importance of learning them—challenging homiletical ideals about the ends of listening; and e) the need to rethink listening practices in relation to new material arrangements, instead of simply trying to copy the listening practices adopted from the material arrangements in the church building.

**Black Queer Preaching:
A Close Reading of Bishop Yvette A. Flunder's Sermon, "Silent No More"**

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Abstract: *There is limited scholarship on African American queer preaching, which may be in part due to homophobia and heterosexism in the Black church. This essay addresses this scholarship gap by providing a rhetorical analysis of a sermon by Bishop Yvette A. Flunder, a Black, same-gender loving congregational pastor. Using the rhetorical analysis modeled by Kimberly Johnson in *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*, I categorize the sermon, "Silent No More," as a womanist critical engagement sermon and identify accompanying rhetorical tools used by Flunder. Additionally, I argue that the "coming out" motif in the sermon represents queer womanist rhetoric. Through the lens of Yvette Flunder, Black queer preaching is deeply wedded to the African American preaching tradition with the use of lived realities as text, vivid imagery, and the celebratory close. Ultimately, this rhetorical analysis provides insight into the preaching of one of the pioneering Black queer women pastors of the 21st Century.*

Introduction

There is a lack of scholarship on African American queer preaching in the field of homiletics, which may in part be due to patriarchy and heterosexism in the Black church. In the book, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word*, Teresa Fry Brown states that one of the many congregational perceptions of her answering the call to ministry was that her sexuality had changed.¹ The change of Fry Brown's sexuality presumably means that church folk would now perceive her as lesbian or homosexual, rather than heterosexual. The perceived congregational response speaks to the homophobia in the Black church. Unfortunately, the same homophobia in the Black Church is reflective in the Academy and in society at large. Karen Baker-Fletcher writes, "I suspect that for many [womanists, our silence about homosexuality] is for the same reason that many gays and lesbians hesitate to come out of the closet: fear of losing a job, of being thrown out of church, ostracized in the community."²

Despite homophobia, scholars have published collections of African American sermons that include queer preachers. *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection* edited by Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis was published in 2008. The collection included the sermon titled, "Silent No More," written by Yvette Flunder, who identifies as a Black same-gender loving woman with spiritual formational roots in the Pentecostal Church of God in Christ denomination. In *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons*, Frank A. Thomas and Martha Simmons published two sermons from queer preachers, Peter J. Gomes and Anna Pauli Murray in the final chapter, "From Black to African American and Beyond 1969 to the Present." Gomes was the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard Divinity School and Pusey Minister at Harvard's Memorial Church, who identifies as "a

¹ Teresa Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 13.

² Monica Coleman, "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 5 (Fall 1989), 88.

Christian who happens as well to be gay.”³ Whereas, Anna Pauli Murray was less vocal about her sexuality and gender publicly. The public knows much about Murray’s struggles with identity and intersectionality through personal papers, journals, and diary entries. In 2021, a documentary film titled, “My Name is Pauli Murray,” was featured at the Sundance Film Festival. The documentary highlighted the life of Murray, a non-binary, Black lawyer and activist who was influential in the fight for Civil Rights and gender equality.⁴

In *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, Betty Collier-Thomas features eight of Murray’s sermons. The sermons highlight her prophetic voice on an array of topics, including women’s ordination and the equal creation of both men and women. Published in 1998, this collection of 38 sermons from 14 Black women preachers demonstrates their activism during the 19th and 20th centuries. Collier-Thomas provides a brief biography of each woman as well as contextual analysis of the societal milieu during which each sermon was preached.

To further the scholarship on African American queer preaching, this essay explores Black queer preaching through the lens of Yvette A. Flunder. The rhetorical analysis of Flunder’s sermon “Silent No More” deepens our understanding of Black queer preaching by answering two relevant questions. What is queer rhetoric in Black preaching? And, how might Black, queer preaching differ from Black preaching? Using the rhetorical analysis modeled by Kimberly Johnson in *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*, I categorize the sermon “Silent No More” as a womanist critical engagement sermon and identify accompanying rhetorical tools used by Flunder. Additionally, I argue that the “coming out” motif in the sermon represents queer womanist rhetoric. Furthermore, the rhetorical analysis reveals Flunder’s homiletical method, homiletical theory, and other preaching characteristics unique to Flunder. Ultimately, the analysis discloses that Flunder’s Black queer preaching is deeply wedded to the African American preaching tradition with the use of lived realities as text, vivid imagery, and the celebratory close.

The Sermon – “Silent No More”

“Silent No More” is a sermon written by the Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder who identifies as a Black same-gender loving woman with spiritual formational roots in the Pentecostal Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Bishop Flunder is the Senior Pastor of City of Refuge United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Presiding Bishop of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. Bishop Flunder is a pioneering, openly same-gender loving, Black woman pastor who has ministered to those on the margins of society and religion for over 30 years. In 1991, she founded City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco, California. In 2003, Flunder was consecrated as Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM), a multi-denominational coalition of over 100 primarily African American Christian leaders and laity. She is considered a prophetic preacher who speaks truth to power seeking justice and social action in support of those on the margins.

The sermon “Silent No More” was published in *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection* edited by Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis. According to the forward written by Katie G. Cannon, this collection of sermons demonstrates

³ Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2010), 676.

⁴ *My Name is Pauli Murray*, directed by Betsy West and Julie Cohen (Amazon Studios, 2021), 1:33.
<https://www.amazon.com/My-Name-Pauli-Murray/dp/B09DMPMWCP>.

excellent exegesis of the biblical text and the contextualization of the canon with real lived experiences. “Silent No More” was chosen for the close reading as a clear representation of Flunder’s astute biblical exegesis, her homiletical theory, and her queer theology of preaching. The close reading examines the sermon within the context of the life of Yvette A. Flunder to categorize her rhetoric which expands our understanding of queer preaching.

Even though Flunder does not identify herself as a womanist preacher, I characterize the sermon as womanist based on the focal theme exemplifying the critical engagement tenet of womanism as identified by Stacy Floyd-Thomas, a womanist ethicist, and then re-interpreted as womanist rhetoric by Kimberly Johnson, a womanist rhetorician. Floyd-Thomas builds upon the work of Alice Walker, Katie G. Cannon, and other womanist scholars. Alice Walker coined the term womanism in the book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose* which was published in 1983. Then, the late Katie Geneva Cannon, a pioneer in the womanist movement, appropriated the term womanist in relation to Black women’s ethics in biblical interpretation using Black women’s literature as sacred text.

In *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*, Kimberly Johnson re-interprets Floyd-Thomas’s definitions of the womanist tenets for use in the fields of rhetoric and homiletics. The re-interpretation allows Johnson to categorize womanist sermons and characterize womanist rhetorical tools in preaching. In the book, Johnson provides close readings of one sermon from five self-proclaimed womanist preachers to demonstrate how these women adapt the tenets of womanist thought rhetorically in the church. Johnson categorizes the womanist sermons under one of the four tenets of womanist preaching. Each chapter is structured by first defining the womanist tenet evident in the sermon, and then providing the close reading. Lastly, Johnson characterizes womanist rhetorical tools used in the sermon to establish womanist rhetorical models in womanist preaching. Johnson’s work is the rhetorical precedent for womanist preaching.

In “Chapter Five – Critical Engagement,” Johnson examines Claudette Copeland’s sermon, “What Shall We Do for Our Sister?” The sermon is categorized as a critical engagement sermon. Johnson argues that “critical engagement sermons seek to culturally critique society’s oppressive forces by challenging the ways in which we view people’s problems and by forcing us to confront our own internal system of beliefs, so that we can collectively combat external systems of belief.”⁵

According to Johnson, in this sermon Copeland addresses the misconception that breast cancer only affects the woman who has it. In Copeland’s storytelling, she suggests that there is a rippling effect of breast cancer which impacted her spouse, her church community, and others. Copeland discusses the need for communal change regarding how the community responds to breast cancer. For instance, Copeland talks about watching church women vie for her husband while she was receiving treatments for breast cancer. In Copeland’s most vulnerable state, some members of the church community were not supportive. Some women saw an opportunity to replace her as the Pastor’s wife. Through her testimony, Copeland challenges the way society views breast cancer and mastectomies. The cultural critique regarding the misconceptions of breast cancer is the major theme of Copeland’s sermon. She addresses the misconceptions for purposes of a communal change of behavior, exemplifying a critical engagement sermon.

Johnson notes that there can be similarities between critical engagement sermons and traditional communalism sermons. Both may contain cultural critiques with elements of self-

⁵ Kimberly Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 79.

improvement while uplifting the community. However, critical engagement sermons emphasize a change in communal behavior and traditional communalism sermons focus on self-improvement in order to become a better member of society. Therefore, Copeland's sermon reflects critical engagement and not traditional communalism.⁶

Furthermore, Johnson highlights the rhetorical tools and the purpose of each tool used by Copeland in the sermon, "What Shall We Do for Our Sister?" The list does not exhaust all the tools that could be used in critical engagement sermons. However, the list begins to characterize rhetorical tools used in womanist preaching. The rhetorical tools include the use of the following: female and male biblical characters in order to balance the gender conversation, breast metaphor to create enthymematic identification and to ease the comfort level, and embodiment/embodied meditation to challenge the way we view other people's struggles and the way we respond.⁷

Using Johnson's work as a model, I categorize Yvette Flunder's sermon "Silent No More" as a critical engagement womanist sermon. In "Silent No More," Flunder critiques society's oppressive forces that create an exclusive gospel message. She challenges the ways in which we view the day of Pentecost to combat the external forces of our collective phobias and "isms" in religion and society. As a critical engagement sermon, Flunder critiques the traditionally normative religious ideology of exclusivity based on the Old Testament scripture of Numbers 11 as well as her childhood experiences in the Black Pentecostal tradition. She describes the exclusivity in both religious contexts. Based on religious protocols, there are those who are authorized to be used by the Spirit and those who are not. Flunder uses the New Testament scripture in Acts 2 about the day of Pentecost as an alternative perspective that both challenges the norm and offers a corrective perspective of the inclusivity of everyone.

After presenting the evidence that supports the notion of inclusivity for all, the womanist rhetorician encourages human rhetorical agency that inspires people to change their behavior. Flunder's celebratory charge inspires the audience to be silent no more by spreading the inclusive Gospel. The focus of Flunder's sermon is a change in communal behavior; therefore, based on Johnson's evaluation of womanist preaching, critical engagement reflects the appropriate categorized womanist tenet.

Flunder's "Silent No More" incorporates several rhetorical tools reflective of womanist preaching, some of which are characterized by Johnson in *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*. Each tool is used for a specific purpose in the sermon. The table below outlines the rhetorical tool, provides the sermonic example, and explains the purpose of the tool used in the sermon.

Table 1. Rhetorical Tools in the Sermon – "Silent No More"

Rhetorical Tools	Sermonic Example	Purpose of Rhetorical Tools
Imagery	Description of the disciples on the day of Pentecost	To invoke a vicarious experience that connects the audience to the biblical characters
Old Spiritual Song	"Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody"	To emphasize the communal behavioral change

⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷ Ibid., 85.

Multiple Scriptures	Acts 2: 1-12 Numbers 11	To reinforce the core theological belief of the Holy Spirit
Personal Testimony	Flunder growing up in a Joshua church	To help the audience identify with Flunder's early religious experiences that are similar to the biblical text
Metaphor	The Pentecost message is a "coming out" message.	To explain that Pentecost is about going out into the world and sharing the inclusive gospel message

Queer Womanist Rhetoric in African American Preaching

In “Silent No More,” Flunder’s use of the “coming out” motif represents queer womanist rhetoric. Flunder describes the day of Pentecost as a “coming out event,” whereby the disciples are endowed by the Holy Spirit in the upper room then empowered to go out and spread the inclusive gospel. The delineation of “coming out” queers the interpretation of the text and represents queer womanist rhetoric. The fact that Flunder is queer does not inherently make the “coming out” motif queer rhetoric. Historically, “coming out” became a cultural concept and political tactic within the gay and lesbian community in 1978 during Harvey Milk’s political campaign. “Openly gay elected government official Harvey Milk famously made ‘Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are’ the slogan of his campaign to defeat the Briggs Initiative, or Proposition 6, which would have banned gay teachers from working in public schools in California.”⁸ Milk encouraged persons to come out to their friends and family to build allyship, which could lead to greater social acceptance.

Based on the lived realities of queer persons, “coming out” has layered meanings for individuals and communities. For individuals, “coming out” is the process of disclosing an unknown fact about oneself, historically related to sexuality and/or gender. “Coming out” represents a physical expression of authenticity as a means of identity formation for persons whose authenticity is outside of normative cultural and religious boundaries. With regard to the community, “coming out” associates the person to the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. Being part of the LGBTQIA+ community moves persons from the heteronormative community to the margins. The marginalization or “othering” of persons is addressed by Flunder in the sermon.

As queer womanist rhetoric, the phrase has implications in all four womanist tenets: radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. Womanist radical subjectivity rhetoric “reflects the journey toward identity formation, self-love, and self-worth, along with a moment of epiphany that empowers a woman to escape her oppressive situation.”⁹ In the lives of queer persons, the “coming out” journey is a process toward identity formation with a moment or moments of epiphany that empowers persons to be liberated and fully authentic.

The biblical text explores the disciple’s journey of identity formation before and after the endowment of the Holy Spirit. Before the Holy Spirit, the disciples ministered with the oppressive force of exclusivity that marred the gospel message. After the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit, they went into the community to teach a liberating, inclusive gospel. The epiphany is the endowment of the Holy Spirit that empowers the believers to share the gospel to any- and everyone. Radical subjectivity emphasizes the journey of transformation, going from

⁸ Abigail C. Saguy, *Come Out, Come Out, Whoever You Are* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

⁹ Johnson, op.cit., 13.

ministering an exclusive gospel message to that of an inclusive gospel through the endowment of the Holy Spirit.

Womanist traditional communalism rhetoric “seek(s) to heal and liberate both self and community through its rhetorical Jeremiad that calls people back to the beliefs and values of one’s own community.”¹⁰ For “coming out” to represent traditional communalism rhetoric, the assumption is that acceptance as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, and asexual is the original belief of the community. For an individual to “come out” is to accept their evolved understanding of their sexuality and/or gender as the original intent. According to Johnson, the goal of traditional communalism rhetoric is to focus on the self-improvement of the individual to become a better person in the community.¹¹

In the biblical text, Flunder implies that “coming out” with regards to the inclusivity of the Gospel is the prescribed value of the religious community based on her use of Numbers 11. To paraphrase the scripture; Joshua, Moses’ successor, was upset that the elders, Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp with the people of Israel. The protocol was for the priest to gather at the Tent of Meeting, isolated from the people. At the Tent of Meeting, the priests would receive the power of the Spirit. Then, the priest would come down from the Tent of Meeting and prophesy to the Israelites at the camp. Joshua wanted to stop the elders from prophesying whereas Moses, the leader, wanted more people to prophesy. Moses’s desire for everyone to prophesy is the envisioned value of the religious community. The implication is that if more people prophesy, more persons contribute to the uplifting of the community.

Womanist critical engagement rhetoric “seek(s) to culturally critique society’s oppressive forces by challenging the ways in which we view people’s problems and by forcing us to confront our own internal system of beliefs, so that we can collectively combat external systems of belief.”¹² For “coming out” to reflect critical engagement rhetoric, the focal implication of the individual “coming out” is to change the communal behavior in a manner that eliminates the societal oppressive forces. In essence, the individual experiences a progression toward self-love and self-worth that leads them to live authentically by accepting their queerness. Then the critical engagement rhetoric calls for individuals in the community to evaluate their own homophobia and heterosexism. The individual evaluation may lead to change in the communal behavior of becoming less oppressive. Instead of marginalizing queer persons, the community is to become more accepting and welcoming. The individual’s “coming out” changes the communal behavior while modifying the identity of the community. Thus, the critical engagement womanist tenet has dual aspects of self-improvement and communal behavior change. According to Johnson, even though critical engagement has a duality, the focal emphasis is a change in communal behavior.¹³

In the sermon “Silent No More,” Flunder references the oppressive force as the exclusivity of the gospel based on the believers’ attempts to confine the Holy Spirit to places and people of their choosing. Flunder states that the Holy Ghost slipped out of the tabernacle, slipped out of the tent of meeting, slipped out the upper room, and slipped out of the Azusa Street revival. Some said that the Holy Spirit is not supposed to show up in Asians, motor cyclists,

¹⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹¹ Ibid., 98.

¹² Ibid., 79.

¹³ Ibid., 98.

transgendered persons, nor illegal immigrants.¹⁴ According to Flunder, the Holy Spirit “comes out” to demonstrate the inclusivity of the gospel by showing up in presumably unexpected places and in unlikely people. Specifically in the text, the Holy Spirit showing up in the upper room compels the disciples to “come out” and spread an inclusive gospel message. The disciples’ behavior changes the behavior of the community, which also changes the identity of the community.

Womanist redemptive self-love rhetoric “redeem(s) a woman by removing the socially perceived shame of a woman away from her actions.”¹⁵ According to Johnson, the rhetor offers a perspective that re-imagines the woman as a heroine. “Coming out” represents redemptive self-love rhetoric, as the rhetor removes the perceived shame of being queer from the actions of “coming out” and/or staying closeted. One reason some queer persons remain closeted is the fear of the internalized shame within the community if living authentically. Paradoxically, some queer individuals feel ashamed of being queer when closeted for not living their truth. Redemptive self-love removes the shame from the individual’s actions to focus on the ability to unashamedly love self in spite of what others think.

In the introduction, Flunder describes the disciples as shamed followers of Jesus, hiding from the public in the upper room. She says, “Imagine a group of disjointed theological subversives still suffering scratches and bruises from journeying with Jesus down the road less traveled. This was a group for whom it was a risk to show their faces in public - they were guilty by association. They had been with Jesus, and Jesus had been arrested, tried, convicted, and executed because he had spoken truth to power and spread a welcome table.”¹⁶ In the sermon, Flunder removes the disciples’ shame by celebrating the Holy Spirit “coming out” in an unlikely place of the upper room and among unlikely people, the disappointed disciples. The Holy Spirit “coming out” reimagines the disciples from being villains to heroes, from teaching an exclusive gospel to a gospel of inclusivity.

The Close Reading of “Silent No More”

Close reading is an interpretive analysis that examines texts within the contexts in which they are given. Andre E. Johnson states that “a close textual reading allows for the historical and biographical approach of a rhetorical biography as well as a theoretical approach that emphasizes the text and thereby enables the critic to tease out more nuances of the text.”¹⁷ In the close reading of “Silent No More,” I will discuss the ways in which queer womanist preaching is deeply wedded to the Black preaching tradition through the lens of Yvette Flunder. Flunder’s use of vivid imagery, a hallmark of Black preaching, sets the scene in a palatable way by providing more depth to the biblical exegesis and allows the contextualization of the day of Pentecost. Additionally, components of Flunder’s homiletical theory engage the Black liberation preaching tradition. These components include the Holy Spirit; the homage to three canons: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Lived Testament; justice as a theo-ethical hermeneutic, the African American Pentecostal tradition; and music, including both Gospel and negro spirituals. And lastly, the close of the sermon is indicative of Flunder’s homiletical method of a

¹⁴ Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis, eds. *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2008), 134.

¹⁵ Johnson, op.cit., 59.

¹⁶ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, op.cit., 133.

¹⁷ Andre E. Johnson, *Forgotten Prophet: Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and the African American Prophetic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 6.

celebratory charge to the audience. Collectively, these components inform Flunder's queer preaching that undergirds her queer emancipatory praxis.

The sermonic scripture of "Silent No More" is taken from Acts 2:1-12 (New International Version).

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. **5** Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

From the introduction to the close, Flunder structures this sermon with four distinct moves.¹⁸ Each move transitions the audience to another layer of the contextualization of the day of Pentecost. The moves give insights into Flunder's queer biblical hermeneutic, early religious experiences, queer theology, homiletical theory, and theology of preaching. The sermonic moves are as follows:

- 1.The Introduction - A Contextualization of the Sermonic Text (*Biblical Scripture*)
- 2.The Description of the Holy Spirit (*Core Theological Belief*)
- 3.The Comparison of Similar Thematic Text (*Lived Text*)
- 4.The Sermonic Close (*Celebratory Charge*)

Each move underscores Flunder's homiletical method, the structure of her sermons, which consists of the contextualization of the Biblical scripture, an explanation of a core belief, an incorporation of the lived text, and a directive of a celebratory charge. The presentation of the biblical text is a contextualization of the sermonic text. Flunder rarely just summarizes the scripture. She uses metaphors, adjectives, poignant descriptors, and other vivid imagery to situate the listeners in the text. Flunder's descriptors reduce the distance from the text to the listeners by

¹⁸ "Moves" is a term referenced by Henry Mitchell: "Homiletical moves are meaningful modules or groups of words and sentences that describe the images used to express in the concrete what we cannot adequately verbalize in the abstract." Mitchell differentiates between moves and points saying that, "points are made to score in the intellect while moves involve the whole person in experiential encounters of body, strength emotion, intuition, mental processes and spirit." Henry Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 23.

relating the text to contemporary settings. Core theological beliefs are “characteristics that determine God’s trustworthiness.”¹⁹ The core theological belief is drawn from the scripture. Examples of Flunder’s core beliefs include her preaching motif of “coming out,” justice-oriented ministry, the unction of the Holy Spirit, the radical inclusivity of the gospel, and the love of Christ. Flunder always includes lived experiences that enrich the sermon through humor and humanization. And lastly, she concludes with a celebratory charge as a directive behavioral change for individuals and communities.

Flunder’s homiletical method as outlined in “Silent No More” encompasses the broader concept of homiletical theory. Homiletical theory is the academic examination of disciplines in the understanding of the methodological functionality of preaching. The general categories of homiletical theory include the nature and purpose of preaching, hermeneutics, the authority of scripture, and language. These categories unearth the proclaimer’s beliefs about preaching that inform each sermon. The characteristics evident in “Silent No More” include Flunder’s queer biblical hermeneutic, the authority of biblical and lived text, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, these topics correlate to Flunder’s queer theology of preaching that represents her understanding of African American preaching from the context of her early religious experiences within the Black Pentecostal tradition, religious music, and her identification as a same-gender loving Black woman.

1.The Introduction: A Contextualization of the Sermonic Text

The introductory sentence explains the milieu of the day of Pentecost with emphasis on the characterization of the disciples. Flunder describes the disciples by saying, “Imagine a group of disjointed theological subversives still suffering scratches and bruises from journeying with Jesus down the road less traveled.”²⁰ This first sentence represents a hook, a shocking sentence that grabs the audience’s attention. The descriptors “disjointed theological subversives,” “suffering scratches and bruises,” and “the road less traveled” surprise the audience’s consciousness. A hearer may not expect the disciples to be described using these signifiers.

Flunder’s use of adjectives describing the disciples sets the tone of the sermon. The phrase “a group of disjointed theological subversives” captures the confused state of mind of the disciples as well as the religious ideology of Jesus that went against the grain of other religious norms. “Still suffering scratches and bruises” references the physical injuries of the disciples, possibly from running to safety following the crucifixion of Christ. The phrase “journeying with Jesus down the road less traveled” provides insight into Flunder’s understanding of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus’s ministry was along the margins of church and society.

The last sentence of the introductory paragraph summarizes Flunder’s theological perspective of the ministry of Jesus. Flunder writes, “They had been with Jesus, and Jesus had been arrested, tried, convicted, and executed because he had spoken truth to power and spread a welcome table.”²¹ The phrase “speaking truth to power” is credited to Bayard Rustin, a leader of the Civil Rights Movement who helped organize the 1963 March on Washington.²² In the

¹⁹ Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching as Celebration: Digital Lecture Series and Workbook*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hope for Life International Books, 2018), 33.

²⁰ Ella Pearson Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis, eds. *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2008), 133.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bayard Rustin, *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin's Life in Letters*, ed. Michael Long (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2012), 160.

context of the Civil Rights Movement, speaking truth to power represents a religious leader or social activist confronting a political government of their injustices through non-violent protest politics. The religious leader or social activist demands just socio-economic policies through protests and other elements of activism. Therefore, in Flunder's use of "speak truth to power," she implies that Jesus was a non-violent, religious leader who confronted the government regarding their unjust laws and demanded socio-economic change.

The justification of Jesus's crucifixion as spreading a welcome table speaks to Flunder's understanding of the inclusive nature of the ministry of Jesus. Furthermore, Flunder delineates the welcome table by recognizing that Jesus kept the company of people from diverse religious backgrounds, different ethnic groups, various social classes, as well as Jews, Gentiles, and women.²³ The inclusivity of ministry remains a paramount theme throughout the entire sermon with Flunder articulating inclusivity as the message of Pentecost.

The metaphor of the welcome table has been rooted in the Black church tradition since slavery. Early versions of the hymn, "Oh, Den My Little Soul's Gwine to Shine," are noted to have been sung by an enslaved child who was separated from his mother.²⁴ The earliest versions symbolize the eschatological hope of the enslaved: being with Jesus Christ in heaven, sitting at Christ's welcome table as a sign of dignity, humanity, and love. Modified versions of the song were sung during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The modified hymn represents the hope of the oppressed to one day be welcomed at earthly tables that are exclusionary. The Civil Rights version titled "I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table," became an anthem for the Movement.²⁵

In the second paragraph, Flunder elaborates on the three descriptors in the hook. The first sentence of the second paragraph states, "These believers were discouraged by the recent events that had befallen their movement."²⁶ Flunder addresses the disappointment of the disciples due to the execution of their leader. Jesus's death marks the seeming failure of the religious movement, 'the Way' - the first name for the Christian community. Flunder states that "the crowds fell away because it had become politically and physically dangerous to be a member of the Way, and many chose a safer, more prescribed religious expression."²⁷ The crowds falling away indicates a level of celebrity popularity that turned into marginalized shame. The danger of being a follower of the Way explains why the road with Jesus was less traveled. Flunder's imagery sets the stage for the day of Pentecost when the disciples are bewildered, disappointed, and hiding in secrecy in the upper room, in desperate need of a sign of affirmation.

In summary, the two introductory paragraphs explain the context of the Day of Pentecost. The hearers are reminded of the grave disappointment, shame, and utter confusion of the disciples, the primary figures of the text. Flunder's use of vivid imagery is a hallmark of the African American Preaching Tradition. This imagery provides layered contextualization of her queer womanist biblical hermeneutic, which demonstrates her excellent exegesis. Flunder's queer womanist biblical hermeneutic reflects a theology of inclusivity that seeks to create a just world. Black Queer theology cares for all of those along the margins of religion and society.

²³ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, op.cit., 133.

²⁴ Thomas P. Fenner, Fredric G. Rathburn, and Bessie Cleaveland, *Cabin and Plantation Songs as Sung by the Hampton Students* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1877). Hathi Trust Digital Library. Accessed November 19, 2022, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=emu.010000709463&view=1up&seq=1>.

²⁵ American Experience, "Soundtrack for a Revolution: Lyrics of the Freedom Songs," PBS, Accessed November 19, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/soundtrack-lyrics/>.

²⁶ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, op.cit., 133.

²⁷ Ibid.

2.The Description of the Holy Spirit

One of the integral components of Flunder's homiletical theory is the power of the Holy Spirit. In this sermon, Flunder articulates the power of the Holy Spirit as filling the disciples with fearlessness and focus to share the revelation of God with diverse people.²⁸ She characterizes the endowment of the Holy Spirit experienced by the disciples in the upper room as a tarry service. Flunder describes the purpose of the tarry service as the disciples waiting for "affirmation, purpose, direction, and confidence."²⁹

Tarry services are part of Flunder's early religious childhood experiences within the Black Pentecostal COGIC. In "Silent No More," Flunder does not provide further detail with her own personal experiences in tarry services. However, in a sermon delivered at Emory University's Cannon Chapel on February 25, 2016, Flunder begins with an explanation of her religious background in the Trinitarian Pentecostal tradition.³⁰ The Trinitarian Pentecostal tradition believes in tarrying for the endowment of the Holy Spirit. In the sermon, Flunder retells her childhood personal experience of Pentecost, the day she tarried for the Lord with her "tarry coaches" and received the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues. According to Flunder, when she received the Holy Spirit, she rolled from the front of the church to the back of the church. She had dust bunnies in her hair from rolling under the pews. As she was rolling, she was speaking in tongues. She kept speaking in tongues as she got into the car and returned home. The knowledge of Flunder's childhood experiences with tarrying services provides further insight into Flunder's beliefs about the Day of Pentecost, particularly why she describes the upper room as a tarry service.

According to Flunder, the power of the Holy Spirit overwhelmed the disciples to the point that they could not keep their experience to themselves. Flunder states, "They may have felt the meaning of the words of the old spiritual: 'Said I wasn't gonna tell nobody, but I couldn't keep it to myself!'"³¹ Flunder's reference to the old spiritual provides insight into her experience as a gospel singer who calls herself a "traditionalist."³² The song, "Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody," is an old spiritual in the Black Church tradition.³³

In summary, the description of the Holy Spirit characterizes Flunder's core belief in the purpose of the Holy Spirit to empower God's people to spread the Gospel. The gift of the Holy Spirit can be experienced through speaking in tongues, as is the case on the day of Pentecost. For Flunder, the situation in the upper room represents a tarry service, which is unique to Flunder's early religious experiences in the COGIC church. And lastly, Flunder's professional experience as a gospel singer resounds in her use of lyrics from a popular gospel song from the 1960s: she just couldn't keep the Holy Spirit-inspired message to herself.

3.The Comparison of Text: Old Testament, New Testament, and Lived Text

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 134.

³⁰ Flunder, Yvette A. "2_25_16 Yvette Flunder." Cannon Chapel Sermons, February 26, 2016. Podcast, Owltail, 31:56.

³¹ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, op.cit., 134.

³² Flunder, Yvette A. "Yvette Flunder's Sermon 3_7_13." Cannon Chapel Sermons, March 7, 2013. Podcast, Owltail, 36:08.

³³ "Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody" was sung by the Abyssinian Baptist Gospel Choir on the album *Shakin' the Rafters*. The song was recorded live under the direction of Alex Bradford in April 1960. *Shakin' the Rafters* is one of the all-time greatest gospel albums.

Flunder compares the disciples' endowment of the Holy Spirit in Acts with the Israelite elders Eldad and Medad's endowment of the Spirit in Numbers 11. Flunder characterizes the text by identifying Eldad and Medad as "non-A listers" who interrupted established protocol by becoming filled with the Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit became evident through the gift of prophesy. Both Eldad and Medad prophesized publicly God's plan for Israel. Joshua rebuked the men for being out of order based upon religious protocol. Moses responded by saying, "Would that all of God's people were prophets!"

Flunder does not include several details within the Numbers scripture, specifically the delineation of the protocol that was disregarded in Eldad and Medad's actions. To set the story in its context, the explanation of the protocol is as follows: Joshua, Moses's successor, was upset that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp with the people of Israel. The protocol was for the priest to gather at the Tent of Meeting, isolated from the people. At the Tent of Meeting, the priests would receive the power of the Spirit. Then the priest would come down from the Tent of Meeting and prophesy to the Israelites at the camp. Joshua wanted to stop the elders from prophesying whereas Moses, the leader, wanted more people to prophesy.

According to Flunder, she was raised in a Joshua church whereby they were "taught to confine the Spirit blessing to those who came into the tent."³⁴ The tent represented those who were part of her denomination and church. The people in the tent must obey all the rules. When the tent folks went out into the world, they were supposed to be separate, above reproach, and pious. For Flunder, the Joshua church is not the church of Pentecost. The sentiment of Moses captures the essence of Pentecost. Moses was correct in his desire for all of God's people to prophesy.

Flunder uses the Old Testament scripture to bridge the sermon text and lived experiences. In her use of intertextuality, she compares Joshua's rebuke in Numbers 11 to the religiosity of her childhood church. This comparison leads to her greater idea of religion's attempts to confine the Holy Spirit. Both Joshua and the religious teachings of Flunder's childhood sought to confine the Holy Spirit to certain people. For Flunder, the message of Pentecost is the free movement of the Holy Spirit to any and everyone, even those least likely, based on religious protocol, cultural traditions, or societal norms.

Flunder connects the Numbers text, the sermon text, and the lived text of her experience in her childhood church with the Pentecostal message of the Holy Spirit freely moving among God's people for the purposes of God's plan. Rhetorically, Flunder drives this point home with an anaphora of "The Holy Ghost slipped... The Holy Ghost slipped out of the tabernacle... The Spirit slipped out of them from behind the veil..., slipped out of the upper room, slipped out of the Azusa Street revival,...slipped out of every desperate effort to confine the Spirit to a culture, a denomination, or a doctrine..."³⁵ Flunder continues to drive the message home with another anaphora about the unforeseen places the spirit showed up. "Some said the Spirit could not show up in Macedonia...Some say the Spirit is not supposed to show up in the hip-hop culture...Some would say the Spirit is not supposed to move among Asian folks..."³⁶

In the comparison of thematic texts, Flunder's use of the lived text, her early religious experiences in the COGIC church, is not an application model to substantiate a move. Her personal experience is not a subtext. Flunder's lived text is equally substantive as both the sermon text of Acts 2 and the intertextual scripture of Numbers 11. For womanist preachers,

³⁴ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, *op.cit.*, 134.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

the lived experiences of Black women become the lens through which one interprets scripture and the point of departure in sermon development. Similar to womanist preaching emphasizing the lives of Black women, an attribute of queer womanist preaching is the equal importance of lived experiences of queer, Black women to that of scripture. The lived experiences interpret the biblical text and vice versa.

Black queer preaching emphasizes the use of lived experiences for biblical interpretation as a means of reclaiming scripture. For centuries, the Bible has been used as a tool of oppression to demonize Black queer persons. Therefore, many queer people find ways to reclaim scripture as liberating and loving. One such way is to honor the authority of the lived text just as significantly as the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The lived text can be used to interpret or re-interpret the biblical text for queer preachers.

4.The Sermonic Close – A Celebratory Charge

In the book, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric*, Katie Geneva Cannon discusses the sermonic close in African American preaching based on the pedagogy of her preaching professor, Isaac Rufus Clark. According to Clark, the close depends upon the rhetor's sought response from the audience.³⁷ Several audience responses include repentance, edification, regeneration, spiritual curiosity, and a concrete action. In the sermon "Silent No More," Flunder wants the audience to spread the inclusive gospel of Christ, which represents a concrete action. Therefore, Flunder closes the sermon with a charge to the audience, "We cannot be silent no more!"

Additionally, based on the perspective of Henry Mitchell and Frank A. Thomas, Flunder closes with a celebration. Mitchell characterizes the celebration as the ecstatic reinforcement of the main point.³⁸ Thomas describes the celebration as the joyful, ecstatic reinforcement of the Good News already taught in the sermon.³⁹ In the sermon "Silent No More," Flunder celebrates the good news, which is the gospel's inclusivity to all through the endowment of the Holy Spirit. She reinforces the good news with the celebratory charge to the audience by telling them to go out and spread the gospel to everyone and be silent no more!

The transition to the close begins with Flunder's direct articulation of the Pentecostal message being a "come out" message.⁴⁰ According to Flunder, the message of Pentecost is to come out of the rooms, the four walls of the church and out into the streets to share the good news in creative methods using various languages. "Coming out" is one of Flunder's major preaching motifs. "Coming out" is a distinctive motif of queer womanist rhetoric.

The framing of the day of Pentecost as a "coming out" message is rooted in the boundary dissolving element of queer theology. In *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, Patrick Cheng suggests that Christian theology is a fundamentally queer enterprise because of its basis in a divine, boundary-dissolving radical love.⁴¹ Cheng defines radical love "as a love so extreme that it dissolves existing boundaries."⁴² With respect to the Trinity, the Holy Spirit reflects a boundary-dissolving radical love whereby God dissolves the boundary of divinity and

³⁷ Katie G. Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (London, England: Continuum, 2007), 163.

³⁸ Mitchell, *op.cit.*, 35.

³⁹ Frank A. Thomas, *They like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 85.

⁴⁰ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, *op.cit.*, 135.

⁴¹ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2011) x.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 44.

humanity.⁴³ Similarly, as Flunder implicitly notes, the day of Pentecost is the “coming out” story of the disciples who experienced the radical love of God through the divine revelation of the Holy Spirit endowing the disciples, then dissolving the exclusionary boundaries of humankind, i.e., language, culture, gender etc., to spread the inclusive gospel of Christ.

Flunder’s “coming out” motif is directly related to her personal experience of “coming out” as a same-gender loving woman. However, her use of the motif is deeper and more inclusive than her personal experience. In this sermon, “coming out” is representative of the model for offering the inclusive gospel message to everyone. In other sermons, Flunder uses the “coming out” motif in reference to authenticity in ministry. The “coming out” motif is layered with many meanings depending upon the context of the sermon.

Flunder’s “coming out” motif represents a component of her theology of preaching. For Flunder, preaching liberates people to live authentic lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. To be liberated is to “come out” of religious traditions and cultural norms that are oppressive and exclusionary. As a justice warrior for all people, liberation does not only include individuals. The individual must go back to the community to liberate others.⁴⁴ Justice is a theo-ethical hermeneutic in which Flunder reads scripture as exemplified in the sermon.

In the celebratory charge to the audience, Flunder mentions Peter speaking at Pentecost in Acts 2:14-16, wherein he references the prophet Joel whose prophecy is recorded in Joel 2:28-32. In Acts, Peter declares that Joel’s prophesy is being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Joel 2:28-32 reads as follows:

28 And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Flunder affirms the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel on the day of Pentecost and the continued fulfillment now through present day believers. According to Flunder, believers are purposed to conduct the Spirit rather than contain the Spirit. To conduct means to allow the Spirit to fill persons and move them toward bringing more marginalized people to the Lord. Flunder’s understanding of pneumatology is that everyone is included in this charge of inclusivity. The movement of the Holy Spirit contributes to Flunder’s homiletical theory and her theology of preaching.

The tone of the sermon shifts in the last three paragraphs of the manuscript. The shift reflects Flunder’s understanding of the urgency and gravity of this call to “come out” onto the streets and spread the inclusive gospel of Christ. The urgency is reflected in Flunder saying, “We are at a defining moment now...The time is right. The stage is set.”⁴⁵ Flunder captures the gravity in her description of being on the brink of a great reformation that “turn(s) the exclusivity

⁴³ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴ Yvette A. Flunder, Cannon Chapel Sermons, March 7, 2013. Podcast, Owltail, 36:08.

⁴⁵ Pearson Mitchell and Bridgeman Davis, op.cit., 135.

of religion to the inclusivity of the extravagant grace of God.”⁴⁶ She further describes the gravity as a “Pentecostal evolution revolution.”⁴⁷ The Pentecostal evolution revolution may reflect Flunder’s desired change in the Pentecostal experience of her childhood, whereby those with the Holy Spirit will become inclusive and justice-minded.⁴⁸

In the celebratory charge, Flunder quotes another scripture: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31) The implication is that God is for the inclusivity of religion evident by the movement of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Finally, Flunder reiterates the title of the sermon, “We cannot be silent anymore!” to close the sermon.

Conclusion – Queer Rhetoric and Black Queer Preaching

This essay attempts to answer two relevant questions regarding Black queer preaching: What is queer rhetoric in Black preaching? And how might queer Black preaching differ from Black preaching? Through the rhetorical analysis of Yvette A. Flunder’s sermon, “Silent No More,” I characterize “coming out” as queer womanist rhetoric in Black preaching. Flunder explains that “coming out” has both religious and communal implications, not just personal ramifications for queer individuals. The characterization of queer womanist rhetoric pushes the conversation toward the margins.

As queer womanist rhetoric, “coming out” represents all four tenets of womanism; radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. Additionally, the rhetoric in “Silent No More” reflects the womanist rhetoric of critical engagement which “seek(s) to culturally critique society’s oppressive forces by challenging the ways in which we view people’s problems and by forcing us to confront our own internal system of beliefs, so that we can collectively combat external systems of belief.”⁴⁹ “Silent No More” challenges the exclusivity of the gospel by identifying the day of Pentecost as a “coming out” experience that transforms the gospel to a message for any- and everyone.

The rhetorical analysis of “Silent No More” uncovers the similarities of Black queer preaching and Black preaching. The preaching of Bishop Yvette Flunder is deeply wedded to the Black church preaching tradition due to her early religious experiences in the Black Pentecostal COGIC. As evident in “Silent No More,” characteristics unique to both the Black preaching tradition and Flunder are the authority of biblical and lived text, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the celebratory close. The authority of lived realities reflects a womanist way of preaching as well.

Flunder models Henry Mitchell’s tenants of African American preaching as discussed in *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. For the congregation to have an experiential encounter of the word, the preacher must understand how hearing and other senses relate to belief. According to Mitchell, the hearing experience should include the following: vivid details and images; familiarity, identification, and vicarious experience; and homiletic moves in consciousness.⁵⁰ Flunder’s use of vivid imagery sets the tone for the day of Pentecost as she describes the disciples. Then Flunder assists with the audience’s identification with the disciples as she describes her church experiences as similar experiences to those of the sermon’s biblical text. From the introduction to the close, Flunder structures this sermon with moves that transition

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁸ Yvette A. Flunder, Cannon Chapel Sermons, February 26, 2016. Podcast, Owltail, 31:56.

⁴⁹ Johnson, op.cit, 79.

⁵⁰ Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and experience in preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 20.

the audience to another layer of the contextualization of the day of Pentecost. Lastly, Flunder uses the rhetorical tools of imagery, multiple scriptures, personal testimony, and metaphor in the sermon. These rhetorical tools are evident in both African American preaching and womanist preaching.

Ultimately, Black queer preaching is Black preaching. The identification of the preacher as queer may alter some of the rhetoric, such as the use of the “coming out” motif. However, as revealed through the lens of Yvette A. Flunder in “Silent No More,” Black queer preaching is preaching that engages a gospel message of inclusivity for all. There remains much to learn about queer preaching in the context of the African American church.

Alive to the Other: Using Distance to Help Listeners Overcome Self-deception

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Abstract: *Although homileticians have offered various accounts on what leads people to change, this paper argues that helping listeners overcome self-deception is central to human transformation. In so doing, it is not suggested that the listener needs to come to some particular abstract truth, but rather they need help in opening themselves up to the truth of the humanity of the other. Relying on the account of self-deception posited by C. Terry Warner, this paper offers an indirect model that can help listeners make meaningful changes by overcoming the obstacle of self-deception. This preaching model draws on the author's previous qualitative research in the field of instructional design and builds on homiletic principles discussed in Fred Craddock's Overhearing the Gospel.*

Introduction

It is not a secret that we live in an uniquely polarized time. In light of this divisive environment, many homileticians have offered counsel on how one might still preach effectively.¹ What makes the homiletician's task particularly challenging is that a preacher's role is not simply to give "interesting takes" or offer insightful commentary; rather, preachers are supposed to help change lives.² Considering our contentious North American society, how can we preach so that people are actually open to making changes in their worldview and way of life?

In this article I will offer an indirect model that can help listeners make meaningful changes by overcoming the obstacle of self-deception. Although homileticians have offered many accounts of what leads people to change, I will argue that helping listeners overcome self-deception is central to human transformation. In so doing, it is not suggested that the listener needs to come to some particular abstract truth, but rather that they need help in opening themselves up to the truth of the humanity of the other. The account of self-deception I will draw upon originates from the philosopher C. Terry Warner who has argued that self-deception is not a small part of psychological experience but is a central aspect of everyday life. Because self-deception is defensive by nature, it is challenging to help listeners overcome this problem directly. Therefore, I will offer an indirect preaching model that draws upon my previous qualitative research in the field of instructional design and builds upon the homiletic principles discussed in Fred Craddock's *Overhearing the Gospel*.

Homiletic Conceptions of Change

In order to see how an understanding of self-deception might inform a homiletic model, I will briefly highlight some of the more common assumptions regarding human change discussed in homiletic literature. Although preaching models are often given the most attention, they

¹ Lead D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019); O. Wesley Allen, *Preaching in the Era of Trump* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2017).

² Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*; 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 142; Henk Stoorvogel, Mark van Vuuren, and Menno de Jong, "Sermons That Have Changed My Life: A Qualitative Study of the Factors in Sermons that Elicit Change," *Homiletic* 44, no. 1 (June 2019), <https://doi.org/10.15695/hmltc.v44i1.4731>.

presuppose philosophical and theological conceptions of human transformation. These conceptions inform the principles and practices that homileticians suggest will lead to human change. I highlight a few of the more common assumptions to show how self-deception might add to the homiletic discussion surrounding human transformation.

Many homileticians (especially those associated with the New Homiletic) have argued that the listener will change through a shift in their imagination. Fred Craddock noted how a listener may agree rationally with an argument but will not manifest any actual change in their behavior because “the consciousness in its imaginative depths is unaltered.”³ For Craddock, people need “new images [to] move against the old and shake them into discomfort.”⁴ In like manner, Barbara Brown Taylor argued “the human imagination turns out to be the place where vision is formed and reformed, where human beings encounter an inner reality with power to transform the other realities of their lives.”⁵ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, drawing on the work of theologian Garret Green, asserts, “Preaching as local theology has as a goal the transformation of the imaginations of the hearers in accordance with the message of the gospel.”⁶ More recently, Frank A. Thomas summed up this view succinctly. Relying on the work of Russell Kirk, Thomas argues, “While it is often assumed that human beings understand the world through calculations, formulas, and logical syllogisms, the reality is that we understand the world through images, myths, and stories, and thereby, comprehend our relationship to God, nature, others, and the self.”⁷

Related to imagination, Alyce McKenzie has argued that “scenes in sermons can function, as they often do in literature and film, as ethical simulation chambers for dealing with real-life challenges, drawing us in to identify with characters, undergo changes with them, and take that changed perspective back into our world.”⁸ Here, the sermon provides an opportunity for the hearer to vicariously change alongside characters in our sermon stories. For McKenzie, identification with characters in stories is a primary impetus for listener change. Obviously, there is a long precedence for this in homiletics, especially with those associated with the New Homiletic.⁹ In like manner, one finds arguments suggesting that humans change vicariously through story in other fields including instructional design¹⁰ and the social sciences.¹¹

Besides seeking to influence listeners’ imagination, other homileticians have emphasized how the gospel can fill an “inner neediness” that frees the listener to change behaviorally.¹² In this line of arguing, if the listener understands and experiences the love of Christ, they no longer

³ Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 114.

⁴ Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 114-115.

⁵ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 574, Kindle.

⁶ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 642, Kindle.

⁷ Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), Introduction. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸ Alyce M. McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 96, Kindle.

⁹ Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 95; Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 40.

¹⁰ Patrick Parrish, “Aesthetic Principles for Design,” *Education Technology Research and Development* 57, no. 4 (2009): 515.

¹¹ Geoff F. Kaufmann and Lisa K. Libby, “Changing Beliefs and Behavior through Experience-Taking,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103, no. 1 (2012): 1.

¹² Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 130.

have a need or motivation to sin. For example, when speaking of an “oppressive personality,”¹³ Eugene Lowry said, “The redeeming focus for change is to remove the necessity so that they no longer need to look down upon others.”¹⁴ For these homileticians, the central issue of sin is not necessarily imagination but motivation. According to Bryan Chapell, “In Christ-centered preaching, the rules of Christian obedience do not change; the reasons do.”¹⁵ These homileticians insist that sermons should focus less on behavioral exhortations in helping the listener change and instead teach the work of Christ. Paul Scott Wilson (who advocates a similar approach) has bemoaned how often his students’ sermons “were mostly about human failures and weaknesses in the past, and duties and obligations in the present and future. The burden fell on humans to do everything that was needed.”¹⁶ Instead, Wilson asserts, “Excellence can be measured best by the effectiveness of sermons in ministering the gospel to the people.”¹⁷

Through their “conversational” approach to the sermon, O. Wesley Allen and Ron Allen argue that the listener is invited to grow, “better able to say yes,” and “can be vulnerable” through “authentic conversation.”¹⁸ For them, the openness of conversation invites the listener to the possibility of change. As the preacher becomes more vulnerable in their viewpoints and conversation, so does the listener. Similarly, Mason Lee has recently argued, “The moral power of the gospel arises from the reality that one does not have to believe. . . . The message-bearer’s rejection of coercive strategies in their announcement and speech is precisely that which allows the persuasive power of the gospel to shine through.”¹⁹

Obviously, the assumptions behind listener change are nuanced and varied. The examples above are meant to suggest some of the more common views on how sermons can invite transformation. In homiletic literature, however, little emphasis is given to the role that self-deception may play in human nature and formation. As will be explained further below, one who is self-deceived is actively, though unintentionally, resisting the message of a sermon. In order to see how this is possible, it is important to remember that listeners are always already interpreting the material they hear.²⁰ In other words, they do not listen to a message and then interpret it. Rather, the listener comes with interpretations about the world before they ever hear a sermon. As James K. A. Smith has argued, “perception and evaluation are inextricably intertwined: as soon as I take in a scene, before I ‘think’ about it, I’ve already evaluated it on the basis of predispositions I bring to the situation.”²¹ If the listener is self-deceived in a way related to the sermon message, they will interpret the material in light of their self-deception. The listener may hear profound imagery, identify with sermon stories, feel their needs met through the love of

¹³ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 86.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 312.

¹⁶ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 20, Kindle.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹⁸ Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 94.

¹⁹ Mason Lee, “Vulnerable Good News: Distance & Patience in Gospel Performance,” *Homiletic* 47, no.1 (2022):16. <https://www.homiletic.net/index.php/homiletic/article/view/5323>.

²⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 34, Kindle.

²¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): How Worship Works*, 34, Kindle.

Christ, or hear their own voice in the homiletic conversation, but they make sense of this information in light of their current self-deceived way of being.

Self-Deception

According to the philosopher C. Terry Warner, self-deception occurs when someone ignores their sense to revere the humanity and vulnerability of the other.²² Often calling this process self-betrayal, Warner describes this phenomenon as “a sort of moral self-compromise, a violation of our own personal sense of how we ought to be and what we ought to do.”²³ For example, someone feels they should say hello to someone walking by, offer extra help to a struggling student, or spend time with their child. For Warner, this sense to treat others with respect and kindness is not the result of an unhealthy perfectionism²⁴ or based on a list of ethical or religious rules,²⁵ but rather from simply seeing the humanity of the other. Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, John McClure writes, “the face of the other introduces a profound obligation into my experience. This obligation persists as an infinite responsibility to and for the other, discovered in what Levinas calls ‘proximity’ or ‘the-one-for-the-other.’”²⁶ Simon Critchley further explains:

Levinas's point is that unless our social interactions are underpinned by ethical relations to other persons, then the worst might happen, that is, the failure to acknowledge the humanity of the other. Such, for Levinas, is what took place in the *Shoah* and in the countless other disasters of [the last] century, where the other person becomes a faceless face in the crowd, someone whom the passer-by simply passes by, someone whose life or death is for me a matter of indifference.²⁷

According to Warner, the way that one betrays their sense to see and respect others is through justification. “Self-betrayal is a unified act of self-justifying self-display. It displays itself to be a justified or excused self-protective and perhaps admirable response.”²⁸ For instance, a woman walks to her mailbox after arriving home from work one night. She notices her neighbor across the street, but the woman ignores her sense to spend a few minutes visiting with her neighbor *by* displaying a subtle air of being tired and stressed. She quickly offers her neighbor a forced smile while looking through the mail and then walks into her house. Before entering the door, she conveniently remembers how her neighbor has a tendency to talk for a long time.

²² Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain Pub., 2001), 19-20. I am using the term “the other” to primarily refer to other human persons.

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Ibid., 116.

²⁵ C. Terry Warner, “What We Are,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1986): 39.

²⁶ <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2428&context=byusq>.

²⁷ John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 8, Kindle.

²⁸ Simon Critchley, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

²⁹ C. Terry Warner, *Self-Betrayal and the Crisis of Self-Misunderstanding*, (N.p. Linacre Prince Publishers, 2019), 141.

Through her self-betrayal, the woman convinced herself that she was justified in not visiting with her neighbor. She was also slightly accusatory (and therefore victimizing²⁹) of her neighbor by remembering her neighbor's tendency to visit for a long time. However, if the woman had simply and straightforwardly talked with her neighbor there would have been no need to emphasize her neighbor's faults for the purposes of justification. Although this is a small example of self-betrayal, others picking up Warner's work have argued that denying the humanity of others and thus creating a need for justification (which leads one to see others as less than human) is at the heart of all war, racism, and any other large scale human conflict.³⁰ Indeed, entire peoples and societies have felt justified in their racism, violence, or dismissiveness to the other. If a society or culture wants to overcome its divisiveness, it must end its self-deception.

Warner is quick to point out that one does not betray their sense to do what is right and then come up with an excuse for why they could not do their best in a given situation. Rather, "blaming others and making it seem that we're doing our best in spite of them is *the way* we betray ourselves."³¹ It is also significant to note, that this process is not exclusively a cognitive one; self-deception occurs at the level of being. Warner argues, "When we betray ourselves, we undergo a transformation. By seeing others suspiciously, accusingly, or fearfully, we become suspicious, accusing, or fearful ourselves."³² If this is true, rational argument, statistics, and even powerful stories and imagery will only have a limited effect on the listener. Hearers do not just bring their cognition and emotions to a sermon; they bring their way of being. As Warner observed: "Philosophers and psychologists may have shown adverbs too little respect... Instead of speaking simplistically of whatever is done, it behooves us to attend to the manner or way in which it is done."³³

Interestingly, people can develop styles of self-betrayal. Whether it's self-righteousness, an over-the-top self-assertiveness, childishness, perfectionism, or self-disparagement, people learn patterns that reflect different forms of accusing others and excusing themselves.³⁴ If a man ignores his sense to financially help a struggling friend, he can do it by either asserting his own right to his property or he can self-disparagingly think, "I never have been good at helping other people." In the end, these are just varieties of not yielding to the vulnerability of his friend.

Collusion

Self-betrayal in oneself invites it in others. If a high school teacher maintains a defensive disposition toward their students and establishes rigid classroom rules, then students will feel justified in their own defensiveness. The teacher's dismissive and strict way of being invites the students to rebel. "The more others engage in the accusing behavior we are provoking by our attitude toward them, the more they give us the excuse we need for having that attitude. Both our suffering and their wrongdoing give us proof that they are wrong and we are right."³⁵ In this sense, people do not respond only to our behavior, but our way of being toward them. We may smile, speak politely, and even perform acts of kindness, but others will always notice small

²⁹ Ibid., 60.

³⁰ The Arbinger Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 52-55.

³¹ Warner, *What We Are*, 41.

³² Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 41.

³³ Warner, *Self-Betrayal and the Crisis of Self-Misunderstanding*, 53.

³⁴ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 111-123.

³⁵ Warner, *What We Are*, 43.

hints that our heart is accusatory and self-justifying.³⁶ They, in turn, will seek to justify themselves against our accusations. Warner calls this collusion because it is as if (although not literally) the parties involved are working together to excuse themselves.

The implications of this aspect of Warner's thought for homiletics are profound. To the degree that a preacher has a self-deceived way of being she invites the listener to respond defensively or take up her own justifications. If the preacher speaks condescendingly, self-righteously, or even self-despairingly, the congregation will feel justified in their own self-betrayal toward the preacher. The congregation may agree with the content of the sermon but will find themselves put off by the preacher's manner. For instance, if a preacher ignores their sense to respect the listener's agency and bears down too hard in manner and message then the audience will naturally react defensively. In response, the preacher may think they should try harder to get the congregation to listen by increasing intensity or volume, which will simply invite more resistance from the listeners.

On the other hand, the audience can also collude with the preacher by joining in with the preacher's subtle accusations toward the other. For example, if a preacher communicates that she is slightly superior to others because she has a charitable heart (which acts as her excuse to be dismissive to the uncharitable), those in the congregation who suffer from a similar self-righteousness will feel justified.

Ultimately, even if the listener does not find significant justification in the preacher's self-deception, they may still have an ongoing self-deceived way of being that is leading them to be dismissive of the humanity of family members, co-workers, racial groups, social-economic groups, or other people. This, of course, leads to much social divisiveness. Suppose someone has consistently ignored their sense to see immigrants as fully human by believing that they do not deserve "American jobs." If a sermon focuses on the phrase "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" from Matthew 25:35, the listener is thinking of rationalizations that act as an excuse not to embrace the humanity of immigrants (regardless of one's political persuasion). Even if the preacher offers a heart-wrenching story about an immigrant family moving to the United States, without using methods that help others work through self-deception, the story will probably be interpreted by the listener as manipulative.

When a person is mired in self-deception they feel as if their moral options are limited. As Warner pointed out, the "world we experience as self-betrayers offers us opportunities to submit in humiliation or to stick up for ourselves defiantly, which are both self-absorbed actions, but it offers us no chance of simply doing the right thing without concern for ourselves."³⁷ In other words, when we are accusatory toward others and see ourselves as victims of them, we can find no way to simply love or respect them straightforwardly. We are stuck in our self-absorption.

Becoming Alive to the Other

We are freed from self-deception "when someone we have been blaming becomes real to us..."³⁸ As a result, "We become a person who sees another person as real. We change from being accusing, guarded, and self-absorbed to being open, self-forgetful, and welcoming."³⁹ According to Warner, this cannot happen simply by taking thought to see people differently or as

³⁶ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 36-37, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

an act of willpower.⁴⁰ Rather, one must yield to the truth about another's inner life in a way that allows us to see their humanity.⁴¹ We begin to see people as having thoughts, desires, emotions, and intentions that matter just as much as our own.⁴²

In both academic and non-specialist writings, Warner has identified multiple avenues where this change can take place. For example, someone we have been accusing is compassionate to us and therefore our coldness toward them melts.⁴³ Another way that often invites us to see the humanity of another is when we witness them go through adversity. Seeing them struggle opens us up to their vulnerability.⁴⁴ Also, asking ourselves if we might "be in the wrong" toward someone can soften our disposition.⁴⁵ Of course, this is not necessarily wrong in some abstract propositional way, but in our way of being toward others. In addition, simply asking ourselves what is the simple, straightforward, and respectful way to treat a person we've been struggling with can also help others become real to us.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a sense of how we should be toward others can "take hold of us because it is rooted in truthful, living relationships with others."⁴⁷ In other words, loving and considerate relationships can help us see how we should be toward others. Interestingly, Warner suggests that these relationships can exist with "beings seen or unseen, factual or fictional, living or dead."⁴⁸

Although Warner identifies these and other ways that people can become real to us, there is one catalyst for overcoming self-deception that Warner discusses that is particularly relevant for homileticians. When Warner's ideas are taught in public seminars, teachers and participants share "true stories of self-betrayal, collusion, and the like."⁴⁹ Warner has noticed that "for the large majority of people, hearing others' stories enables them to see their own experiences in a new, truthful light. They realize—usually instantaneously—that a story another has told is their own story, only with different details. This realization seems to sneak past their defenses."⁵⁰

Homileticians will quickly notice this phenomenon as the principle of "overhearing" explained by Fred Craddock in his preaching classic *Overhearing the Gospel*. Obviously, if self-deception plays a central role in preventing people from hearing the message of a sermon, one can see why an indirect approach would be necessary. As we have already seen, the way that people excuse themselves from doing what they sense is right is through justification. When a self-deceived person is directly challenged, they will have ready-made excuses to prevent themselves from internalizing the message of a sermon. In fact, they might verbally or intellectually agree with a preacher, but will still maintain emotional defensiveness.⁵¹ Therefore, an indirect approach is one of the best avenues to cut through self-deception.

In the next section, I will suggest preaching principles that indirectly help listeners overcome self-deception. In doing so, I will draw upon a teaching model that I offered in some of my previous research in the field of instructional design. However, I will also add another

⁴⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁴¹ Warner, 21, 226.

⁴² The Arbing Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, 30.

⁴³ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 151.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁵¹ C. Terry Warner, *What We Are*, 41; Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 114-115.

element to this model that helps listeners give up their self-betrayal so that they can better see and reverse the other.

An Indirect Model that Helps Listeners See the Other

In a previous qualitative research study, I interviewed experts in different fields of storytelling (i.e., film, theatre, painting, narrative preaching, and writing) to learn principles and practices of crafting transformative indirect communication.⁵² The purpose of gathering their ideas was ultimately to create an indirect teaching model that invites transformative learning experiences. This model, which was influenced by Fred Craddock's overhearing homiletic, consisted of four combined elements: 1) cognitive space 2) emotional space 3) inviting change and 4) meaningfulness. For the purposes of this paper, I will add a fifth element: 5) seeing the other. In the following sections, I will explain and apply each of these elements to the field of homiletics to help listeners overcome self-deception. I will also provide an illustration of the first four elements from different sermons and the last element (seeing the other) from a story collected by C. Terry Warner. Each illustration not only contains examples of transformative indirect teaching, but also offers ways for listeners to break out of self-deception.

Cognitive Space

A listener is granted cognitive space when they have room to interpret the content of the sermon for themselves.⁵³ Thomas Long described a similar phenomenon when he argued that effective stories have "enough ambiguity built into them to force the hearer to make a decision about the story's meaning and application... The listeners have to roll up their sleeves and get involved in the project of making meaning in the sermon."⁵⁴ Cognitive space is not only afforded through stories. Material that emphasizes concrete details as opposed to abstract principles also gives the listener room for interpretation.⁵⁵ Furthermore, using illustrations, stories, characters, and images that contain some sort of moral ambiguity can also create cognitive space.⁵⁶ When characters contain both positive and negative traits or when the listener has to make sense of difficult moral issues without the communicator explaining everything, then the hearer has the cognitive space to interpret the sermon for themselves. Another way to offer cognitive space to the listener is to communicate ideas by emphasizing the *behavior* of characters in stories.⁵⁷ As a filmmaker suggested: "typically what you're doing in a given scene is you're setting the interaction of the characters up in such a way that their behavior communicates that meaning."⁵⁸

Alyse McKenzie illustrates cognitive space in a story included in her sermon entitled *Peel Off the Plastic*:

Some years ago, a student told me a story about a seven-year-old boy in her church named Brandon. He had an inoperable tumor and limited time to live. His

⁵² When referring to the storytelling experts from my previous instructional design study, I will simply refer to their respective titles: filmmaker, preacher, playwright, author, or painter.

⁵³ Stephan D. Taeger and Stephen C. Yanchar, "Principles and Practices of Designing Narrative Distance for Transformative Learning Experiences," *Educational Media International*, 56, no. 2 (2019): 170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2019.1614322>

⁵⁴ Long, 40-41.

⁵⁵ Taeger and Yanchar, 170.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

parents began bringing him to church. He requested baptism. Normally, a child of his age would be asked to attend several classes during the Sunday school hour to learn about the Bible, worship, and baptism. My student told his parents she would waive that requirement in his case. “No,” Brandon told them. “I want to come to the classes.” So there he sat in his chair in the circle. One Sunday, my student was using a flannel board to teach the parable of the lost sheep. She was employing the “I wonder” format, in which you tell a Bible story and then have the children ask “I wonder” questions. After she finished telling the story, one boy put his hand up, “I wonder if any of the sheep got eaten while the shepherd was gone.” Another said, “I wonder if the shepherd got in trouble for leaving the sheep.” Then Brandon put his hand up, “I wonder . . . if the sheep is stuck way down in the hole and is so tired and so weak that it can’t move, will the shepherd come all the way down to get it?” Her answer? “Absolutely, Brandon, absolutely.”⁵⁹

Instead of explaining the story in propositional terms, McKenzie simply describes the event and lets us discover the meaning. In the context of the sermon as a whole, McKenzie doesn’t draw any tired “lessons” from the story, but rather lets us interpret how the story fits into the larger experience of her sermon. The story also contains some ambiguity in the reply of the teacher. One might ask, “should the teacher really promise Brandon that he is going to be rescued? In what sense will he be rescued?” Therefore, the listener has the cognitive space to draw their own conclusions.

Although these methods were often championed by the New Homiletic, they also play an essential role in helping people overcome self-deception. Not providing cognitive space can serve to entrench the listener in self-deception in at least two ways. First, self-deceived listeners are on alert for direct messages that provide justification for not embracing the message of a sermon. For example, suppose a listener’s way of being toward those in struggling socioeconomic communities is one of dismissiveness. If that listener hears a repeated theme (and even cleverly crafted statements) about “helping the poor,” these will be used as flags by the listener to not take the message seriously. As shown by Warner’s work, those caught in self-deception are actively, though unintentionally, looking for reasons to justify their own belittling of the needs and inner life of the other. Secondly, and somewhat surprisingly, a lack of cognitive space also serves to justify the listener in mindlessly *agreeing* with authority figures or world views.⁶⁰ In this case, direct messages that lack meaningful opportunities for interpretation can serve as ways to *show* that one agrees with a message or broader worldview without having to open oneself up to the other. Using the example above, a listener can self-deceptively agree that helping those in lower socioeconomic communities is what one is expected to do without letting their own being be influenced by the needs of others. In this case, this mental assent may serve as a way to self-righteously prove to themselves or others that they are charitable. However, if the listener is granted cognitive space, they are more likely to have to make their own decisions about helping others without finding signals that they are part of some “in group,” regardless of how noble that group claims to be.

As with all of the examples I will use, this story not only illustrates an indirect method, but also it invites us to see the humanity of the other. Rather than saying something like, “God

⁵⁹ McKenzie, 145, Kindle.

⁶⁰ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 214.

helps those in dire need,” McKenzie allows us to experience the simple vulnerability of a hopeful boy. This is the kind of story that some preachers may be tempted to use manipulatively, but McKenzie employs the story in a way that invites the reader to acutely see the other. Ideally, these types of stories will open self-deceived hearts to the humanity of others.

Emotional Space

Emotional space gives the listener room to experience the sermon in the way they choose. “In other words, the content presented does not seek to manipulate or force the listener to feel something. Instead, when emotional space is present, the listener feels respected, valued, safe, and understood.”⁶¹ As Craddock argued in *Overhearing the Gospel*, “No matter how much a speaker pledges sincerity, shows feeling, and swears to genuine concern, a direct disgorging of emotion does not reproduce that same experience in me.”⁶²

Homileticians have long been concerned with concepts associated with emotional space. Michael Brothers, drawing on Craddock, explained that the purpose of distance in a sermon is to give the listener “room, or space, to consider a message without being lured, pressured, manipulated, or coerced by means of direct confrontation.”⁶³ Paul Scott Wilson suggested that one should “evaluate the emotional and spiritual impact of stories” in a sermon.⁶⁴ One reason to maintain emotional space is that overbearing emotion or a contentious disposition can lead to defensiveness. When explaining their conversational homiletic, Wesley Allen and Ron Allen advised that one must be careful to not allow “conversation to devolve into argument”⁶⁵ warning that this can lead one to “valuing their own position more than respect for others.”⁶⁶

The storytelling experts in my previous qualitative study said that emotional space is maintained during communication in several ways. In some form or another, a few of the participants spoke of avoiding “unearned emotion.”⁶⁷ In other words, one should not try to create an emotional experience without doing the necessary work that would naturally lead to such an experience. This may happen, according to one participant, by “simplifying human conflict.”⁶⁸ In the realm of preaching, the listener will probably feel manipulated if the preacher is trying to create a powerful emotional experience without first appropriately probing the complexity of an issue. Another way that one can avoid emotion which is “unearned” is using “denotative words as opposed to connotative.”⁶⁹ In like manner, homiletician William Brosend argued, “One of the simplest ways to add interest to our sermons is to pay more attention to how we describe and phrase things. Sharp, vivid, active words and phrasing beat tortured, adjective-laden, convoluted ones every time.”⁷⁰ In addition, one of the participants in my study mentioned the importance of avoiding “expressing emotion through dialogue.”⁷¹ In the context of the sermon, this principle applies to preachers who tell stories, create parables, or use imagery that maintain emotional

⁶¹ Taeger and Yanchar, 172.

⁶² Fred B. Craddock, 106-107.

⁶³ Michael Brothers, *Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 74.

⁶⁴ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 126, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Allen and Allen, 97.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Taeger and Yanchar, 173.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁰ William Brosend, *The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 152.

⁷¹ Taeger and Yanchar, 178.

space. Finally, providing authentic descriptions of life and everyday experience also creates emotional space. As one playwright (with the pseudonym Michael) explained:

Interviewer: What happens for the listener when something appears to be inauthentic? When they're watching a show and they go, "oh, that didn't seem real."

Michael: Well the word that most people use is "manipulative." You're just trying to manipulate me... if we try to take shortcuts... then it's the same thing as just using a lot of violins in a musical soundtrack. Sweeping violins to create an emotion that's not really being represented."⁷²

In a sermon on Romans 16, Fred Craddock offers a poignant example of offering listeners emotional space while still inviting them to see the other. After indirectly establishing that lists of names (including the list of names in Romans 16) are meaningful because they represent people with histories, relationships, etc., Craddock begins to describe an experience he had in Atlanta with a well-known list:

"I remember when they brought the famous list to Atlanta. The workers set it up in the public place, block after block to form a long wall of names. Vietnam names. Some of us looked at it as if it were a list of names. Others went over closer. Some walked slowly down the column. There was a woman who went up and put her finger on a name, and she held a child up and put the child's hand on a name. There was a woman there who kissed the wall at a name. There were flowers lying beneath the wall. Don't call it a list. It's not a list."⁷³

Craddock masterfully maintained emotional space in a variety of ways. First, the emotional impact of this moment had been earned through the context he had already established in the sermon. In other words, he didn't try to "cash in" on this moment without first analyzing the complexity of the issue, providing context to the idea, and even giving us emotional breaks through humor. In addition, his illustration contained no emotion expressed through dialogue—only descriptions of behavior. Craddock's image is not bathed in connotative words that would try to force us to feel something. And ultimately, the illustration seems authentic; humans act like real humans.

Maintaining emotional space is essential for helping the listener work through self-deception. If listeners feel that the preacher is violating their emotional space, they will feel as if the preacher is manipulative. Warner suggests that when we manipulate, "...we aren't primarily responding to the need of another but are pursuing the goal of getting them to change. There's an accusation embedded in this effort; the message is, 'You're inadequate; you need to shape up.'"⁷⁴ As argued above, another's accusation toward us is often the very thing we use to justify our own self-betrayal. Suppose a preacher is speaking on how the effects of hurting the environment are mostly felt by those in marginalized communities. If the preacher addresses this topic in a way that violates emotional space, the listener will experience subtle messages that communicate

⁷² Taeger and Yanchar, 173.

⁷³ Fred Craddock, "When the Roll is Called Down Here," in *Creative Styles of Preaching*, ed. Mark Barger Elliot, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 16.

⁷⁴ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 118.

beyond the content of the sermon. These accusations will communicate that the preacher doesn't think the listener is "good enough" or that they are "evil" and therefore "broken" in some way. This, of course, will invite defensiveness from the listener and provide justification for not caring about the environment or those most likely to be affected by its mistreatment. What makes these kinds of accusations particularly dangerous is that they happen at the level of being, not necessarily through the propositional content of the sermon. In other words, the preacher communicates their subtle disdain for the listeners through body language, tone of voice, or word choice. In response, listeners might say something like, "I'm not sure why, but that preacher is annoying to me." On the other hand, if listeners experience the respect that comes from granting someone emotional space, they are less likely to be defensive.

Another way a preacher might violate emotional space is to draw exclusively from narratives, illustrations, or words, from certain cultures, socioeconomic classes, or worldviews. Speaking of the New Homiletic's emphasis on representing the listener's experience, John McClure explained, "the problem lay in the largely inadequate, uncritically examined quality of the experience to which these homileticians ultimately appealed. In short, appeals to common human experience ... fail to pay true attention to the real experiences of the many people, with their own partial and contradictory stories/lives."⁷⁵ Listeners might feel manipulated, disrespected, or unseen if the preacher uses sermon stories or images that represent limited societal, racial, or cultural groups. Central to giving people emotional space is to realize that aspects of one's experience might be dramatically different than those of the listeners. Otherwise, the communicator might unintentionally suggest that the listener's experience or story is somehow less valuable or insignificant. In this case, our own self-deception (as manifested by not seeing the specificity of ourselves and individual others) will work to invite defensiveness and self-deception in the listener.

Like the previous examples, Craddock's illustration described above also invites us to come alive to the other. Through subtle descriptive language, we see the inner life of those remembering loved ones at a Vietnam memorial wall. While granting emotional space, Craddock paints a powerful scene that allows us to see the care, vulnerability, and love of others for others. These are the kinds of illustrations that are most likely to break through our self-deceptions and help soften our way of being.

Inviting Change

Granting the listener cognitive and emotional space is not enough to assist the listener in ending self-deception. The preacher needs to invite the listener to change. I have been arguing that an indirect method is the most effective way to do this when dealing with self-deception. In the following example, notice how John McClure (in a sermon called *Speak the Truth*) invites us to change while still maintaining cognitive and emotional space:

"Sometimes it takes a serious wake up call. That's what happened to me. And it woke me up from a lot of things. Started me rethinking a lot of things that I took for granted. It was 1994. And I was visiting my family for Christmas in the countryside near Springville, Alabama. My wife and I were driving through the pine trees and barren oak trees with one of our best friends in the back seat. And out of the blue, she said just enough to indicate that something was going on at home that was not good. I mean really not good. And in that moment, everything changed. Everything. Her trauma awakened me to the

⁷⁵ John S. McClure, op.cit., 49, Kindle.

reality of the trauma of hundreds and thousands of frightened and abused women and children. My worldview changed on a dime. And then my comfortable theology had to change. Everything changed. I was no longer a bystander about that one injustice. It just wasn't possible. And that began to snowball into waking up about a lot of other injustices all around me."⁷⁶

McClure maintains cognitive space by giving us room to interpret his story. He also does not come across overbearing or manipulative, thus maintaining emotional space. Obviously, just granting the listener space would not be enough to help them overcome self-deception. McClure instead invites us to be different in at least three ways. First, he creates an emotional experience without violating our emotional space. Both playwrights I interviewed for my previous instructional design study mentioned that people are ultimately changed through emotional experience and not information.⁷⁷ The illustration of McClure's friend who hints that her situation at home was "not good" is poignant and impactful. The second way McClure invites a shift in the listener is by offering us a vicarious opportunity to change alongside himself. In other words, as he shifted into a new person, we are given an opportunity to do so ourselves. As an author said: "in a novel, the character is the one who changes and the reader changes vicariously with that character."⁷⁸ When a preacher offers an illustration with characters who change, we are giving the listener a small chance to do the same. Finally, McClure subtly "provoke[s] people in a way that invites them to think or see things differently."⁷⁹ As he discussed his own change of heart, McClure said, "then my comfortable theology had to change." As a listener we can't help but ask ourselves, "Does my comfortable theology have to change, too?" McClure effectively maintains cognitive and emotional space by not directly and overbearingly asking us to reconsider our "comfortable theology." Instead, by focusing on himself, we are indirectly invited to reexamine ourselves.

Granting cognitive and emotional space by themselves would probably not lead to someone overcoming self-deception. At some point, listeners need a chance to come to the truth about the other's inner needs, feelings, and humanity. McClure's story does this effectively through the methods mentioned above, but also by including a story where he "awakens" to the suffering of others. As mentioned above, Warner described one exit from self-deception as when "the person blamed suffers some stern adversity or tragedy that renders him or her helpless and thereby makes our various petty, self-absorbed concerns minuscule and shameful by comparison. The vulnerability of that person, struggling with his or her difficulties, melts our hearts."⁸⁰ A self-deceived person may not realize their dismissiveness or apathy toward the suffering of others. A story like McClure's may begin to end the self-betrayal of the listener so they begin to think that other's suffering matters just as much as their own.

Meaningfulness

In order for stories to have a potentially transformative effect they must be meaningful to the listener. Obviously, if a listener doesn't perceive sermon material as mattering then they are

⁷⁶ John S. McClure, "Speak the Truth," YouTube, November 18, 2020, video, 6:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UHgVi86S7c>

⁷⁷ Taeger and Yanchar, op.cit., 175.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 152.

not likely to be influenced by its content. When speaking of hearing a story, a playwright said, “we’re hoping that we are going to be able to liken this thing unto ourselves; that something in there is going to happen, where I can look at these people and go, ‘...I know exactly how he feels.’”⁸¹ Besides simply providing opportunities for application, a meaningful story affords moments of identification.⁸² Meaningful identification moves beyond superficial references to the personal tastes of the hearer such as the local NFL team or lyrics from a pop song. These might matter on some level, but meaning is best established through discussing the weightier human topics like love, truth, justice, relationships, and the divine.⁸³

The preacher I interviewed in my previous study suggested that one should choose a character and maintain their point of view through the sermon.⁸⁴ In other words, if one chooses the viewpoint of the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the preacher should use illustrations that reflect his point of view. In this case the preacher may give examples of typical excuses that one uses for not helping others in need. However, in narrative preaching (or similar forms) beliefs will often refine during the sermon as the preacher “learns” in front of the audience.⁸⁵ In this way, there doesn’t necessarily have to be identification with just one scriptural character, but rather one worldview that shifts and improves during the sermon. The preacher invites change through the vicarious shift in thought taking place in the sermon and creates a meaningful experience by focusing on one point of view. As a film director said, “a good film story is about one person... because if it’s only about one person that gets you to identify emotional, much more intensively.”⁸⁶

When speaking of engaging preaching, the homiletician I interviewed said that the preacher should “know where your people are so that they find you’re asking the questions they ask.”⁸⁷ Perhaps one of the most important aspects of creating meaningful stories or content is to make sure that the preacher addresses topics and questions that the congregation is asking. Obviously, this has received a lot of attention in homiletic literature. However, I emphasize this principle to suggest that the stories and illustrations one uses, whether the preacher intends it or not, contain implicit questions and answers. For example, if the preacher shares a story about a mother who has a cold relationship with her daughter and then shares how the mother was able to reconcile that relationship—a question is answered. Part of the reason for this phenomenon is that stories have an inherent moral quality. In the words of the philosopher Charles Guignon, “...insofar as composing a story always draws on the background of communal stories of trials, struggles, conquests, and defeats, such storyizing has a moral dimension: the narratives constructed have a ‘moral’ to the extent that their resolution implies the achievement of some goods taken as normative by our historical culture.”⁸⁸ In the realm of preaching, we can review the stories or illustrations a preacher is using and ask ourselves if the kinds of questions the congregation cares about are addressed directly or indirectly.

⁸¹ Taeger and Yanchar, 176.

⁸² Fred B. Craddock, 106.

⁸³ Stephan Taeger, “Using Narrative Distance to Invite Transformative Learning Experiences,” *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning* 13, no. 2, (2020): 223; Stephen C. Yanchar, “Participational Agency,” *Review of General Psychology*, 15, no. 3 (2011): 280.

⁸⁴ Taeger and Yanchar, 176.

⁸⁵ Fred B. Craddock, 112, 114.

⁸⁶ Taeger and Yanchar, 176.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸⁸ Charles B. Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 289.

In a sermon called *Grace and Disgrace* Fred Craddock demonstrated how to use a story that is meaningful, albeit in an indirect fashion. In speaking of once grading a student's sermon, he said:

I gave a student a C on his sermon. He was upset; he thought it was a grand sermon. I didn't think so. There were some things to be improved. There were basically two things wrong with it: What he said and how he said it. So I gave him a C. I thought it was sort of a sign of encouragement. Just keep working; it'll be a B and then an A. He came in a few weeks later and flopped that C sermon down on my desk and said, "Prof., I preached that sermon in my home church and I got a standing ovation." He picked it up and stomped out. Has he passed the point? The last time I saw him, he was hanging onto the furniture to keep from ascending. Is he still teachable? It won't be long until he will be standing at the door of his church somewhere, people filing by, "Good sermon, Pastor."
"Good sermon, Pastor."
"Good sermon, Pastor."
"Good morning, Pastor."
"Uh, oh, I wonder what's the matter with her? I'll have to call on her in a pastoral way."⁸⁹

There are several aspects of this story that make it meaningful for the listener. Although one might think that the typical congregation could not identify with a story about a homiletics student, this illustration touches on the universal human theme of acceptance. In addition, another aspect of this story that makes it meaningful is that it reflects the point of view of the main character in the sermon from which it originates. In this particular message, Craddock discusses Saul's (first king of Israel) need for approval. Rather than listing off principles of application from the story, Craddock spends time *investing* in this specific person and point of view. Finally, this story, as well as the theme of the sermon, are indirectly dealing with the question, "what should I do with my need for approval?" In one sense, the answer to this question is found inherently in the story itself. By illustrating how one should *not* handle their need for approval in the way the homiletics student did, Craddock is showing us how one should give up their constant need for acceptance.

Using stories that are meaningful is essential in helping the listener overcome self-deception. As mentioned above, when Warner described people hearing stories of others coming to honesty about their self-deception, he said these people "realize—usually instantaneously—that a story another has told is their own story, only with different details."⁹⁰ Unless the listener sees themselves and the things that matter to them in the story, they probably will not be open to listening to its inherent moral invitation.

Like the other examples noted above, this story invites one to see the humanity of the other and overcome self-deception. At first glance it might seem difficult to see how someone could see the humanity and vulnerability of someone who is acting in a way that is so self-serving. However, those mired in self-deception, "struggle anxiously with what they falsely believe to be threats needing to be dealt with. In the world as they construe it, they act purely in

⁸⁹ Fred B. Craddock, *The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 22.

⁹⁰ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 215.

self-defense.”⁹¹ Interestingly, Warner suggests that this understanding is essential in setting *ourselves* free from self-betrayal and therefore creating a space for others as well. He says that if we “understand how threatening the world seems to them, we will set ourselves free of our accusing, judgmental attitude. We will become, as onlookers, more open, truthful, and considerate in our way of being, more responsive to them as they really are.”⁹² In the instance that Craddock offered, the listener can feel genuine concern for someone trapped in the constant need for approval or affirmation. The preacher can help the listener open themselves to others by framing examples of people who are trapped in self-deception as an opportunity to be empathetic. By seeing the humanity of those caught in self-deception, we begin to liberate ourselves from our own self-betrays and give others reason to see us as a human deserving of their respect and kindness.

Seeing the Other

In a popular book based on Warner’s philosophical work, people who embrace the humanity of others are described as seeing that another’s “hopes, needs, cares, and fears [are] as real to [them] as [their] own.”⁹³ People who do not see the humanity of others are described as seeing humans as “obstacles, vehicles, [and] irrelevancies.”⁹⁴ As Martin Buber argued, we can either have an “I-it” or an “I-thou” way of being towards other people.⁹⁵ In the sections above we see a variety of ways that stories can help us come alive to others, helping us embrace an “I-Thou” way of being. For the purposes of further illustration, the following story provides another example of this phenomenon. Taken directly from Warner’s work, it concerns a man named Monte who had a son and a daughter-in-law living at home because they were evicted from their residence. When they moved into Monte’s home, they borrowed his car since their own vehicle “required a major repair.” Sometime later, Monte “got a call informing him that they had been in an accident.” Although filled with anger, Monte decided to try his best to act cordial.

Monte was almost to the car before he could see his daughter-in-law, who was sitting in the driver’s seat. Her head rested on the steering wheel, and she was sobbing. At that moment, he said, his heart melted. What melted this man? He had, after all, done everything that lay within his power to act as considerately and generously as possible.

What melted him was the sight of his daughter-in-law broken and contrite. This image punched through his shell of self-concern. It disrupted the certainty with which he had judged her.”⁹⁶

In other words, Monte developed an “I-Thou” way of being toward his daughter-in-law. When including these kinds of stories in sermons, it is helpful to highlight the moment when a person becomes *real* to another. In addition, if a preacher can maintain cognitive and emotional space, the listener is more likely to discover how the story relates to themselves without feeling

⁹¹ Ibid., 79.

⁹² Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 79.

⁹³ The Arbinger Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, 30.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ The philosophical debate has a long and nuanced history surrounding these issues. I use Buber’s distinction between “I-It” and “I-Thou” for the limited scope of this article. See The Arbinger Institute, 79-80.

⁹⁶ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 152-153.

emotionally repulsed. This is the kind of preaching that can allow the listener to move past defensiveness and social division and open themselves up to the needs of others.

It may be helpful to reemphasize that the process of someone becoming real to us is not a matter of willpower. Otherwise, a preacher may give the impression that listeners need to grit their teeth and be more loving. Rather, as Warner said regarding the example above, “All the willpower Monte could muster had failed to extinguish the accusation in his heart, but something about her, the very person he had been despising, rendered him unable to retain his hardness toward her any longer.”⁹⁷ Warner speaks of “allow[ing]” or “yielding” to the truth of the other.⁹⁸ With this in mind, it may be wise to use these words or terms like “open” or “honor” when speaking of becoming alive to the humanity of others.⁹⁹ In one sense, rather than framing the issue as a matter of willpower, these terms help us see that the ending of self-deception is a matter of reverencing the other as an image bearer of God. Ultimately, the kind of agape love that sees others needs willingly, and even joyously, responds naturally to their humanity.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Influencing human transformation can be particularly challenging for societies that are locked in social divisiveness. Homileticians have offered various accounts of what leads to human change. Although these have been helpful to one degree or another, there has not been much emphasis on the role that self-deception plays for the listener. Self-betrayal occurs when one denies their sense to honor the humanity of the other. We engage in this way of being by taking up justifications that are inherently accusatory. Since self-deception is also defensive by nature, I have offered an indirect model that can be employed by preachers to help listeners come to greater honesty about how they might relate to others. As preachers share sermons that contain cognitive and emotional space but also meaningfully invite the listener to come alive to the other, they may help listeners overcome self-deception. John McClure, drawing upon Emmanuel Levinas, explained what happens when we see the other: “In the neighbor's face (visage), we experience an absolute obligation toward compassion, resistance, justice, and hope that grips our lives and holds us to a new vision for all humanity.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Warner, *Bonds that Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*, 154.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 108 and 36.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰¹ John S. McClure, 134, Kindle.

International Developments in Homiletics

Is There Still a Place for the Sermon?

Some Observations in German-speaking Homiletical Books and Discussions

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In January 2022, Swiss Protestant pastor *Kathrin Bolt* took a chain-saw, publicly sawed apart her pulpit, and transformed it into a table to replace the sermon with conversations and meals. In February, the congregation in Bolt's parish was invited to four Sunday services 'without a sermon.'

To make things clear: there is surely no trend in German-speaking countries to remove pulpits from church buildings. But this action can be seen as a paradigmatic sign for ongoing discussions and as an expression of uncertainty about whether we still 'need' sermons (in their traditional expository form), whether the effort is still worth it, whether preaching makes an impact, or is nothing other than an empty ritual. During the Corona pandemic, many pastors and lay preachers sought new digital forms which were usually shorter and much more 'personal' in nature. Nonetheless, in empirical studies when people were asked what they expect most in Protestant services, the sermon is at the top of the list. There are very many pastors for whom the preparation of a sermon is a central part of their own pastoral spirituality as well. And when in 2018 a revised lectionary was introduced in German Protestant Churches – in effect doubling the number of texts from the Hebrew Bible – many pastors and congregations were enthusiastic. Perhaps we can be sure of only one thing: in German-speaking contexts (as perhaps for other parts of the world), preaching is in a time of transition. The Protestant and Catholic Churches are rapidly losing members (in 2022, for the first time in history, Christians were a minority in Germany) and influence. Churches had to find their voices and their practices in new ways during the pandemic and now in times of war in Europe.

What is *homiletics* currently addressing in this situation? I share four observations:

(1) It may not be surprising that in times of transformation, homiletics asks *fundamental questions*: What is preaching all about? Why should we continue to preach? *Manuel Stetter*, professor of Practical Theology in Rostock, described "Preaching as a Practice of Change" in his dissertation (published in 2018).¹ Stetter reflects on the basic tension between the intentionality of the preacher and the autonomy of the listeners; his work is a profound rereading of recent homiletical developments, and a reflection on aesthetic approaches and their insights in creative and innovative moments in preaching. But he also posits a reappraisal of argumentative and persuasive ways of preaching. One year later, *Martin Nicol*, retired Practical Theologian in Erlangen whose "Dramaturgical Homiletics" gained great influence in homiletical education and was greatly influenced by his study of homiletics in North America, published his book "Mehr Gott wagen."² Again and again Nicol asks the central homiletical question, How is it possible to 'dare more God' in our preaching (this is a rough English translation of the German title) by reflecting on the structure and language of sermons, the role of preachers, and by being

¹ Manuel Stetter, *Die Predigt als Praxis der Veränderung. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Homiletik*, APTLH 92, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018.

² Martin Nicol, *Mehr Gott wagen. Predigten und Reden zur Dramaturgischen Homiletik*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2019.

constantly in dialogue with artists, writers, poets, etc.? Ferenc Herzig, a Practical theologian in Leipzig, is inspired by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his homiletical dissertation, “Unsinn zur Unzeit.”³ Herzig’s thesis may be typical for a time of uncertainty, ambiguity, and transition as he asserts that we may never know what preaching ‘is’ but we keep on preaching, expecting the ‘Ereignis’ (event) to happen.

(2) Next to these fundamental reflections, there is a certain trend among homileticians to deal with the *Bible, exegesis, and hermeneutics*. This may be connected with the revision of the lectionary and intensive discussions about biblical hermeneutics (especially the relationship between the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Testaments), the relevance of the Bible, and the future of expository sermons. But it also shows that during confusing times, homileticians go back to the cradle of Protestant homiletics: namely, the proclamation of the Bible. In 2019 Christine Wenona Hoffmann, Professor of Practical Theology in Frankfurt, focused on the relationship between homiletics and exegesis.⁴ While fewer and fewer preachers seem to be interested in the work of exegetes, it is also true that exegesis at German Universities is not always connected with questions of homiletics but much more with historic, archaeological, linguistic, etc., matters of research interest. Hoffmann’s work is a plea to rediscover the fruitful perspectives of an ongoing dialogue of the two ‘partners,’ exegesis and homiletics – which may help homiletics to leave some of its conventions behind and discover new and fresh insights in biblical texts. In 2021 Johannes Greifstein published his book “Vom Text zur Predigt” (‘From the text to the sermon’),⁵ making a plea for a new dimension of intradisciplinary theological work by connecting exegesis, dogmatics, and homiletics. It might be true to say that German homiletics is coming closer to the reality of North American homiletical work with a much more direct overlap between these three disciplines.

(3) As in all other fields of Practical Theology, also in homiletics a *mega-trend toward empirical research* can be discerned in German-speaking countries. Scholars work with qualitative empirical methods to understand the preachers’ views on the role of preaching today and their own biblical hermeneutics; there are many quantitative and qualitative empirical studies about digital forms of proclamation and the changing role and ‘habitus’ of pastors in these media contexts; there are text-based studies of formal homiletical trends; and studies of sermon listeners. In the years to come, we will know much more about these aspects of preaching and many more.

(4) One other trend is worth noting: there is a growing awareness of the sermon as just one part of the worship service and growing interest in an *integration of homiletics and liturgical studies* – e.g., the works of Ferenc Herzig and Johannes Greifstein show but also provide evidence of this in the book series “Evangelische und Katholische Studien zu Gottesdienst und Predigt” (‘Protestant and Catholic Studies on Worship and Preaching’).

I write these lines fourteen months after the beginning of the brutal attack of Russia against Ukraine. In many sermons, pastors are continuing to deal with the question of war and violence and want to find ways to express the disruptive message of God’s shalom in our time. I

³ Ferenc Herzig, *Unsinn zur Unzeit. Ein Dialog mit Gilles Deleuze über „Ereignis“ im homiletischen und liturgischen Horizont*, EKG 6, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Würzburg: Echter 2020.

⁴ Christine Wenona Hoffmann, *Homiletik und Exegese. Konzepte von Rechtfertigung in der evangelischen Predigtpraxis der Gegenwart*, APrTh 75, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2019.

⁵ Johannes Greifstein, *Vom Text zur Predigt. Ein Beitrag zur Praxistheorie homiletischer Bibelauslegung*, Praktische Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart 34, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021.

think it may be fair to say that in future years, an overview of current trends in German-speaking homiletics (and liturgical studies) will show increased attention given to homiletical research related to this theme and interest in whether preaching makes a difference – even in times of war. Times of uncertainty and struggle are never easy but may also provide opportunities for reconsidering what preaching and the field of homiletics may yet become in the years ahead.

Jeffrey W. Frymire. *Preaching from Inside the Story: A Fresh Journey into Narrative*. Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022. 214 pages. \$28.00.

Narrative preaching has had a tarnished journey. Breaking onto the homiletical scene through the writings of Henry Mitchell, David Randolph, Charles Rice, Edmund Steimle, and others, this more story-oriented form of preaching seemed to be the next natural iteration of the New Homiletic movement. The New Homiletic itself drew inspiration from the return to narrative theology in the New Hermeneutic wave of biblical studies, advocated in the writings of Gerhard Ebeling, Amos Wilder, Robert Funk, and most notably Hans Frei and Paul Ricoeur. Eugene Lowry (with the help of his seminary students) designed the “homiletical loop,” a way of plotting narrative sermons in a way similar to the classic Freytag Pyramid of the theatre world. Eventually, Lowry’s loop became the standard way of understanding the narrative sermon—and narrative, in general—leading him to be considered one of the most influential homileticians of the twentieth century. Others would take their spin on Lowry’s theory while others would critique it for not being “biblical” (i.e., proposition-driven) enough. Still, narrative preaching held promise as a homiletical theory and theological system. And, then, it all came crashing down, leading some invested scholars to ask what happened to narrative preaching, as much from the pulpit that claimed to be narrative preaching sounded more akin to bad anecdotes.

Granted, this is a vast overstatement of the history of narrative preaching. It did not just crash and burn nor did it completely disappear. However, the case can be made that it did not fully live up to its potential. Part of this is in the approach itself. While some have a natural talent for telling a story, most of us who recognize the value of sharing the biblical text in creative and captivating ways need to be taught how to tell a story well. Stories are how humans capture history. Stories are how we remember first dates and last farewells. And stories, biblically speaking, are how we recount our interactions with the Divine. And we need to be taught how to tell our stories well.

This is where Jeffrey Frymire’s book enters the discussion. One of the newest volumes in the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series, this beautiful conversation on the wonder that is narrative preaching soars with both hopeful promise and careful proclamation. Frymire approaches this topic from the perspective of both critical researcher and committed practitioner. The influence of Clayton Schmit’s narrative pedagogy in the Fuller doctoral program is evident throughout (chapters 1-2, specifically). Frymire knows his stuff, from exploring the depths of Aristotle’s original construction of plot to modern-day influences of playwrights and professional storytellers (chapter 4). Not only this, Frymire also delves into the science of storytelling and cognitive development, to show how humans are wired for story (chapter 3).

This is where Frymire’s contribution is so needed, as the author moves from the more classical approaches to storytelling (i.e., Aristotle, Freytag, and Lowry) to analyze and evaluate several neurological studies related to storytelling and cognitive development. This brings a rich depth to the belief that stories not only entertain but are central to the learning process and, therefore, discipleship. The overall focus, however, is not how to apply a narrative framework to the sermon but how to recognize the narrative design of the biblical text in order to allow the telling in the text to guide the crafting of the sermon (chapter 5). Yet, Frymire does not settle for simply recapturing Luke 15, but instead offers five sample sermons (chapters 6-10) in five different narrative forms from his own preaching ministry.

This is a needed contribution in an ongoing conversation. Frymire invites the reader on a journey of discovery into the wonderful world of narrative and story. Those who teach narrative preaching might consider this book as a foundational textbook; it is also recommended as a source from which to draw for broader conversations about approaches to preaching. All in all, It is a readily accessible introduction to narrative preaching.

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Cole Arthur Riley. *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us*. New York: Convergent Books, 2022. 224 pages. \$23.20.

“This is not a book of new things or ideas; my thoughts have been thought before. It is more remembrance than revelation, more maybes than certainty. And there is sparse novelty... This is a book of contemplative storytelling” (xi). I would add – *This Here Flesh* is magnificent storytelling with a call to “sacred attention” (x). Riley does theological exploration and theological expression in a manner that both challenges and complements traditional theologies. She writes of a liberating God, liberating relationships, and a liberated self.

Riley invites readers into her world to contemplate the significance of and spirituality within everydayness. It is her life story (thus far) – yet it is a story of the experiences of humanity packaged in poignant language and precise imprecision. The author shares her journeys of wondering, of knowing, of seeing, of being seen. Interrogating a series of life themes, Riley puts her individual and familial experiences in conversation with scholars such as Alice Walker, Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, Audre Lorde, and Julian of Norwich. At the same time, she weaves in cultural references – Baby Suggs, Ms. Celie, Harry Potter, and Brooklyn – all of which converge, laying bare her understandings of personhood and the Divine.

The book is divided into 15 chapters, each of which contains stories oriented around a primary theme. For example, in chapter 1, *Dignity*, the author explores the image of God, the whiteness of God, and the inherent dignity of all persons. “Our liberation begins with the irrevocable belief that we are worthy to be liberated,” writes Riley, “that we are worthy of a life that does not degrade us but honors our whole selves” (15). In chapter 3, *Wonder*, she challenges readers to “reclaim the awe of our child-selves, to allow ourselves to be taken by the beauty of a thing...” (29). She resists the negative connotations of the words *childish* and *juvenile*, asserting that childlike wonder helps us pay attention. “To encounter the holy in the ordinary is to find God in the liminal—in the spaces where we might subconsciously exclude it, including the sensory moments that are often illegibly spiritual.” Whereas a trip to the Alaska Iditarod might provide countless big moments, the memory the author most cherishes is seemingly mundane: she watched a music video on repeat with friends in the freezing night, with “lips cracking, bellies burning, and snow running down my pants as I rocked back in laughter” (34). This memory, and others like it, remind us of our belonging. Wonder is a force of liberation. “If you really want to get free, find God on the subway. Find God in the soap bubble” (40).

Chapter 5, *Body*, is an exploration of what it means that the “creator of the cosmos would choose to rely on an embodied creation” (57). Riley discusses bodies which are Black, diseased, traumatized, and broken, all with an eye on the broken, bloodied, body of Christ. She critiques body-less Christianity, choosing rather, liberation in the form of embodied wholeness. “You want to tell me to love God? Ask me when I’ve last eaten” (68). This is spiritual embodiment.

All in all, the book is ripe with potent language and tender pointedness that takes the reader deeper into themes of liberation. On *fear*: Find those who tell you, *Do not be afraid*, yet stay close enough to tremble with you. This is love (90). On *rage*: It is very important that our belonging before God not depend upon our ability to hide or extinguish truths in and about us...As we allow God to behold our rage, a sacred intimacy emerges (113). On *repair*: If you cut me, I want you to apologize with grave specificity for the blood running down my back...I want your soul to writhe like it was the back of God that was cut. This would make any sorry truer (140). And, on *rest*: When we rest, we do so in memory of rest denied...Rest is an act of

defiance...It is the audacity to face the demands of this world and proclaim, *We will not be owned*...We will be free and we will be dreaming (157).

This Here Flesh is both a nightstand read and a substantive classroom resource.

Contemplative practitioners will find this book engaging and insightful, as will persons who see glimpses of the Divine in everyday life. Teachers of preaching and theology may find Riley's skillful storytelling instructive, as she demonstrates one way to wrestle with theology, spirituality, and the Divine, in view of life's realities.

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Joy A. Schroeder & Marion Ann Taylor. *Voices Long Silenced: Women Biblical Interpreters through the Centuries*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022. 378 pages. \$25.99.

It is astonishing that Joy Schroeder and Marion Ann Taylor have analyzed more than seven hundred books and articles written by and about female biblical interpreters and have presented more than three hundred of these interpreters in a chronological order from 100 CE to the present over the seven chapters of their book. Chapter 1 focuses on women's biblical interpretation during late antiquity. Twenty-seven Christian and Jewish women, both named and unnamed, are introduced, along with their life stories, writings, and artworks. These women were martyrs, queens, copyists, skilled painters, and leaders of Christian churches and Jewish synagogues. Among many insights, this chapter offers the consideration of personal diaries—such as the prison diary of martyr Perpetua (ca. 203), and the Holy Land travel diary of Spanish pilgrim Egeria (ca. 381-84)—as a literary form for biblical interpretation, suggesting that reflection on daily life in light of biblical texts is a practical way of interpreting the biblical text for contextual preaching.

Chapter 2 presents forty-six medieval women who studied and interpreted the Bible in various literary and artistic ways. Female theologians, who were mostly nuns, abbesses, and anchoresses, offered women's perspectives on biblical passages in a misogynistic ecclesial culture that suppressed women's voices. This chapter also includes Byzantine Christian women who wrote hymns and poetry, women leaders in the Coptic Church of Egypt, and female Jewish scribes and scholars.

Chapter 3 offers the stories and works of twenty-three female biblical scholars and preachers—both Christian and Jewish—during the Reformation era. Many of these women used the printing press to publish and circulate their theological and biblical debates on the rights of women to study and preach the Bible.

Chapter 4 presents globally, forty-eight female biblical interpreters during the early modern period of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, who not only interpreted Scripture from a female perspective but also advocated for women's education, literacy, and the study of Scripture. The chapter also informs us of Walatta Petros (1592-1642) and other female biblical interpreters who gave voices against colonialism, racism, sexism, and enslavement.

Chapter 5 selects seventy-two women from hundreds of female biblical interpreters and preachers of the nineteenth century and presents their diversified voices based on their different racial and cultural experiences. For example, Black and white female abolitionists and suffragists' different views on race and gender resulted in conflicts and divisions among them in interpreting biblical texts.

Chapter 6 discovers forty-two women who participated in biblical interpretation across denominations, geographic regions, and religious backgrounds, from 1918 to 1970. It emphasizes that some women pursued graduate-level education and pioneered teaching at colleges and seminaries and published their writings in professional journals.

The last chapter focuses on contemporary women's biblical interpretations from the 1970s to 2020 by presenting fifty-six female biblical interpreters. The chapter identifies the distinctiveness of this historical period as its diversity and points out that the diversity of contemporary female biblical interpreters' voices depends on their audiences, ranging from a radical revisionist type of feminism to quiet protest, and even those who might not want to be called feminists.

The uniqueness of the book is that the chapters lead us to understand the breadth and depth of women's ways of biblical interpretation globally, without essentializing their experiences and ways of thinking. Moreover, this book contributes to the critical evaluation of the history of women's biblical interpretation by revealing the shortfalls in female biblical interpretation in given historical and cultural contexts, such as anti-Judaism, racism, colonialism, classism, white supremacy, and even adoption of patriarchal worldviews and the oppressive masculine notions of values of ideal womanhood. This candid self-criticism of female biblical interpreters and preachers helps us recognize and identify our own limitations and encourages us to critically evaluate the ethical value of women's biblical interpretations.

Nowadays, many female scholars publish books and teach the Bible from a variety of female perspectives. Yet, most of their books tend to be recommended or suggested resources for a course, rather than primary texts. In this situation, it is significant to reconsider the learning goals and outcomes of a course by raising questions such as: What is different about teaching the history of biblical interpretations from female perspectives? Why is it necessary to decenter the disciplines of biblical interpretation and preaching where male voices have taken center stage for two millennia? How can our teaching and research help students and readers decenter their approaches to biblical interpretation and preaching? This book challenges us to consider these questions as teachers, scholars, and preachers.

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Donna Giver-Johnston. *Claiming the Call to Preach: Four Female Pioneers of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 344 pages. \$55.19.

Throughout history, women have faced challenges in identifying their vocational "calling." When it comes to women and preaching, it often elicits adverse reactions, confusion, disapproval, and even hopelessness. Women expressing a divine call are often harmed during the process of discernment. Donna Giver-Johnston in *Claiming the Call to Preach*, examines the calls of four female pioneers of preaching, claiming their calls to preach through resistance. With a 21st-century understanding of gender identity, Giver-Johnston claims that within the periods of these women's lives and call narratives, the concept of identity was limited to males and females. Giver-Johnston argues that the history of these call stories and how we grasp the broader picture of language prove that anyone can experience a "call" regardless of societal barriers. Contextually, *Claiming the Call to Preach* responds to disenfranchisement attached to discerning a call or pull to preach. Using her narrative, Giver-Johnston recalls the harm and discomfort associated with the first time she heard a call, citing how it perpetuated the silencing of women.

This book shares the inspiring stories of Jarena Lee, Frances Elizabeth, Caroline Willard, Louisa Maria Woolsey, and Florence Spearing Randolph. Despite living in a time when women were often silenced, they heard a calling and overcame numerous challenges to follow their paths. The author, Giver-Johnston, shares their journeys and relates them to her own experiences of resistance. By highlighting these pioneering women, the book offers valuable insight into the struggles and triumphs of those who knew they had a calling. It also sheds light on their neglected narratives and how they reclaimed their voices through preaching. In addition, Giver-Johnston explains the purpose of providing the history of each call story as a response to a neglectful narrative. The book highlights the concept of a call to ministry and preaching by exploring the relationship between theology and the practice of claiming the call. Each chapter focuses on one woman and her narrative, with added subtitles that respond to specific pieces and spaces that have been overlooked (34). The book is compelling as it situates an outward call, the endorsement to preach, and an inward one, being a divine summons within the stories of each woman and the author herself (2). The text also details how one critically examines the rhetoric of the call to preach, highlighting the hermeneutics of experience, social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, and reconstruction. The book contributes a wealth of life expertise alongside theological research while pointing out an overarching hurdle in claiming the call. Ultimately, this book reaches an audience wrestling with complicated questions about the idea of a call to ministry and preaching while also affirming the experiences of all persons. Beyond preaching moments, we experience it; discerning a call is nothing short of a task within itself. However, this writing is not a "how to" resource but a landing space in authority and authenticity.

The relationship between Giver-Johnston's claims of power and her extensive research is apparent. Her work indicates that interpreting a call involves various perspectives while influenced by harmful past practices. Her consideration of rhetoric provides an outstanding conversational tool for readers discerning a call beyond its use in the history of preaching. In summary, *Claiming the Call to Preach* critiques the practice of preaching and its effectiveness in traditional transformation. It is a compelling text that offers an analysis and contextual framework for historical knowledge while providing a lane for readers to adopt a contemporary awareness of counterculture. Her personal experience of the issues raised in the text is critical and engaging. Due to her intimate encounters with resistance, more detail into her life as a woman in ministry who is actively re-imagining her call is necessary as it helps the reader make

deeper connections between her powerful claims and her wealth of research. In hindsight, Giver-Johnston's work suggests that interpreting a call takes on several lenses due to historically harmful norms. As a result, claiming a call can be reconstructed, re-imagined, and reconsidered because by re-imagining, we can approach experiencing God without ableist biases.

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Matthew D. Kim and Paul A. Hoffman. *Preaching to a Divided Nation: A Seven-Step Model for Promoting Reconciliation and Unity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 208 pages. \$17.93.

In *Preaching to a Divided Nation*, Matthew D. Kim and Paul A. Hoffman share their concerns about the rapidly increasing polarization in our politics, economy, and society, which often promotes prejudices and violence. Kim and Hoffman bemoan that this social dysfunction seems to have spread to many pulpits, exacerbating the division among Christians rather than uniting them in God's peace. As they remain hopeful that preachers, the heralds of the good news of Christ are called to "promote reconciliation and unity" (3), they explore seven steps through which preaching can effectively address divisive topics.

In the first chapter, "The Theological Step," the authors argue that gospel preaching must begin with theology, the narrative about God. Kim and Hoffman suggest that preachers interpret the Bible "through a missional meta-narrative" (8), which describes how God has reconciled the sinful creature to Godself through Christ. As a redeemed body of Christ, Christian communities, then, are called not only to proclaim but also to embody the "gospel of reconciliation" (20).

The second chapter, "The Contextual Step," emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of the listeners, who are part of a broader network of local and national history and culture. Kim and Hoffman argue that for preachers to listen to and understand their congregation more empathically, they need to nurture all cultural, emotional, and historical intelligence.

In the third chapter, "The Personal Step," the authors suggest that preaching for healing and reconciliation requires preachers to reflect critically upon themselves and to acknowledge their sins and biases confessionally. While preachers often bear wounds and brokenness, these stories can facilitate homiletical renewal through a tripartite model of devotion, introspection, and connection. Preachers gaze upward towards God by worshipping, praying, and reading the Bible. They gaze inward to check on their heart. Finally, they gaze outward to the community to serve and foster a sense of belonging.

The fourth chapter, "The Positional Step," describes how preachers can be vessels of the Holy Spirit, who, as the chief reconciler, effects changes in people's hearts and minds. *Unction*, the gracious act of God moving through preachers, can happen especially when they faithfully preach from the Holy Scripture, as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit; love their congregation deeply; and pay attention to the level of training, theologies, and polity of their churches and denominations.

In the fifth chapter, "The Methodological Step," Kim and Hoffman discuss a homiletical method of reconciliation and unity. They encourage preachers to identify "centered sets" that are the "core, shared foundations of the faith" of the congregation, such as shared doctrines, a shared identity as God's people, a shared mission, and shared experiences (79). After recognizing their listeners' common ground, preachers can move toward "bounded sets," which divide people. Preachers are to condemn that which disrupts Christian unity and preach about humility, kindness, and charity.

The sixth chapter, "The Practical Step," guides preachers regarding what to ask and determine pre-sermon, mid-sermon, and post-sermon. The authors emphasize the importance of defining the purpose of a sermon. Is the preacher preaching about controversial topics to improve the congregation's understanding or help wounded people heal? While analyzing the topics and congregation prayerfully, preachers are to actively pursue unity and reconciliation.

The final chapter, "The Categorical Step," recounts the "reconciling narrative" introduced in the first chapter and presents biblical texts that could be used to address topics of classism,

ethnocentrism, political division, and sexism. The appendices provide useful practical tools along with six sermons, including sermons prepared by the book's authors.

In our deeply wounded and divided society, Kim and Hoffman's work attempts to center pulpits and churches on God's identity as the ultimate reconciler who continues to call God's people to unite in God's love, justice, and mission. However, some readers might question the inconsistency in the authors' theological views of women. While Kim and Hoffman condemn sexism as an "idolatrous form of social sin" (17), they later categorize the ordination of women and their roles in ministry as "nonessential doctrines of differences in ministry philosophy" (146). Therefore, one might question how sexism, which is a sin against God, is nonessential with God who created both men and women equally in God's image (121).

Nevertheless, readers may appreciate that Kim and Hoffman boldly encourage their fellow Christian preachers, teachers, and communicators to repent of their individual and social sins. These sins include not only participating in ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, and political division, but also instigating their congregations to be divided over *isms*. While the healing process often involves tears, repentance, and forgiveness, all preachers are commissioned to preach the word of God so that people can be united in God's love, generosity, and reconciliation.

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John S. McClure. *Ethical Approaches to Preaching: Choosing the Best Way to Preach about Difficult Issues*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 128 pages. \$23.00.

Drawing from a diverse group of scholars, John S. McClure's "introductory handbook" outlines four ethical approaches to preaching. He provides the reader with clear and distinct pathways to viewing, understanding, interpreting, and preaching complex subjects because different issues require different approaches (25).

Limiting himself to four kinds of ethics (Communication, Witness, Liberation, and Hospitality), McClure invites pastors, preachers, and teachers of preaching to think anew about their journey from text to sermon when dealing with ethical problems. He extends the invitation by challenging the reader's comfort level (complacency) with their current praxis, then calling the reader to a new and more meaningful way.

Instead of another homiletical theory or method, McClure offers the reader a way to "approach" ethical issues. He defines "an approach as a practical way to get from here to there" (xvi). Because the approach is new, McClure warns the reader to expect discomfort while simultaneously encouraging the reader to stay the course.

To get from here to there, McClure relies on four organizing questions that function as a hermeneutical framework for each approach. They are (1) The Way Out – helps listeners identify the best way out of the ethical issue (xvii), (2) The Way In – provides listeners a way into the ethical issue (xviii), (3) The Way Through – helps listeners identify where they are and what's at stake by using familiar illustrations, images, stories, etc. (xix), (4) The Way Toward – helps listeners identify where they are going (xx).

After defining the hermeneutical framework, McClure wades into the body of the text, which includes four chapters. Each chapter presents one of the ethical approaches, suggest appropriate ethical situations for their use, and provides annotated sermons as examples and additional reading resources.

In the first chapter, McClure argues that Communicative Ethics is preaching that seeks broad moral consensus, particularly when congregants hold strong positions. They are sermons that "search for the moral high ground in situations of public, national, or global crisis" (26).

The second chapter describes how Witness Ethics concerns itself with preaching that addresses an "accommodationist mode" of preaching (36). It is countercultural preaching aimed at character development. Its goal is to help listeners "claim unique forms of Christian moral agency in the public square" and beyond (37).

In the third chapter, McClure discusses Liberation Ethics that intentionally focuses on systems of injustice wherever they exist. It is a social ethic that seeks to "unmask, critique, and change current social systems" (61). The preacher's work is "conscious raising," helping the listeners understand how systems work.

The last chapter explains Hospitality Ethics as preaching that seeks to cultivate wide-ranging relationships. This ethic aims to bridge the divide of differences with face-to-face dialogue.

This handbook is a gem. As rightly stated, it challenges the reader to try a different path. From the outset, McClure grabs the reader with his easy-to-follow framework and invites them to follow him. With the care of a long-term pastor, he skillfully moves through each ethical approach, teaching and encouraging the reader along the way. After each chapter, the good pastor says, "now you try it." This book is made for the times in which we live. It is the resource pastors, preachers, and teachers of preachers need now.

Jackie Blue, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA

Jacob D. Myers. *Stand-Up Preaching: Homiletical Insights from Contemporary Comedians*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022. 228 pages. \$35.

Stand-Up Preaching is “not about helping you write and deliver funnier sermons” (23). There are undeniable similarities between preaching and stand-up, however, and preachers cannot help but marvel at the latter’s impact (2). Stand-up comedy is risky; it is incredibly contextual and easily misunderstood. Still, Jacob Myers is convinced it is worthy of preachers’ attention. It is “1) speech that invites participation amid cultural difference and 2) speech that challenges ideologies and structures of inequity without completely alienating audience members” (3). Myers invites readers to learn how stand-up comedians use humor to make people think in new ways with an interest in “how their methods might serve our homiletical goals” (28). Between each chapter, Myers analyzes a particular comedian and suggests what preachers might learn from them.

In chapter 2, after reviewing arguments for and against humor in the pulpit throughout history, Myers turns to theories of why humans laugh to help preachers discern for themselves whether and how humor is appropriate in the pulpit. These include a theory of humor that casts others “in a predominantly negative light” (63) and a theory pointing to humor that creates “cognitive dissonance” in the way it “violates our mental patterns and expectations” (65). He notes the latter as supported by Karl Barth for how it can manifest the upside-down nature of the gospel.

Chapter 3 examines stand-up comedians’ use of language with an interest in how they interrogate listeners’ assumptions and invite them to think about an issue from a different vantage point while simultaneously fostering community through laughter. A brief history of American stand-up reveals the path that has led to the current emphasis on the seemingly authentic personal identity of the speaker, telling the truth, and cultivating a sense of intimacy with the audience. All of this influences both the content and form of the language.

Chapter 4 speaks to the power of narrative to invite listeners into a meaningful experience not their own that transforms their view of the world. Myers describes the “elements of effective narration” (e.g., a cohesive structure that moves from tension worthy of our emotional investment to a correspondingly cathartic resolution) while pointing to specific examples of these elements in stand-up (117). We are also shown examples that move from tension to “a kind of prophetic indictment” rather than the release of laughter (124).

Chapter 5 focuses on the persona that a comedian cultivates in relationship with their perceived authenticity. The latter is vital in the contemporary scene. It is closely connected to the comedian’s ability to create a sense of intimacy with the audience and believably portray a correspondence between “personality, embodiment, point of view, comedy material, and performance” (141). Myers posits ways preachers might learn from comedians for whom these aspects of identity have collided in recognition that we navigate similar tensions with the added challenge of always performing for the same audience.

Chapter 6 names that bodies communicate before a word is spoken and highlights how this impacts those who do not fit society’s standards of size, race, gender, sexuality, and space (which bodies belong on a stage). Rather than hiding their bodies (as preachers often do behind robes and pulpits), comedians tend to acknowledge and engage them as a part of their set (165). Myers points to various ways comedians do this and encourages preachers to “employ our bodies and voices in ways that arise from our unique personalities and experiences” (176).

Chapter 7 reviews reasons to be cautious about bringing comedy into the pulpit, including concerns about “punching down,” making light of serious topics, and manipulating others by condemning and laughing at “those who disagree with us” (195-96). Myers also acknowledges arguments that comedy makes no tangible difference and can even prohibit social change. Still, Myers is convinced of its potential to transform minds through the space levity creates, which can lead to action. The final comedian he analyzes is John Oliver, whose comedy has made a clear difference in the world.

In this book, readers are shown numerous close readings of stand-up. Myers does what he sets out to do and helps preachers thoughtfully consider what we can learn from this genre. I was left wishing I had been shown a few close readings of stand-up preachers doing this well or more nitty-gritty tips on how to get started to help me leap over the vast differences in content and tone. Comedians do not tend to speak compassionately about those who disagree with them or evince love for their enemies, which is fundamental for preachers. I look forward to seeing people translate these insightful learnings into embodied speech “worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called” (Eph 4:1).

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Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, ed. *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2022. 246 pages. \$81.44.

In *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, a diverse group of homileticians answer the clarion call to name, analyze, and propose solutions to the issue of whiteness and white supremacy in the field of homiletics. Taking seriously the way that whiteness dominates the homiletical guilds, each contributor “seeks both to unmask and destabilize white colonial hegemony that continues to shape the field of homiletics today and to explore alternative, non-dominant homiletical pathways toward a more just future for the church and the world” (5). Through this critical exploration of the way that whiteness overshadows the homiletical “practice, pedagogy and theory,” (2) this book brilliantly destabilizes white colonial hegemony and sets forth pathways for sustained resistance to this white racialized norm and articulates possibilities for an anti-racist homiletical future.

The book skillfully portrays a dynamic group of homileticians that “represent(s) polyvocal efforts to identify and decenter the homogenizing impact of white racialization in homiletics and to subsequently contribute diverse critical homiletical approaches emerging in conversation with racially minoritized scholarship and racially subjugated knowledge and practice” (5). Born out of concerns first addressed at the Academy of Homiletics annual gathering, the book represents a sustained effort to address and practically examine the dominance of white preaching.

The first section, “Racial Hegemony in Homiletics,” maps differing viewpoints and perspectives on the issues of whiteness in homiletics. Section one’s multi-point entry addressing the problem of whiteness in homiletics offers the reader varied ways of seeing clearly the mask of white supremacy within the field and how the impact of the mask is legion. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks illuminates the “missionary connection in the advancement of the hegemonic culture of white supremacy” (20) that offers a historical view and deep-rooted understanding of the problem. Debra J. Mumford analyzes the whiteness found in a sermon with a keen eye toward the worldviews, social, and cultural location of Jerry Falwell Sr. Peace Pyunghwa Lee and David Start deconstruct the white supremacist legacy of Duke Chapel in “The Towering Sermon” making the connection of how the chapel and other monuments that uphold and embody white domination impact our preaching today. As they caution, “Ignoring the gods and goals of white supremacy etched in glass and stone is as foolish and as deadly as ignoring the corpse at a funeral” (50). Gerald C. Lui asserts, “Asian American preaching is traumatized by white preaching” (55) and argues that “whiteness embeds itself in Asian American homiletics” (64). In evaluating the data from her survey and study of Protestant clergy who address racism in their sermons, Leah D. Schade makes the case that pastors need more “education, training, support, and accountability within theological and denominational structures if white Protestant Christianity in the United States is to make serious progress with unmasking and deconstructing homiletical whiteness” (71). In chapter six, Andrew Thompson Scales confronts the limitations of civility for confronting racism and critiques the “phenomenon of purple churches” (85). In “Resisting White Fragility,” Sarah Travis “proposes that sermons may challenge fragility as it occurs in both preacher and listener primarily through a decolonized process of capacity-building” (98). In “Through a Glass Dimly,” Christopher M. Baker explores the epistemologies of ignorance, asserting that “white preachers must unlearn so much of what they have always thought they have known” (118).

In section 2, the book turns toward possibilities and opportunities to remove the mask of white preaching. “Resistance and Possibilities in Homiletics,” is the task of decentering whiteness within preaching and is offered as an ongoing multi-dimensional task and as hard but necessary work. HyeRan Kim-Cragg starts the section by proposing the necessity for a postcolonial reading optic through “a contrapuntal reading of the biblical text” (129). Richard W. Voelz argues that to “unmask White preaching, the homiletics classroom must also come under scrutiny” (142). In “Of Handmaids, Mediatrices, and Mothers,” Jerusha Matsen Neal offers some crucial reflections for white women preachers. Andrew Wymer draws our attention to the ongoing work of unmasking white preaching that this collection centers and pushes the argument into “abolition of the brutal systems of whiteness and white preaching” (172). Suzanne Wenonah Duchesne offers the need for conscientization. Lis Valle-Ruiz describes the work of decentering white preaching as an exorcism through the burlesque performance of Sophia Divinatrix. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough articulates the danger of the single story of the powerful pulpit decentering its “power” through a call and demonstration of centering the preaching witness of Black Women. The book ends with the hopeful note that although this work could not fully unmask white preaching, it still “is more of an ellipsis than a period” (231) toward the endeavor.

The book’s goal in and of itself is powerful. To bring attention to the mask of white preaching and to inflict multiple splinters, cracks, and dents in the mask is notable work. The book’s critical engagement with the historical aspects of whiteness in homiletics and the hopeful turn toward the future is commendable. The effort is done in a communal framework, lifting up a myriad of diverse voices, united in its anti-racist splendor. As HyeRan Kim-Cragg exhorts, “Whiteness in homiletics breathes deeply in the cultural norm of whiteness in academia and preaching practice as examined above. It is, thus, a time for whiteness to come out” (136). Let us head this prophetic rebuke in all the ways the Holy Spirit leads!

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Ryan P. Burge. *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. 145 pages. \$19.99.

The Nones by Ryan P. Burge is a thought-provoking book that delves into the growing trend of religious disaffiliation in the United States. Using a wealth of data and analysis, Burge provides a comprehensive overview of the “nones,” a group of people with no religious affiliation, and explores their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

The impetus for this book was the results of the 2018 GSS, in which the nones reached the same size as Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants in America. Burge engages various quantitative data sources over decades to trace the emergence of this shift in the religious landscape. His audience is not political science students but denominational leaders and laity who wish to understand the statistics to better understand the world around them. Burge is well-suited to this work of data analysis for religious leaders. He is a pastor in the American Baptist Church and a political science professor at a university. Burge code-switches between those two identities to make the statistical data accessible to an audience without a social science background.

Burge mostly interprets data from surveys, notably the General Social Survey (GSS), polls, and census. The GSS survey is “the gold standard in measuring religious change in America” (1) because it has asked the same religious questions since 1972. Burge also defines and explains RELTRAD classification scheme and the seven categories used to capture a snapshot of the religious landscape in the United States. Along with analysis, the book contains many helpful charts and graphs to visualize the trends.

Burge provides a historical overview of religious affiliation in America and how it has changed over time. He argues that the decline of religion in the United States is not a recent phenomenon but rather a long-term trend that has been accelerating in recent decades. Burge, interpreting the data, clearly shows “that every successive generation starts out less religious than the one prior...” (81)

Next, Burge delves into the characteristics and beliefs of the nones. He demonstrates that the nones are a diverse group with various religious, political, and social beliefs. Their lack of affiliation does not necessarily mean that they are non-spiritual or non-religious. He also shows that the nones are not necessarily hostile to religion but often have a more nuanced view of spirituality and faith.

In the final part, Burge explores the implications of the rise of the nones for society and politics. He argues that the nones are not a monolithic group and that politicians and religious leaders must pay attention to their diverse perspectives and values. He also argues that the nones have the potential to be a powerful political force, particularly if they can organize around issues that matter to them.

A strength of the book is Burge’s willingness to engage with the complexities of the nones. He acknowledges that this group is not monolithic and that there are significant differences between those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particulars. He also explores the role that factors such as age, gender, race, and education play in shaping the beliefs and behaviors of the nones.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of *The Nones* is its analysis of the political trends of religious disaffiliation and religious affiliation. For example, Burge notes that “of the twenty largest predominately white Protestant traditions in the United States, sixteen became more Republican between 2008 and 2018” (131). If traditions are becoming less politically

diverse, people who are Christian and lean more to the left are running out of options. Burge is clear that this political hostility in churches contributes to the increase of the religiously unaffiliated. At the same time, Burge challenges preachers for not speaking into politics from the pulpit, allowing congregants to be shaped politically by social media and news outlets instead of theology and tradition. “If pastors don’t give congregations guidance on how to think about politics,” says Burge, “they will get it from somewhere else” (132).

The Nones is an important book for pastors and congregations seeking to explore the why behind shifts in the religious landscape in the United States. Along with insight into the nones and their influence in the country, readers will leave with a better understanding of the various surveys utilized to describe the diverse attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of people in the United States.

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Elizabeth Conde-Frazier. *Atando Cabos: Latinx Contributions to Theological Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. 149 pages. \$19.99.

Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier is a Latina scholar who has for decades devoted herself to connecting the academy and the Latin@ church, encouraging the institutions of theological education to value the Latin@ church's gifts and contributions to theological education. Before her current position as director of the AETH Executive Office, Conde-Frazier was the Dean of Esperanza College of Eastern University. Her book *Atando Cabos: Latinx Contributions to Theological Education* is part of a groundbreaking series titled *Theological Education Between the Times*. This series highlights diverse voices contributing to the much-needed decolonization of theology and theological education. Each author gifts theological education with insights from their own cultures and contexts. Readers might be familiar with other titles in the series, including Willie Jennings' *After Whiteness* and Keri Day's *Notes of a Native Daughter*.

Atando Cabos's guiding question is: How should theological education institutions welcome and incorporate Protestant Latinx's gifts in their work? She suggests one way is by forming creative collaborations using people's and institutions' *cabos sueltos*, "ends for which we previously had no use because they seemed out of place and did not match the previous situation" (1). As an example of what it means to *atar cabos sueltos*, Conde-Frazier reflects on her own *cabos sueltos*. She *ata los cabos sueltos* (connected the loose ends) of the theological education she received in her Latin@ church in New York, an American Baptist Bible Institute, seminary, and the academy. The theological education Conde-Frazier received in her church community prepared her for the ministry of preaching, teaching, fellowship, and service to the community. These are *cabos sueltos* with which she continued working as a theological educator. For her, the theological education and Christian formation she received in her Latin@ church have at least the same and perhaps more significant value than the theological education she received in seminary. Thus, she argues that theological education in the Latinx context exists in a continuum that started with the Protestant missionaries, who left a "legacy of mission as both the source and the focus of the Latin@ church" (30). Consequently, in the Latinx context, "*cabos sueltos* arise in history," the history of both the individual and the community (5).

For creative collaboration between the Latin@ church and institutions of theological education, Conde-Frazier argues that one needs to *atar estos cabos sueltos* (tie up these loose ends). In theological education, *atando cabos* involves a creative "reinventing" (2). However, this "reinventing" is not done *ex nihilo*. Rather, doing so entails paying attention to the existing voices and resources historically unvalued and marginalized in theological institutions. She invites those in theological education to value and take seriously "the diverse gifts of the Spirit enfleshed in each member of the body of Christ, the church," as many Latin American theologians have done (45).

The book is structured in five chapters. In Chapter One, Conde-Frazier provides a helpful overview of the history of Latin@ theological education. In Chapter Two, she discusses what she considers to be the three foundations essential for guiding the Latin@ church: *misión integral* (integral mission), the good news of the *basileia* of God, and the priesthood of all believers. In Chapter Three, she argues that theological education should have an integrated mission of the church as its purpose. Its curriculum should include preaching, teaching, liturgy or worship, fellowship, social action or service, and prophetic ministry in the community or social justice. In other words, theological education must include disciplines that "represent the actual complexity of the world and the type of problem-solving and analysis needed in our multicultural

society” (59). This would also contribute to the task of decolonizing theological education. In Chapter Four, she discusses a collaborative educational ecology between the academy and the church. In Chapter Five, Conde-Frazier suggests that a new paradigm centered on the Holy Spirit’s work can help decolonize theological education and restore agency to the people.

My only quibble is that a subtitle of *Protestant Latinx Contributions to Theological Education* would have been more appropriate as she nowhere discusses Roman Catholic contributions. That, however, does not diminish this treasure of a book, written from Conde-Frazier’s deep experience of and passion for the church and education, in which she urges theological education institutions to be guided by a vision of *misión integral* that permeates each sphere of life. I highly recommend the book, particularly for theological education institutions’ Deans, staff and faculty and directors of Bible institutes or similar programs.

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Ryan M. Panzer. *Grace and Gigabytes: Being Church in a Tech-shaped Culture*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. 16. 184 pages. \$16.

Ryan M. Panzer is clear about the purpose of this book, namely, to understand what it means to tell God's story in a culture shaped by digital technology. In other words, Panzer does not want to provide church leaders and ministers with yet another how-to guide, but to help them consider the underlying values in a tech-shaped culture so that they can minister in a way that ensures that the Gospel is heard. Since the author is a trained theologian with a background in the tech industry, he is in a position to do so. Throughout the book, he stresses the urgency for the church to align with the profound cultural reorientation caused by technology, in particular, the four core values of a tech-shaped culture: *questions, connection, collaboration, and creativity*. However, churches should not align with everything in tech-shaped culture. According to Panzer, they should also function as a counter-culture by extending God's grace into digital spaces, for example, providing virtual experiences of a grace-filled Sabbath, modeling a mindset of humility and empathy that sees to the whole person, and curating content that nurtures spiritual life.

Since it is a question of culture and values, Panzer underlines that it is not necessary to involve much technology in the ministry. It can be high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech as long as it includes the core values. The important thing is the churches' approach to people accustomed to a tech-shaped culture. For example, the traditional learning practices of the church (memorizing statements and doctrine by heart without questioning) clash with a culture that values learning by collaboration and asking questions, in which multiple answers reside side by side. Instead, the church must listen to people's questions before humbly presenting its own answers. An important part of Panzer's argument is that technology should be integral to church life. Online practices are not a replacement but an extension of what the churches are already doing. To this reader, this perspective is one of the strengths of this book. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches found ways to be online churches. However, being an (exclusively) online church is not the same thing as being a hybrid church where online and onsite practices are an integrated whole. In the post-pandemic context of this reader, where churches struggle to combine the best of their online experiences with their old, onsite ways of being church, an easy-to-read and accessible primer such as *Grace and Gigabytes* is a valuable contribution.

As indicated, this book is about ministry in general. However, someone with a specific interest in preaching will find many interesting things to ponder. The author is Lutheran, and, as such, he finds the Word and the Sacrament central to the church being church. The logical consequence for him would be to make (at least) the Word accessible through live-stream. There are no excuses. Panzer writes, "To not stream the worship service is to block those on the other side of the screen from having the encounter with the grace of God" (70). Likewise, the values of a tech-shaped culture connect to the teachings of the priesthood of all believers and humans as the *imago Dei* of God the creator. Consequently, the clergy must stop monopolizing the pulpit and encourage laypeople to preach and tell their faith stories. A reader use to the discussions in the field of homiletics could thus find this book engaging and thought-provoking.

Coming from a scholarly discussion that for at least five decades has promoted interactive dialogue, listening to the parishioners' questions before humbly offering answers, and including the voices of others, a homiletician might also wonder whether these values are solely tech-shaped, or if there are other societal changes that encourage such values in contemporary

culture. To what extent media shapes religion and culture, and religion and culture shapes media is also debated in fields such as digital religion or digital theology. In addition, these scholars also debate if we ought to speak about a singular digital culture or multiple digital cultures since the use of technology tends to differ depending on the cultural context. If this reader were to wish for anything more from this book, it would have been a more thorough discussion of the concept of “a tech-shaped culture” that is so central to the book’s argument.

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Ronald J. Allen, ed. *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God, Volume 1: Theologies of Preaching in Historical Theological Families*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2022. 360 pages. \$41.00; and Ronald J. Allen, ed. *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God, Volume 2: Theologies of Preaching in the Early Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2022. 350 pages. \$43.00.

In his edited two-volume series, *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God*, homiletician Ronald J. Allen provides a comprehensive and important work not only for homiletical scholars and students, but for any preacher seeking to deepen their understanding of their own theological identity in the pulpit. Allen's first goal for this endeavor is to provide "a reference work on the theology of preaching in historical and contemporary manifestations" (Allen, Vol. 1, x). He achieves this by bringing diverse voices to the project in the hopes that readers will discover their own voices within the array. In so doing, they can bring a critical analysis to the theological influences that impact their preaching.

The reader will find Allen's first goal readily visible in the twelve essays found in Volume 1 from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican/Episcopalian, Wesleyan, Baptist, African American, Stone-Campbell, Friends, and Pentecostal traditions. Deftly organized, these essays delve into the theological depths of each tradition. The authors provide historical context while identifying unique characteristics for each tradition and how they manifest themselves in the practice of preaching. They present both influential historical figures and contemporary voices. The essays conclude with future trajectories for preaching within each tradition, a critical analysis outlining the strengths and limitations of each, and bibliographies for further study.

While it may seem curious that he includes the African American theological tradition alongside the more predictable denominational categories, Allen explains that he includes this perspective as a separate essay because "African American preaching does have a particular history that transcends the boundaries of the other theological families" (Vol. 1, x). He rightly notes that "Eurocentric scholars of preaching have tended to give short shrift to African American preaching" (Vol. 1, xi). Therefore, he "invites readers to honor African American preaching in its own right while paying attention to how it plays out in specific theological families" (Ibid). In Volume 2, additional voices expand on that tradition.

Despite the eighteen essays in Volume 2 that present even more diverse voices, Allen himself acknowledges that there are perspectives yet to be presented and movements to be explored. This volume presents the Evangelical, Liberal, Neo-Orthodox, Postliberal, Existentialist, Radical Orthodox, Deconstruction & Weak Theology, Black Liberation, Feminist, Womanist, Latinx Liberation, Mujerista, Asian American, Asian American Feminist, Queer (LGBTQ2SIA+), Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Process Theological families. The second volume is enhanced with the addition of sermons to further exemplify the traditions in praxis.

Within the two volumes of *Preaching the Manifold Grace of God*, readers encounter articles from homileticians as well as scholars from other disciplines. Contributors range from venerated academic elders to emerging voices, all of whom offer valuable wisdom and challenging insights. Each section provides views from different theological traditions both within and outside of denominational categories. The scholars vary not only in their disciplines but in other important intersections of identity such as race, age, ability, sexuality, gender, and nationality. While no book can cover all the various nuances of each tradition, this two-part

series does provide a starting point for preachers to explore their own identity and better understand theological traditions besides their own.

Allen makes it easy for readers to compare and contrast the different traditions by keeping the sections consistent. He also outlines a process of analysis in Appendix A using “Mutual Critical Correlation” that helps preachers consider the influences of these traditions on their worldview. This process points to one of the values of these books for the classroom. For those who teach preaching, both volumes are a welcome resource for guiding students from across the theological spectrum to understand more deeply their own traditions – as well as those with which they are not as familiar.

Seasoned preachers will also find these volumes useful. The annotated sermons in Volume 2, with the explanation of their development and highlighted sections that correlate to the particular tradition, provide a resource that unites the theoretical and practical which is so important to the study and practice of homiletics. Additionally, the suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter provide direction for continued study. Ministeriums might explore the reading lists together to learn more about the traditions represented in their communities and bring new respect and appreciation for the ecumenical diversity among them. While the cost of this two-volume set may be prohibitive for an individual pastor to purchase, theological libraries would do well to invest in these for their students and local pastors who frequent their stacks or eBook holdings.

Regardless of the uses, it is important to remember that the specific worldviews represented in each theological perspective and movement are derived from subjective experiences which may or may not be in alignment with the reader’s experiences of the various traditions. As Allen explains, “These [theological] differences are not arcane matters of interest only to scholars. Differences in theologies of preaching have practical outcomes for preachers and congregations in the respective ways in which they prepare sermons and listen to sermons” (Vol. 1, ix). Allen further states, “As a preacher I need to be as fully conscious as I can about the perspectives that I bring to the sermon so that I can work with their strengths and respond critically to their limitations” (Ibid).

Preaching the Manifold Grace of God holds the potential to help preachers begin to tease out the theological influences on their identities – which may stretch across several traditions. The various perspectives in these books could help a preacher to identify their own unique voice born from the theological origins that have formed their worldview. At the same time, this collection celebrates the unique theological voices formed over centuries and in pulpits across the world: God-given and Spirit-led, in all their beautiful diversity.

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David M. Csinos. *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022. 212 pages. \$19.80.

In *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church*, David M. Csinos challenges the existing divisions of different age groups who worship in the church and advocates for an all-age approach by connecting two long-separated fields: preaching and intergenerational ministry. Csinos, who is a practical theologian teaching at Atlantic School of Theology in Canada, blends theology, biblical hermeneutics, and homiletic theory to create a radical intergenerational approach to preaching. Providing a substantial foundation and practical guidance for intergenerational preaching in addressing social crises such as COVID-19, Csinos's work offers thought-provoking ideas and inspiration for preachers and faith formation ministers, as well as church members.

Csinos divides the book into three parts. In chapters 1 to 4, he lays the foundation and outlines the features of intergenerational preaching. He argues that an intergenerational preacher should strive to testify to and witness God's revolutionary love in the Scripture; empower the transformation of perceptions and imaginations among the preacher, community, and the world; and create space for every church member to encounter God in a new way (35-36). To ascertain the communal aspects of preaching, Csinos surveyed more than twenty faith practitioners in various countries and denominations. Based on their responses, he suggests eight hallmarks for intergenerational preaching: a gospel for everyone, mindful use of language, mutual formation, Bible-centered, honoring diversity, inviting active participation, creative theological interpretation, and the presence of the Spirit (75-87).

In the second section from chapters 5 to 7, Csinos expounds the content of intergenerational preaching by introducing six creative styles of leading an all-age service that were used by six church leaders in their own contexts. These six styles are: crowdsourcing the message, talking the message out, sharing faith stories, preaching the liturgy, preaching as cocreation, and participating in the gospel (95-153). The styles involve using various techniques such as performing arts, LEGO bricks, storytelling, silence, co-creative arts, and active participation. Through the works of these leaders, Csinos stresses the importance of the entire congregation interpreting, speaking, and experiencing the gospel together (168). In the final section, Csinos offers some concrete ideas for readers who seek to shift their church's culture and practices from "an adult-centric monologue" to an inclusive experience for all (161). In the last chapter of the book, Csinos uses the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study to highlight the potential of intergenerational ministry to respond to real-life challenges and guide people through the "new normal" (175).

Csinos's writing style is both lively and accessible. This book showcases his abilities as a creative minister who can contribute to academia with his sharp pastoral vision. Csinos brings forth a concrete intergenerational preaching model that is supported by practical exercises, questions, and personal examples, making this book a valuable resource for ministers, church leaders, and laypersons alike. Another strength of this book is its embodiment of communal involvement in preaching. Drawing insights from preachers and faith members around the world, Csinos presents a diverse view of intergenerational work that can benefit church leaders of varied social locations. Such a collaborative act further highlights the new possibilities that intergenerational preaching may create by bridging the gaps between young and old, as well as homiletics and intergenerational ministries.

While the book is filled with inspiring intergenerational principles and practical examples from contemporary leaders, some readers may desire to read a sample of an intergenerational sermon from the author. This would have been a helpful addition in the last chapter to illustrate how preachers can sensitively address crises like the pandemic. All in all, this book is timely and insightful. It is a call to invite *all* church participants to shake the status quo of the church and envision a better future where people of all ages can come together to worship God as one.

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Tyshawn Gardner. *Sacred Anthropology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022. 188 Pages. \$22.99.

In *Sacred Anthropology: Prophetic Radicalism for Pulpit and Pew*, Tyshawn Gardner invites pastors and parishioners to adopt the radically prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ through both preaching and living. Sacred anthropology uses a prophetic methodology in which humanity and their social relationships are examined through the lens of Scripture for the purpose of affecting a biblical response to justice issues. For Gardner, sacred anthropology brings together a critique of the social order with biblical truth for the sake of employing a prophetic response to the racial ills of the world. Gardner asserts that “through the power of the Holy Spirit, prophetic radicalism is the key to unlocking the closing doors of equity, justice, and prosperity” (6).

In chapter 1, Gardner lays the foundation for a theology of sacred anthropology by exploring the relationship between cultural and theological anthropology. Cultural anthropology examines historical and cultural data for the sake of understanding humanity and social relations. Gardner uses cultural anthropology as a tool for understanding race and racism as an outgrowth of sin and the causes of inequity in the U.S., as well as a resource to help preachers understand the people who listen to their sermons. Theological anthropology is a hermeneutic that foregrounds the Bible as the main source for understanding God’s purpose for creation and humanity. Together, theological anthropology and cultural anthropology create a sacred anthropology that centers the Bible as the source for a prophetic response to racial injustice.

Chapter 2 presents the prophetic radicalism in the life and proclamation of Jesus Christ as a way of life for the pastor and those in the pew. Applying John Calvin’s notion of Jesus Christ’s theocratic offices of priest, prophet, and king, Gardner contends that through these roles Jesus performed prophetic radicalism by the exposing evil and injustice in the material world of his day (22). Similarly, pastors and congregations communicate to evil forces what is God’s justice through proclamation of the word and the resulting activism.

In chapter 3, Gardner situates sacred anthropology within the work of prophetic radicalism which he argues is necessary for confronting racial injustice. Prophetic radicalism begins with the biblical claim that all humankind is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). From here, he provides four practical steps for “pulpit and pew” to become sacred anthropologists: 1) awareness of one’s own culture and appreciation of the ethnically other; 2) analysis of data about and experiences of the socially disadvantaged; 3) making tangible and measurable amends, and 4) collaboration with other ministries and agencies.

In chapter 4, Gardner builds on the work of Kelly Miller Smith Sr. to argue that social crisis preaching is the primary tool for employing sacred anthropology. Social crisis preaching is about intentionally developing congregations through the power of the Holy Spirit to care about and confront the injustices experienced in their communities (64). Using Aristotle’s modes of persuasion applied to Kelly Miller Smith Sr.’s life and ministry as a model, he establishes the three elements of social crisis preaching as “the descriptive use of language, interdisciplinary content, and pastoral courage” (69).

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to the personal matters of sacred anthropology: suffering and self-care. In chapter 5, Gardner asserts that in the history of the African American church, the work of social justice activism through prophetic radicalism has left many wounded. He invites sacred anthropologists to practice Christian spirituality to sustain them through suffering. Chapter 6

identifies the need for clergy who employ prophetic radicalism to practice self-care as they experience the weariness that results from engaging in the burdensome work of justice.

Sacred Anthropology is a necessary book for pastors and parishioners who are in search of a biblical response to racial injustice. It invites readers to consider the role of Scripture in their assessment of racial injustice as well as in their everyday lives as they work to dismantle social ills in their communities. While Gardner argues that the work of sacred anthropology involves both pastor and pew, his concluding chapter on self-care misses an opportunity to consider how parishioners, too, experience weariness in the fight for justice. It would have been helpful if Gardner had also explored the weariness experienced by those within the congregation who employ prophetic radicalism. Nevertheless, this text is a wonderful resource for those who are committed to preaching and living with the prophetic radicalness of Jesus Christ.

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Jeff Stanfill. *Disastrous Preaching: Preaching in the Aftermath of a Natural Environmental Disaster*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2022. 132 pages. \$23.

In a time when floods, fires, and other disasters are increasing in intensity and frequency, preachers face the question of how to preach in the midst of environmental crises. In his slim, practical volume, Jeff Stanfill offers tools for preachers to guide a congregation through the immediate and lasting impacts of a natural environmental disaster. Stanfill's writing comes from his own experience of leading his congregation through the 2016 flood of his community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He shares compellingly about his own experience of this disaster and offers a framework for how a preacher might lead their own community through a similar experience.

Stanfill's book is thoroughly pragmatic, giving the reader a three-part framework for how to approach preaching after disaster: preach the Bible, preach for the survivors, and preach faithfully. This book is a good and helpful word for preachers thrown into the travails of a natural environmental disaster. It provides practical, theologically-grounded (but not theologically-overbearing) scriptural references that he calls the "5 Biblical Disaster Events." These stories include some that are well-known, like Noah and the Flood, and some that are less familiar, like the story of Jerusalem's famine in Acts. The range of stories Stanfill includes provides different windows into faithful responses to disaster and ways that a community can make meaning in the midst of crisis.

In his section on preaching for the survivors, Stanfill is attentive to the manifold aspects of disaster response and recovery. The effects of a disaster on a church community are not only physical and spiritual. They also include the psychological, sociological, cultural, and communal impacts. A preacher needs to be able to attend to how each of these dynamics are changing in the midst of a disaster and encourage their church to support each other and the broader community as they weather the physical, spiritual, social, and other effects of disasters.

While Stanfill addresses many of the effects of natural environmental disasters on communities, his approach and analysis fall short in regard to justice issues that intersect with natural environmental disasters. So-called "natural" environmental disasters are always a combination of social, political, and meteorological crises compounded by the sociopolitical response. Too often, that response disproportionately affects black, brown, Indigenous, and low-income communities. To get to the root of disaster resilience, recovery, and response, a church must be attentive to the racial and economic conditions of its community. Disaster "resilience" for a church should be understood less as "bouncing back" and more as "bouncing forward" – growing from a disaster in order to build a just, equitable, beloved community.

The most glaring omission in *Disastrous Preaching* is any discussion of the biggest driver of natural environmental disasters: climate change. Throughout the book, Stanfill fails to mention, or even allude to, climate change as a driving force of disasters. In a time when climate change is causing natural environmental disasters to increase in intensity and frequency, it is important for preachers to be able to make the connection between a congregation's experience of a disaster and the way human action is driving climate change. Discussing natural disasters without mentioning or alluding to climate change is like telling the story of Noah without mentioning the human sin that brought on the floods. Or preaching on the Exodus plagues without mentioning Pharaoh's hardened heart. It only tells a portion of the story and leaves out the most important part – the lesson about *why* this has happened and *how* we can work to ensure it does not get worse for ourselves and other communities. To be faithful to God and our

communities requires preaching about climate change when climate disasters happen. This is not just about making a political or theological point. It is about communicating the reality of what is happening in our world so that the community is prepared if, and when, the next climate disaster strikes.

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Lisa L. Thompson, *Preaching the Headlines: Possibilities and Pitfalls*; Working Preacher Books, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2021. 144 pages. \$19.99.

Navigating social issues in one's preaching is sometimes a tightrope walk between saying too much or saying too little, between being "too political" or not being political enough. Preachers need guidance, tools, and models for how to connect the biblical text and their contemporary context in ways that invite conversation rather than shut it down. Lisa L. Thompson's book, *Preaching the Headlines: Possibilities and Pitfalls*, is just the book needed for this time of increasing polarization both within congregations and the communities in which they minister.

In the Introduction, Thompson asks fundamental questions that can guide preachers in their sermon preparation when addressing contemporary issues. These questions connect the anthropological and theological conundrums that often underlie hot topics: "What does it mean to be human? How do we live with integrity? How ought we interact with others, especially those who are different from us? And perhaps most importantly, How do we seek God's presence, guidance, and hopes in the midst of it all?" (6).

With these questions in mind, Thompson lays out the guiding assumptions of the book in chapter 1, including the fact that preaching misses the mark when it fails to name the biblical and theological values that guide our faith lived out in community. At the same time, she is careful to note that "No border exists between pastoral care and the pursuit of justice, setting the world right-side up and calling out the chasm between the world as it is and could be" (17). In other words, it would be inaccurate to say that a sermon addressing social issues from a faith perspective is prophetic rather than pastoral because, in fact, they are bound up together. Thus, when the preacher engages their congregation (and beyond) as collaborative partners in discerning the relationship between faith and contemporary challenges, they can be guided into appropriate proclamation when they follow some basic instructions: "recall all that you know about faith, pay attention to this thing in the world, and now say something about it" (27).

In the next three chapters, Thompson takes on the topics of race, gender, sex, abilities, and other bodily matters ("Fleshy Parts," chapter 2); religion, money, and politics ("Taboo Conversations," chapter 3); and environment, land, and borders ("Struggles for Belonging," chapter 4). Each of these chapters follows the same logical progression to lead the reader first behind and beyond the headlines in order to discuss tangible matters, tensions, and risks. This is followed by exploring faith through examining tangible changes, faith talk, and possibilities for preaching. Thompson models forthright interrogation of topics such as violence against vulnerable bodies while bringing a theological framing to bear, in this case, a robust theology and Christology of the flesh. A consummate pedagogue, Thompson implicitly demonstrates how a preacher might approach social issues by deftly weaving timely news stories together with solid scriptural, ethical, and theological critique and reflection.

At the end of each of these three chapters, she offers helpful and practical questions that can inform a preacher's sermon development based on fundamental values that transcend partisan politics. The last chapter includes powerful sermon excerpts that illustrate how to apply the principles of the book. Thompson precedes each sermon with an explanation of her exegesis and contemporary application. She also includes a behind-the-scenes peek at her rationale in choosing illustrations and rhetorical techniques, as well as outcomes of the sermon.

In the homiletics classroom, an instructor could use *Preaching the Headlines* as the basis of an assignment for students to craft a sermon addressing a controversial topic in a sermon. For

the practicing preacher, one might envision an eponymous three-part sermon series taking each of the chapter themes in turn. For an even richer and robust sermon preparation experience, the preacher could invite a group of parishioners to read each of the chapters and discuss how the sermons might be shaped by the guiding questions, biblical approaches, and theological frameworks. This kind of collaboration would truly embody the spirit of Thompson's work by building bridges of understanding, trust, and mutual prophetic discernment.

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Keri Day. *Azusa Reimagined: A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022. 232 pages. \$28.

In *Azusa Reimagined*, Keri Day offers a vital consideration of the intersectionality of race and gender with theological and economic concerns. However, what truly sets this work apart is the centering of the 1906 Azusa Revival, an event critical to the growth of Pentecostalism in the United States, as a revolutionary example of Black religion, and an authentic explication of Pentecost, both interpretive postures rarely taken by white or Black religious scholars.

Through the Azusa Street Revival, Pentecost advanced a radical resistance to the new Pentecostalism of racial capitalist thought as promulgated through the Philadelphia World Fair of 1876 and the Chicago Columbia Exposition of 1893. Both of these events represent a hijacking of the Pentecost narrative, promoting a vision of the United States as uniting people across racial boundaries and depicting whites as benevolent deliverers of the deviant and bestial non-white communities who desperately waited for white America's salvific interventions. This use of the World Fairs illustrated the narration of colonial histories while also silencing historical complexities that challenged this narrative of white power (30). For Day, the new Pentecost of racial capitalism represented a gross malformation of the egalitarian vision of ancient Pentecost (34). *Azusa Reimagined* rejects readings of the Azusa Street Revival as operating with the norms of white evangelical orthodoxy. The doctrinal constraints of white evangelical orthodoxy could not accommodate the slave religious practices central to the Azusa Street experience or render those slave religious practices "legible within the grammar of Christian orthodoxy" (60). Rather, Azusa is read as "a radical intervention into the racist character of Christian orthodoxy" (60). *Azusa Reimagined* provides intriguing perspectives on the ways the Azusa Street Revival critiqued "American Democracy under racial capitalism" (147) and the "gross materialism that abounds in charismatic, Evangelical, and neo-Pentecostal churches today" (151). However, what I found most compelling was how *Azusa Reimagined* uses the people and practices of the Azusa Street Revival to illuminate the truly radical nature of this event as witnessed in descriptions of the consequential role of Black women in the revival and on the life of William Seymour. These women represented a repudiation of the racial commodification of Black women's lives in a marketplace that held so many black women captive to domestic roles in white households. Day continues her emphasis from *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* to note both the economic and racial constraints on Black women while also drawing critical attention to the agency and impact of these women on Black religious movements and institutions. These Black women of the revival are understood for their role in resisting the racialized construction of their being and agency and the patriarchy present within the white and black communities.

Additionally, *Azusa Reimagined* offers a critical treatment of erotic desire as a co-conspirator with the "racist and capitalist structure of domination in America" (103). This use of erotic desire implies that racial capitalism should be understood as categories and conditions that are not simply ideological but also experiential at the level of feelings. Concomitantly, there is an examination of the Azusa's counter-narrative of erotic desire as a space of resistance through its "creation of emancipatory moments in response to the white racial bonding early capitalist practices depended upon" (103). This idea of the erotic as a category of consideration offers fascinating possibilities for examining the consequences of racial and patriarchal structures as directed against both women and LGBTQIA communities in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Within this book, there is the presumption of the perceived intentionality of the religious practices of the Azusa Street Revival as conscious choices against racialized commodification of black life or its deformed understanding of Pentecost. Even those who would embrace this revolutionary reading of Azusa's religious practices may challenge this presumption of intentionality. Or some may perceive this work as centering white religious or economic perspectives that render the religious practices of the Azusa as only reactions to whiteness. However, I believe there is a more than adequate rebuttal to both of these concerns in this book. For those who share the author's interest in the radical instincts of Pentecostalism, its consequence on racial capitalism, or the intersection of the white Pentecostal vision, this is a vital addition to your library.

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Maurice J. Nutt CSsR, *Down Deep in My Soul: An African American Catholic Theology of Preaching*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2023. 240 pages. \$24.49.

Maurice J. Nutt's *Down Deep in My Soul: An African American Catholic Theology of Preaching* is a comprehensive, engaging, and helpful aid to any preacher inside or outside of the Catholic context. In his book, Nutt aims to articulate the gifts and promote the resources found within the Black preaching style for those who will preach in African-American Catholic settings. From the African-American slave experience to the current struggles of racial injustice, Nutt articulates the origins and emphasis of Black spirituality and how it still has powerful effects today. His book shows the ways Black preaching, a cornerstone of the Black spiritual experience, is a gift to not just the Black community but to the church at large. Through church documents and church history, Nutt wields a compelling argument of the unique ties of Catholic and Black culture in ways that bring new life to the homiletical conversation and form a Catholic theology of preaching that could be useful for priests, professors, scholars of homiletics, as well as the average Catholic parishioner interested in learning how to preach the gospel within their daily context.

For priests, Nutt offers a compelling argument for how the Black preaching tradition could aid the current need for better homiletical practice within parishes. A key part of his recommendation addresses homily preparation and execution. To address the impact and need for good preaching within the Catholic context, he offers tools and techniques that are staples of the African-American preaching tradition, revealing insights into better use of the lectionary, addressing sermon structural concerns, and encouraging the use of Black literary sources as methods of successful homily preparation. Nutt uses examples including dialectical and tonal techniques that hone compelling and prophetic preaching not often seen in the wider Catholic context. In doing so, he shows how dynamic preaching of the Word can make the Eucharist a moment of better-recognized celebration for everyone in the pews.

For teachers/scholars, this book offers a survey of the core curriculum of Black homiletical practice. Nutt succinctly covers David Buttrick, Eugene Lowery, Henry Mitchel and other homiletics essentials while putting them in conversation with names like W.E.B. Du Bois, bell hooks, and James Cone. He clearly knows the basis of homiletic practice as he outlines the core structures of narrative practices and the aspects needed to bring a Word not easily forgotten. With this Black homiletical knowledge, he also articulates how Black spirituality uniquely ties into the Catholic experience naming how documents like *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (the U.S. Bishops 1982 document meant to improve the state of preaching in the Catholic Church) promote the need for better preaching. His inclusive coverage of the topic, both ecclesial and evangelical, makes this a thoroughly researched look into the practice of preaching in the Catholic context that would make this book an asset to any preaching classroom syllabus.

Lastly, for the edification of the average Catholic, Nutt tells the tale of Black Catholic history weaving in stories of resilient parishes, prominent Black Catholic voices, and anecdotal examples from Pope Francis's pastoral preaching style. He brings into contemplation a way to find one's unique voice that goes beyond the clerical bounds, even including a section on when and where lay preaching is beneficial within the Catholic context. This book is sure to help any Catholic wanting to preach more powerfully as well as help any Catholic church enthusiasts wishing to learn more about what makes a good sermon open their ears in new ways to the

homily at their local church. The author clearly aims to prepare all people to evangelize in ways that can be effective both inside and outside of the walls of the local parish.

As a Black Catholic student of theology and education, I found this book not only engaging, but an accurate depiction of the unique gifts and unique struggles of the Black Catholic reality. Chapter by chapter, Nutt describes relevant stories, ecclesial documents, and community-based insights that are often untold assets of the Black and Catholic reality, a small population within the Church with a great impact. This book could be an asset to any classroom, home office, or church office interested in a dynamic theology of preaching not yet named within the Catholic context. This book is the articulation of a Black Catholic theology of preaching that many of my homiletic classes have been waiting for, and I'm grateful that students can learn from it in the years to come.

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Kwok Pui-Lan. *Postcolonial Politics and Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021. 261. \$ 24.21 (paperback).

We are currently living in an era of irony. On the one hand, the world is more connected than ever before, yet on the other hand, we are witnessing the emergence of a new Cold War between global superpowers, as well as political polarization and division within our own nation and society. National and international politics now have an influential role in shaping and reshaping people's lives, for better or worse. Kwok Pui-Lan, a renowned Asian American postcolonial feminist theologian, responds to the changing geopolitical situation, particularly in the Global South, by bringing her postcolonial wisdom to the intersection between politics and theology. She offers a way to develop a political theology that embraces postcoloniality.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 delineates the contours of Kwok's political theology of postcoloniality. In chapter 1, Kwok unearths the genealogy of political theology and points out that central concepts such as secularism, sovereignty, and governmentality have been based on a Christianity-focused and Eurocentric bias. She argues the need for an alternative approach by locating political theology in close proximity with non-western religious traditions. In chapter 2, Kwok traces the construction and development of the concept of religion and reveals its entanglement with empire and its colonial project. The notion of religions itself has been loaded with racial and economic ideologies, and thus, the study of religion needs to be interdisciplinary and cross-cultural, attending to multiple intersections of religions and larger contemporary political issues. Chapter 3 examines how the understanding of sexuality in colonial discourse was imbued with racial obsession and affects the understanding of the sexuality of Jesus through the lens of postcolonial queer theology. To dismantle and subvert the symbol of the one phallic God, postcolonial sexual theology needs to overcome binary thinking or "thinking bisexually" and reexamine the body and sexuality from diverse religious and cultural traditions. In chapter 4, Kwok gives particular attention to the relationship between Christianity and empire in the American context. She sheds light on how the notion of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism has its roots in Christianity and how Christian churches and leaders have influenced Americans' attitudes toward China. Kwok urges Christian theologians and ethicists to challenge empires and churches to reclaim their prophetic stance.

Part 2 elucidates the postcolonial reality of the Asia Pacific, shifting geopolitical relations in the region due to the rise of China, and the development of diverse postcolonial theologies in the Asia Pacific as examples of resisting and intervening in neocolonial and imperialist politics in the region. Chapter 5 explores contextual theologies (such as minjung theology in Korea, Homeland Theology in Taiwan, and Asian American feminist theology) as ways of doing postcolonial theology in East Asia. Kwok points out deimperialization, decolonization, de-Cold War thinking, reconciliation, and peace as critical themes for postcolonial theology in the region and beyond (107). In Chapter 6, Kwok discusses how transnational globalization has reshaped the Asia Pacific and particularly the lives of Asian women. Due to the development of immense transnational networks and increasing movement of people and capital across borders, a binary construction of identity, such as the West and the Others or identity construction by essentializing one particular trait, is no longer possible. Kwok highlights the need for transnational feminist theology that fosters fluid and hybrid identities of Asian and Asian American people to resist and disrupt colonizing and imperialist discourse. In chapter 7, Kwok provides and critically examines a concrete account of the Hong Kong Protests as a case study for articulating postcolonial political theology.

Part 3 of this book explores postcolonial practices related to theological pedagogy, preaching, interreligious peacebuilding, and ecojustice. In chapter 8, Kwok critiques the Eurocentric nature of teaching theology, which she argues persists despite the demographic shift of Christianity from the global North to the global South. She proposes reclaiming the public nature of doing theology and suggests that teaching theology in a global world should aim to educate students to become global citizens and leaders. Chapter 9 offers implications of postcolonial theory for preaching and provides practical methodology for postcolonial preaching. Kwok defines the purpose of postcolonial preaching as creating a Third Space that enables "both preacher and listener to imagine new ways of being in the world and to discern God's grace for the victims of history and for the marginalized" (158). In chapter 10, Kwok debunks dominant myths about religion that hinder peacebuilding and shows how these myths are rooted in colonialism. Religious traditions have diverse and rich theological, symbolic, and ritualistic resources for peacebuilding, and a postcolonial approach helps to promote interreligious dialogue without drawing a binary line between "us" and "them." In chapter 11, Kwok engages with the issue of ecological justice and examines how the anthropocentric views in Western Christian theology and mission have supported and perpetuated ecological imperialism. She argues that in the age of the Anthropocene, Christian mission needs to expand its focus from the salvation of the soul to the care of the whole creation by developing planetary consciousness and solidarity (193).

This book is a collection of revised essays that were previously published; yet Kwok's postcolonial theological insights remain relevant and timely for our current global political situation, in which Sino-American competition has intensified and many predict an inevitable clash of civilizations. The dominant framework for understanding tension between global superpowers is the "us/them" binary, as both the US and China compete for hegemony. Without an alternative approach to the situation, Christians and pastors cannot carry out their prophetic tasks in the public square, engage in peacebuilding in multireligious and multicultural contexts, and they are vulnerable to becoming agents of empires. While this book is not a homiletic book, it is an invaluable resource for preachers. It offers a critical lens for preachers to understand the complexity of postcolonial political situations of our time and the ongoing influence of colonialism in political and theological discourse. Additionally, it provides postcolonial practices that resist the threats of empire and create a space in which people can reimagine themselves towards a different possible future based on postcolonial hope.

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Antonio Eduardo Alonso. *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021. 188 pages. \$28.00.

Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life addresses the complex and unavoidable commodification of the sacrament. Antonio Eduardo Alonso's book argues resistance is not the only approach to religious consumerism. He notes the inherent materiality of the Eucharist and sees hope in God's continued work through the sacrament despite its commodification.

Alonso places his work in conversation with various approaches to culture and consumerism in the church. He includes helpful interludes that illustrate concrete examples of commodification. After introducing his approach, the first interlude describes his abuela's home altar. A collection of mass-produced prayer booklets, religious art, and mass distributed authentic bottles of Lourdes water appear to clutter abuela's altar. Yet, these commodified objects were essential parts of her faith.

Chapter 1 focuses on the liturgical theology of Geoffrey Wainwright, William T. Cavanaugh, and Vincent Miller. These authors share an ethical need to resist consumer culture, but they differ in their liturgical response. Alonso identifies the logical limits of resisting commodification in liturgy that exists in a material world, let alone a consumer culture.

The second interlude illustrates these limits through the historical commodification of hymnals and song books. Liturgical renewal after Vatican II required new genres and languages, new songs, and new collections for a variety of audiences. Alonso described the personal connection he has with some of these commodified hymnals. Despite the consumer culture that created them, God was still present and active within the songs of his youth.

Chapter 2 draws on the work of Michel de Certeau and Walter Benjamin to look for God's active presence in everyday consumer practices. Alonso uses Certeau's understanding of tactics as practices that exist within the structural strategies of the culture around them. A tactical resistance to commercialism does not change the culture or create a new one, but instead, resistance exists within the culture. This is where hope exists as a theological aspect of everyday lives in a commercialized world.

A third interlude follows chapter 2 with a focus on everyday consumerism and the commodification of technology. This is, perhaps, the most familiar commodity of the twenty-first century. Alonso uses Apple's advertising campaigns to illustrate the culture of "thinking differently" in which resistance itself becomes a commodity (84). Still, God is actively present in and through the products of resistance.

Chapter 3 brings contemporary liturgical theology into the conversation with a specific focus on the formative nature of liturgy. Alonso argues that liturgical theologians often rely on the social sciences to prove their theories. As a result, they lack empirical evidence of formative change. Alonso points to historical evidence of Eucharistic practices that were reflected, and even formed by, the culture of the time.

The fourth interlude illustrates the historical evidence of commodified Eucharist in the production of communion bread. Once a liturgical ritual practiced in religious communities, the baking of Eucharistic bread became a commercial business after Vatican II. The Cavanaugh Company quickly became the bread of choice for many congregations, while still responding to the theological needs of their consumers. The bread shared at Christ's table became a commodity in a consumer world, yet we do not doubt the efficacy of the bread.

The final chapter of Alonso's work brings together his previous arguments and illustrations to consider "what it means to celebrate the Eucharist in a commodified world" (7). The material nature of the elements requires each celebration of the Eucharist to be realized through the bread and wine on a specific table, at a specific time and place, with specific people. In this sense, the Eucharist can never fully exist outside a commodified world. Ethical sourcing, labor, transportation, and sharing the meal should be everyday practice, yet even in the absence of resistance, the Eucharist still conveys the grace of God.

While Alonso writes from a Roman Catholic perspective, scholars and religious professionals from many Christian traditions will identify with the challenges raised in *Commodified Communion*. The book raises important questions at the intersection of contemporary culture and the liturgical practice. According to Alonso, liturgy cannot escape the commodified world in which it exists, but God's actions in and through imperfect commodities and imperfect people offer the promise of Eucharistic hope.

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Yara González-Justiniano. *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022. 164 pages. \$95.00.

Can a church be a well of hope that quenches people's thirst for justice? How do the practices of the church shape a hope that liberates the people marginalized by recurring colonialism, skepticism, and desperation? *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica* provides theoretical and qualitative analysis of hope and offers a constructive model that puts hope at the center. In this book, readers will find hope springing from the practices of the Puerto Rican churches that attempt to overcome evils and misfortunes.

Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica is published in the series Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in Religion and Theology. This series challenges colonial biases in religions, the academy, and faith communities and pays special attention to voices, practices, and epistemologies from the margins. As one of the contributors to this series, Yara González-Justiniano adds a voice from Puerto Rico and walks us to a hope that reflects Christian theology and practices. Yara González-Justiniano, born in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, is Assistant Professor of Religion, Culture, and Psychology with emphasis in Latinx Studies at Vanderbilt University.

None of the setbacks generated by haunting colonialism and natural disasters, including hurricane María in 2017, could dampen an unwavering hope in Puerto Rico. Delving into hope-centered stories of Puerto Ricans and their communal practices, González-Justiniano attempts to develop a model that can eliminate colonial sins, including systems of economic exploitation, social stagnation, and theft of land, which have pervaded Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans' lives. Centering hope as a practice of liberation, she conducts ethnographic research in diverse congregations in Puerto Rico. Based on her analysis of ecclesial practices and grassroots actions in local communities, she evaluates how churches in the lands of Puerto Rico attempt to participate in and articulate a hopeful future. Having evaluated how the political system in Puerto Rico oppressed hope, González-Justiniano constructs a sustainable model of hope.

Yara González-Justiniano divides her work into three parts: theoretical framework, qualitative research, and model construction. In the first part, she provides a historical analysis of churches' practices and their relationships with grassroots activism, setting a framework that shows the relationship between hope and its challenges in Puerto Rico. Drawing attention to the arguments of Rubem Alves, Ellen Ott Marshall, and Jürgen Moltmann, she pinpoints the connection between a theology of hope and various practices that churches embrace to articulate what hope is and how they participate in raising hope for their wider society. Putting hope as an axis of her framework, she weaves theology and practice of hope. In the second part, she provides qualitative research. González-Justiniano evaluates individual interviews, site visits, field notes, sermons, public statements, and websites. Her research shows how congregations have practiced and communicated hope within wider society. This descriptive aspect of her research enriches an understanding of hope and provides vivid examples of hope represented in practices of solidarity and hospitality. Integrating the first and second parts, González-Justiniano develops a model for hope in the third part. Considering hope as a new hermeneutic, she articulates a practical theology of hope that emphasizes liberative epistemological and practical aspects.

In particular, Yara González-Justiniano's work offers several homiletical implications. She argues that preaching should express how a Christian theology of hope actively engages in practices of hope within a church and a wider society (88). Assuring the significant role of

preaching in congregations of Puerto Rico, she shows how pastors proclaim a decolonial Christ, bind people in hope, and encourage them to enact and be a hope for their community. She avers that preaching provokes hope within a community and provides solidarity that overcomes the doctrinal and political differences within a community. In this regard, preaching leads people to join in actual practices of liberation engineered by collaborative imagination. Preaching should invite people to communal work and partnership beyond any kind of boundaries (112).

In this book, Yara González-Justiniano finds and builds hope from and for a particular context of Puerto Rico. Yet, her yearning for hope is not limited by geopolitical and theological boundaries. If you are looking for a sustainable and practical hope, put this book on your must-have list. It will provide you with rich wisdom and reassuring encouragement that strives to eliminate the systemic evils and misfortunes of colonialism. Also, it will guide you to create hope-full practices for a life of thriving.

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Suzanne Keeptwo. *We All Go Back to the Land: The Who, Why, and How of Land Acknowledgements*. Edmonton, Alberta: Brush Education, 2021. 432 pages. \$24.95.

The increased recognition of the history of colonization by non-Indigenous/non-Native settlers has introduced a new element to Christian worship within the North American context, known as Land Acknowledgments. *We All Go Back to the Land* by Suzanne Keeptwo, who identifies as Métis (Algonkin/French and Irish), is a forthright practical resource for preachers and worship leaders. Leaders who identify as First Nation/Indigenous/Native or settlers will discover more than just a how-to guide in this book. Settlers especially will find a wealth of insights for building relationships with Indigenous Peoples and gaining understanding of the history of colonization and its impact on all creation. While Keeptwo's contextual basis for *We All Go Back to the Land* primarily draws from experiences within the traditional unceded, and unsurrendered territories of the Original Peoples within what is known as Canada and specifically the Inuit, First Nation, and Métis peoples, it is also comprehensive enough to be a resource for any audience.

Suzanne Keeptwo presents the wider implications for this book in her aim to “uphold the practice of Land Acknowledgment as a way for Original peoples to celebrate and honor their ancestors’ veritable relationships to the Land as it shaped the inherent Indigenous worldview” (3). She further clarifies that it “is not only a guide as to how Land or Territorial Acknowledgements should be done and by whom, but why they should be done. Land Acknowledgements should be done to bring awareness and ... to help heal the Land so it will sustain us and those who come after us” (4). And finally, she says, “This book aims to determine who the Land Acknowledgement is for, how it should be done, and who is responsible for delivering it” (7).

Keeptwo's storytelling style reflects her cultural values that invites the reader into a conversation with a community of Indigenous elders and scholars. For further study she lists her sources in a Bibliography packed with a wealth of information. The chapters follow a narrative train of thought making the detailed table of contents especially helpful.

The first chapter, “Original Land, Original People” provides a historical view of colonization. By interweaving the history with the social norms (protocols), religious rituals, and legal and political structures of the various Nations, Keeptwo disrupts tendencies to universalize Indigenous worldviews. She also meets her aim to explore the ways in which the Original Peoples relate to the Land. Additionally, by presenting the stories of stolen land and broken treaties she introduces settler preachers and worship leaders to the reasons for a Land Acknowledgement.

The next three chapters stress the importance of relationships. Chapter 2 “The Land Acknowledgement: An Educational Opportunity,” provides a detailed review of the ways in which various institutions failed to create Land Acknowledgments that honored the voices of the Original Peoples. Keeptwo follows this up with her third chapter, “The Land Acknowledgement as Cultural Practice,” which provides practical advice for how to create a Land Acknowledgement that honors the Original Peoples and the Land. The fourth chapter, “Invest in the Land Acknowledgement,” further elucidates the ways in which Acknowledgements and the process of their creation can lead to Indigenous knowledge becoming exploited, commodified, and misrepresented through cultural appropriation and provides suggestions for settlers to build trustworthy relationships.

The subsequent chapters offer practical advice. The fifth chapter, “Identity Politics,” is a comprehensive case study of the Métis peoples and their loss of culture due to a number of systemic injustices which in turn highlights the complexity of identity for all peoples. The sixth chapter surveys, “Examples of Problematic Land Acknowledgements,” while chapter 7, “The Land Acknowledgement as Artistic Practice,” introduces the reader to a variety of ways in which Acknowledgements can become living entities through art. In the concluding chapter, “We All Go Back to the Land,” she shares some practical approaches for creation care and provides lists of Indigenous organizations for settler preachers and leaders to support in their ongoing effort to forge relationships with Indigenous peoples based in actions, not just words.

This book provides a valuable resource for Seminary Chapel staff, preachers located in the academy and the church, and worship leaders who want to acknowledge the lands their institutions occupy and begin building relationships with the Original Peoples of those lands. It invites preachers and worship leaders to move beyond words and to engage with tangible actions. Furthermore, it can guide preachers in an interrogation of the influence of the colonial narrative on their homiletic and hermeneutic turning them toward a liturgical praxis that honors The Original Peoples and the Land.

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