

The Role of Imagination in the Preaching of Henry Ward Beecher

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Abstract: *This article argues that Henry Ward Beecher’s use of imagination in preaching serves as a significant contribution to the field of homiletics. A renowned pastor and three-time lecturer at Yale’s distinguished preaching series, Beecher relied on his extensive creativity to not only shape the contours of his sermons, but also to impact a nation in the throes of Civil War. Though not always appreciated, Beecher models the need for, and practice of, imagination in Christian pulpits.*

Introduction

Much ink has been spilled on the life and ministry of Henry Ward Beecher. He is one of the most written about American preachers in history.¹ In the most recent biography on Beecher, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Debby Applegate presents an exhaustive study of his life.² Exposing his ministerial successes and scandalous revelations, Applegate leaves little treasure for researchers to unearth in the life and ministry of Beecher. But one significant area regarding Henry Ward Beecher that has not received worthy attention is his understanding of the role of imagination in preaching.

This article argues that imagination played a pivotal role in Henry Ward Beecher’s preaching theology, methodology, and delivery. Not only did Beecher employ imagination in the development and delivery of his sermons, but he also sought to pique the imaginations of listeners in order to help them see his message and better implement it in their daily lives. First, this article briefly explains the meaning of “imagination” for purposes of evaluating Beecher’s life and contribution to homiletics. Second, a brief biographical sketch of Beecher reveals his reliance upon imagination from his early years to his last days. Third, Beecher’s preaching theology derives from an imaginative understanding of Christianity that drives him from the chains of his father’s Calvinist roots into the freedom of his “Gospel of Love.” Fourth, Beecher draws from his imagination in his sermon methodology, avoiding exposition of Scripture and rationalistic structures. Fifth, his delivery derives from his hope that the listeners’ imaginations will cause them to see and feel the message he desires to convey. Finally, a major contribution to the history of preaching by Beecher comes from his *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (hereafter, *Yale Lectures*), where he devotes a section of one of his lectures to the indispensable nature of imagination in preaching. At the conclusion, the reader will see that imagination played a significant role in Beecher’s preaching, demonstrating the need for homileticians to further mine the riches of Beecher’s use of imagination in sermon preparation and delivery.

Imagination Defined

To assess Beecher’s use of imagination, one must understand the meaning of

¹ Edgard DeWitt Jones, *The Royalty of the Pulpit: A Survey and Appreciation of the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching Founded at Yale Divinity School 1871 and Given Annually (with Four Exceptions) Since 1872* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951), 19.

² Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York, NY: Three Leaves Press, 2006).

imagination. Scholars often opine on the nature of imagination in conjunction with a modifier. In one of his works, Walter Brueggemann addresses the meaning of “prophetic imagination.”³ Donald Juel advocates for an understanding of “scriptural imagination.”⁴ Vikki Bell argues that one should affirm feminism through use of the “feminist political imagination.”⁵ With these modifiers, one might get the impression that imagination is too broad and complex to understand in the abstract.

Even in the abstract, however, imagination can be readily grasped and employed. In *The Theological Imagination*, Gordon Kaufman notes that the imagination gives humans “the ability to envision possibilities which do not actually exist” or “the power to entertain the merely possible.”⁶ People can use these images to bring clarity and order. For example, Kaufman defines theology as the development of human life through a symbolic “picture.”⁷ Kaufman also argues that humanity’s concept of God comes from the imagination through the use of images along a continuum from the “highly mythical and symbolical” to the “more abstract notion of the cosmic ground of our humanity.”⁸

Like any other tool, humans use imagination positively and negatively. Julian Hartt asserts that image is a “machine,” that can express either hope or despair.⁹ While Kaufman offers a positive use of imagination, Amos Wilder recognizes that there is a field of art and literature that “evidences the morbid and the diabolical that are parasitic on the life of the imagination.”¹⁰ Genesis 6:5 notes a time where humans only used the imagination for evil.¹¹ Millard Erickson posits, “Through their imagination they can picture themselves in some other geographical location. One can imagine oneself to be someone other than who one is, occupying a different position in society or being married to a different partner. Thus, we may desire not only what is actually available, but also what is not proper or legitimate.” Thus, imagination in its abstract essence is a tool that one may wield positively or negatively in order to envision mental pictures or symbols of the real, the possible, or even fantasy.¹² With this broad understanding of imagination, Henry Ward Beecher’s life demonstrates how one can form images and symbols, both positively and negatively, and transfer them into the imaginations of sermon listeners.

Biography

On June 24, 1813, Henry Ward Beecher was born into one of the most impactful families in American history.¹³ But despite his family’s extraordinary influence on their culture, Debby

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 13.

⁴ Donald H. Juel, *Shaping the Scriptural Imagination: Truth, Meaning, and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Shane Berg and Matthew L. Skinner (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 2.

⁵ Vikki Bell, *Feminist Imagination: Genealogies in Feminist Theory* (London: Sage, 1999), 1.

⁶ Gordon Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 60.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹ Julian Norris Hartt, *Theological Method and Imagination* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1977), 14.

¹⁰ Amos N. Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), 37.

¹¹ Andrew R. Page, “The Role of Imagination in Expository Preaching,” *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 23: 156.

¹² See Page, “The Role of Imagination,” 151–178 for a more thorough definition of imagination for preaching.

¹³ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Changing Emphasis in American Preaching: The Stone Lectures for 1943* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1943), 58.

Applegate claims that “Henry’s success was the most surprising.”¹⁴ Beecher experienced significant struggles in school and in his spiritual life. Two early events shook Beecher negatively, creating corresponding negative uses of his imaginative development.

First, his mother, Roxana, died while he was a toddler. Disenchanted with his stepmother, Beecher began to re-imagine his mother based on stories and letters from Roxana. Applegate claims that Beecher used his imagination to create out of Roxana “a paragon of unconditional love, his own guardian angel.”¹⁵ In his mind, Roxana became “the Perfect Mother, around whom he built him a fantasy world where he could and did find refuge.”¹⁶ Despite his imaginative response, this negative circumstance significantly impacted his future relationships, including his relationship with God.

Another negative experience that impacted Beecher’s imagination involves a sermon. His father, Lyman Beecher, was of the Old School Calvinist persuasion and sought to catechize his children accordingly.¹⁷ As part of his catechism, the doctrine of a literal hell stood out in young Beecher’s mind.¹⁸ Under the preaching of a visiting minister, he heard the ghastly tale of a “bad boy” who got sick and upon his death bed had visions of the “Devil” chasing him. Already acquainted with the fears of death and hell, Beecher’s young imagination ran wild with similar nightmares. He declared, “I saw forty devils in the air. I dreamed of them. I did not for years shake off the feeling of terror which that conversation produced in my mind.”¹⁹ His use of imagination for these negative experiences later shaped Beecher’s ministry, particularly his views of Calvinism and the doctrine of hell.²⁰

However, not all of Beecher’s imaginative exploits in childhood were negative. When his father sent him to Mount Pleasant for school, Beecher met his first true friend, Constantine Newell. Applegate claims Constantine “captured Henry’s eager imagination.”²¹ Constantine’s foreign descent and infant English speech were endearing for Beecher, who found real intimacy with Constantine. Another positive connection from Mount Pleasant that would shape his future career was his relationship with John E. Lovell. Lovell was a public speaking instructor. Since his mother Roxana had passed away, Beecher had difficulty speaking. Lovell gave him drills that Beecher practiced religiously and he eventually found his place through oratory to share his imagination with the world.²²

Beecher attended Amhurst college and joined the Athenian Society, a debate club of sorts, putting his newfound oratory skills to work. He also further developed his imaginative capabilities by reading about social and political issues in preparation for these debates.²³ He even used his imagination in his practice of delivery, running through the woods shouting at trees and rabbits.²⁴ He continued to improve these skills while at Lane Seminary, giving himself to the

¹⁴ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

¹⁶ Paxton Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait* (New York, NY: The Press of the Reader’s Club, 1942), 10.

¹⁷ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 28, 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²² *Ibid.*, 65–66.

²³ Michael Duduit, “Henry Ward Beecher: Preaching Action Over Theology,” in *A Legacy of Preaching*, eds. Benjamin K. Forrest, Kevin L. King, Bill Curtis, and Dwayne Milioni (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2:196.

²⁴ Hibben, *An American Portrait*, 34–35.

study of “popular literature, debate, and poetry.”²⁵

The details surrounding Beecher’s “conversion” to Christ are somewhat fuzzy, according to Applegate. At the age of fifteen, Beecher was called upon to pray for a revival meeting at Mount Pleasant but he declined out of fear. At the next meeting, however, he summoned the courage to pray and enjoyed the opportunity.²⁶ From this experience, Beecher felt that he had been “saved” and decided to join his father’s church.²⁷ When called upon to take communion for the first time, however, Beecher inwardly waffled as to his true conversion.²⁸ Applegate presents several other stories of Beecher’s potential conversion, though Beecher never could nail down a precise moment.²⁹ Nevertheless, Beecher determined that his responsibility, as the son of Lyman Beecher, was to enter the ministry.³⁰

Beecher’s first pastorate was at First Presbyterian in Lawrenceburgh, Indiana.³¹ A short time after the move, he married Eunice Ballard, his fiancée for seven years.³² While the congregation was minuscule, he developed pastoral habits that served him throughout his career. “He laid out his goals and strategies, he carefully composed and numbered all his sermons, and kept an elaborate journal with notes on what he preached, who came, and how it went over.”³³ Unfortunately, the church did not pay much and Beecher found himself embroiled both in debt as well as ecclesiastical controversy among Old School Calvinists.³⁴ But before leaving, he began a study of his Methodist competition, ultimately imitating some of their tactics. He began to preach with more “spirit,” and he hid a condensed compilation of his notes in his pulpit Bible to feign an air of spontaneity.³⁵

As a result of his new strategies, an Indianapolis businessman recruited Beecher to pastor the Second Presbyterian Church. It was during this time that Beecher began to re-imagine his purpose for preaching. While he was relatively popular, he was disappointed with the lack of conversions from his sermons.³⁶ During a study of the New Testament, he began to understand that the apostles first searched for “common ground” among listeners in a way that motivated them to desire change. Based on this hermeneutic, Beecher believed that preaching was not to present orthodox doctrines “but to motivate the audience psychologically.”³⁷ The focus of his sermons shifted from legalized systems to “Christ as lover.”³⁸ Regardless of this re-imagined “Gospel of Love,” Beecher still held to some Calvinist and moralistic tendencies, particularly in his first written work, *Lectures to Young Men*.³⁹ But his preaching became more lively and accepting among his congregation. He fed his listeners with illustrations developed by his

²⁵ Michael Souders, “Truthing in Love: Henry Ward Beecher’s Homiletic Theories of Truth, Beauty, Love, and the Christian Faith,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41 (2011): 320.

²⁶ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 80–81. According to one story of his salvation experience, Beecher came to Christ through an experience in the woods. Another tale of his conversion places Beecher at a fireplace in his room during a time of devotion.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³² *Ibid.*, 142.

³³ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153, 158.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁹ Dudit, “Henry Ward Beecher,” 198.

“overflowing curiosity, his voracious reading, and warm friendships with everyone.”⁴⁰

Beecher’s last ministerial stop was at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. It was here that Beecher peeled the remaining scales of Calvinism and doctrinal preaching from his preaching and proudly proclaimed that he would be preaching on real issues for real life. Applegate quotes Beecher as saying:

“If I remain here and you come to this church, it must, at the commencement, be distinctly understood that I wear no fetters, that I will be bound by no precedent, and that I will preach the Gospel as I apprehend it, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, and I will apply it sharply and strongly to the overthrow of every evil, and to the upbuilding of all that is good.”⁴¹

Whatever issues came to his mind and percolated within his imagination, Beecher would form into his Plymouth Church messages. Through his sermons and lectureship during his time at Plymouth Church, Beecher gained nationwide fame, even attracting the attention of President Abraham Lincoln, who called on him to deliver a speech at Fort Sumpter.⁴²

Unfortunately, Beecher was not just famous for his sermons at Plymouth Church. Several biographers and historians have already delved into the numerous potential scandals and affairs he allegedly had with women in his congregation.⁴³ One such scandal was publicized due to a criminal adultery trial. Theodore Tilton, a colleague and congregational member, charged Beecher with committing adultery with his wife, Elizabeth Tilton. Beecher was ultimately acquitted, but the scandal haunted Beecher the rest of his days. As a result of this scandal, Beecher’s detractors attacked his “Gospel of Love” as dangerous and immoral.⁴⁴

Even during this trial, Beecher was still revered among many. He was asked to give the inaugural Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching, which he entitled *Yale Lectures on Preaching*. In fact, Yale invited him for three consecutive years, an honor only bestowed on him.⁴⁵ In his lectures, he addressed the entire spectrum of the preaching ministry. But one of the more original points of preaching he discussed, as will be developed further, is the need for imagination in preaching.

Besides his preaching ministry, Beecher was also praised as a social reformer. Many recognize Beecher as a staunch abolitionist. He helped collect rifles to send to Kansas to ward off Southern occupancy. The press coined these rifles, “Beecher’s Bibles.”⁴⁶ He also pushed for anti-slavery political candidates, preached against slavery, and held mock “slave auctions” to purchase their freedom. Beecher also joined the fight for women’s rights. In addition to his pulpit work on the subject, Beecher sought to create the first library for women in Brooklyn. He gave a speech on behalf of the library and helped raise funds necessary to open it.⁴⁷ His work in social

⁴⁰ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 170.

⁴¹ Ibid., 206.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Ibid., 421. Referencing a statement from Victoria Woodhull, Applegate writes, “Every Sunday morning Henry Ward Beecher stood in his Brooklyn pulpit and preached to a dozen of his mistresses.”

⁴⁴ Altina L. Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 6.

⁴⁵ Dudit, “Henry Ward Beecher,” 205.

⁴⁶ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 281–282.

⁴⁷ Sandra Roff, “A Room of Her Own: The Woman’s Library, a Footnote to New York City Library History,” *Information and Culture* 49 (2014): 450, 457.

reform further solidified his renowned reputation as a progressive and beloved reformer.

On March 8, 1887, Henry Ward Beecher passed away. Brooklyn mourned his passing, flying all flags at half-staff.⁴⁸ His legacy, though marred by scandal, continues in the sermons and lectures he provided. His imagination allowed him to engage the imaginations of hearers and readers to a more thorough understanding of the “Gospel of Love.”

Beecher’s Preaching Theology

Beecher’s preaching theology was not static. It was progressive. In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher advocated that a true preacher will eventually find one’s own theology: “Every man who is fit to preach will, before many years, begin to have an outline of his own theology very distinctively marked out.”⁴⁹ This claim certainly proved true for Beecher himself as his imaginative understanding of doctrine transitioned from the fearful visions of his father’s Old School Calvinism to his re-imagined view of Jesus Christ as lover.

Beecher did not view God through his father’s lens of fear. To Beecher, Lyman Beecher’s views were “fear-oriented and preserved the elite place of the minister in interpreting doctrine.”⁵⁰ Jonathan Edwards, according to Beecher, suffered from the same misguided understanding of God. While he favored Edwards’s emotional and imaginative elements, he decried the dreadful images that his messages imposed upon listeners. In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher asserted:

Great as Edwards truly was, and far in advance of his age in many respects, he yet was unconsciously under the grossly materializing theological habits of the mediaeval schools. The monarchical figures of government in the Bible, and the figures of material punishment, are full terrible enough. But to employ the imagination, as Edwards did, in inventing new horrors for hell, above all, in attempting to picture the Divine Heart as so in love with justice that it rejoices in the merited sufferings of the wicked, was a sad perversion of the functions of imagination.⁵¹

Thus, Beecher attacks Edwards not just for presenting God as a fearful Judge, but for perverting the use of Edwards’s imagination to produce fear through his listeners’ imaginations. In his own preaching, Beecher consistently avoided the subject of hell, and he eventually abandoned the belief of a literal hell altogether.⁵²

Instead, Beecher grounded his preaching theology in a softer view of God. This vision of God likely came from his imaginings about his mother, rather than from his father. Altina Waller claims that Beecher viewed “religion, God, and Christ with feminine gentleness rather than male authority.”⁵³ This claim finds merit in Beecher’s *Yale Lectures*. In noting that preachers should address the atonement, he challenged them to ensure a steady diet of Christ’s love in their preaching as well. In arguing for their attentiveness to this charge, he said, “He shall put his arm around about men, and comfort them as a mother her child. That is the love of God in Christ

⁴⁸ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 467.

⁴⁹ Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (New York, NY: J. B. Ford and Company, 1872), 140. For the sake of historical accuracy, gendered language is retained when quoting Beecher here and elsewhere in this essay.

⁵⁰ Souders, “Truthing It in Love,” 323.

⁵¹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 261.

⁵² Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 21.

⁵³ Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton*, 30.

Jesus.”⁵⁴ Beecher connected his vision of God’s love with an understanding of the motherhood of God. Further evidence of his mother’s influence on his theology includes a discussion of faith in the unseen. He testified:

If I were asked what had been in my own ministry the unseen source of more help and more power than anything else, I should say that my mother gave to me a temperament that enabled me to see the unseeable and to know the unknowable, to realize things not created as if they were, and oftentimes far more than if they were, present to my outward senses.⁵⁵

Clearly, Beecher credits his mother with his imaginative capacity to see beyond physical realities. With her passing while he was a toddler, it is unlikely that Beecher ever learned these traits directly from Roxana. Rather, as mentioned previously, his imagined view of her as a “Perfect Mother” came to shape his understanding of God as a perfect “mothering God.”⁵⁶

Beecher not only possessed a kinder view of God against the Old School Calvinists’ judgmental view of God but he also possessed a higher view of humanity as well. Beecher rejected the Calvinist tenet of “total depravity.” In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher said, “The old theological way of stating man’s sinfulness, namely, ‘Total Depravity,’ was so gross and so indiscriminating, and was so full of endless misapprehensions, that it has largely dropped out of use.”⁵⁷ In one sermon, he explicitly denied belief in this doctrine.⁵⁸ He viewed total depravity with disdain and discouraged its use in preaching. In his *Yale Lectures*, he accused ministers holding to total depravity of “stirring men up to bitterness and resistance.”⁵⁹ Instead, preachers should “tone that down” and focus on appealing to the “nobler side of their (i.e., the listeners’) minds.”⁶⁰

A controversial component of Beecher’s preaching theology involves the purpose of preaching itself. In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher noted that most preachers preach for the glory of God. These preachers serve more as God’s “attorneys,” called to vindicate God for God’s anger, wrath, and judgment on humanity.⁶¹ While demonstrating “sympathy towards God,” these preachers fail to demonstrate any sympathy or sweetness towards humanity.⁶² Beecher even more directly attacks this view in his sermon, “Human Ideas of God.” He argues, “If it is wrong for you to seek your own glory, then it is wrong for God to be a seeker of his own glory.”⁶³ Beecher suggests that overemphasizing the glory of God serves as a turnoff to listeners. The lost would prefer to remain in a state of eternal damnation than serve a hypocritical God who seeks glory while forbidding humanity from doing the same.⁶⁴ This preaching theology represents a clear break from his father’s Calvinistic view of the sovereignty and glory of God as preaching’s

⁵⁴ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 116.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁶ Hibben, *An American Portrait*, 10.

⁵⁷ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 83.

⁵⁸ Henry Ward Beecher, “The God of Comfort,” *The Sermons of Henry Ward Beecher*, First Series (New York, NY: J. B. Ford & Company, 1869), 21.

⁵⁹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 256.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 256.

⁶¹ Ibid., 34.

⁶² Ibid., 34.

⁶³ Henry Ward Beecher, “Human Ideas of God,” *The Sermons of Henry Ward Beecher*, Second Series (New York, NY: J. B. Ford & Company, 1869), 113.

⁶⁴ Beecher, “Human Ideas of God,” 113.

supreme purpose.⁶⁵

Rather than focus on God and God's glory, Beecher believed the purpose of preaching is to transform humanity. For Beecher, preaching serves "to build humanity to live up to its God-given potential."⁶⁶ Preaching for God's glory does not move people and Beecher felt that preaching should inspire change in a listener's life in order for it to prove effective. In his *Yale Lectures*, he tied his preaching theology to his perceived role of apostles in "winning souls."⁶⁷ He asserts that preachers must first rouse a desire in the heart. Once the desire for change has been awakened, the next step is for the preacher to build up the listener until the work is complete. Thus, the preacher's aim is a "reconstructed manhood," one which causes one's congregation to live better and be better.⁶⁸ While this "reconstructed manhood" appears moralistic in practice, it is in line with Beecher's goal of helping people improve their lives through a better understanding of the love of Christ.

This hermeneutic of reconstruction in his preaching theology allowed Beecher to find common ground with some of the positions his father had taken on certain moral and social issues. In fact, Beecher demanded it of preachers in his *Yale Lectures*. He claimed that the preacher has both a right and duty to preach on moral, social, political, and economic issues.⁶⁹ Beecher insisted that the preacher should bathe these discussions in the love of Christ and with a sympathetic spirit toward the congregation. To accomplish this mixture of moralism and Christ's love, Beecher declared that preachers must use imagination.⁷⁰ He had already demonstrated his ability to accomplish this feat, having traveled the country giving lectures on temperance with favorable responses from crowds.⁷¹ Thus, Beecher's practice of implementing moralistic preaching on certain issues matched a preaching theology of producing better people among his listeners.

Beecher's vision of progressive human improvement likely stems from his acceptance of Darwinian evolution over creationism. Beecher presented a sermon series on a form of theistic evolution at Plymouth Church that mingled natural selection concepts with his progressive theological and political ideals.⁷² Beecher did not believe evolution was limited to the development of species. He also held that evolution had a part in God's overall design.⁷³ But he did not hold to all of the original tenets of *The Origin of Species*. Much like his conception of biblical exegesis, Beecher took the parts of evolution that suited his view of audience-centered progressive theology and re-imagined the aspects of it that conflicted with his ideas of free market theory.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Beecher's form of theistic evolution opened the door for another popular preacher to incorporate evolutionary ideas into his modernistic preaching: Harry Emerson Fosdick.⁷⁵

⁶⁵ Dudit, "Henry Ward Beecher," 201.

⁶⁶ Souders, "Truthing It in Love," 325.

⁶⁷ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110–111.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷² Benjamin T. Lynerd, "The Purpose-Driven Darwinist: Henry Ward Beecher and the Theology of Progress," *Political Theology* 17 (2016): 49–50.

⁷³ Harold Miller, "The Voice of God: Natural or Supernatural," in *Preaching in American History*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1969), 220.

⁷⁴ Lynerd, "The Purpose-Driven Darwinist," 68.

⁷⁵ Dwayne Milioni, "The Concept of Self in the Preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 69; Halford R. Ryan, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Persuasive Preacher* (Westport,

An interesting aspect of Beecher's preaching theology that appears largely ignored involves the subject of women preachers. In his sermon, "Do the Scriptures Forbid Women to Preach," Beecher takes the congregation through three competing views prevalent during that time on the subject of women preachers.⁷⁶ The first view is the literal approach, which relies on the plain language of the verse as a bar for women preachers for all time. The second view rejects any limitation on women preachers for all time, claiming that Paul had no authority to render such a restriction. Beecher joins the third view, which sees the restriction on women preachers as limited to the customs and practices of the time of Paul's writing and, therefore, offers no limitation to contemporary preaching by women.⁷⁷ Beecher points to the women leaders and prophetesses of the Old Testament and Peter's Pentecost sermon reference of handmaidens prophesying to argue that Paul is only writing for a specific people at a specific time. He then exposes other Scriptures that he believes preachers conveniently refuse to take literally. With imaginative fervor, Beecher proclaims that the Bible's limited application in this matter represents the "genius of Christianity" and allows Christianity to move the church forward into a new age.⁷⁸

Thus, Beecher developed a progressive preaching theology. Though reared by an orthodox Calvinist, Beecher rejected what he perceived as the harsh, judgmental aspects of God in favor of a tender, motherly God of love. As a result, his preaching sought to build his listeners into the best possible moral and productive Christians as possible. God's love was progressive, changing, and limitless. Where cultures allowed changes, Beecher saw no issue with avoiding doctrinal preaching in favor of a hermeneutic of human progress.

Beecher's Sermon Methodology

Henry Ward Beecher generally avoided expository preaching. In his *Yale Lectures*, he called on preachers to exchange the literal meaning of Scripture in favor of an experienced meaning. He said, "[Y]ou must not shut yourselves up to those germ-forms, with stupid reverence merely for the literal text of the gospel. It is the gospel alive, the gospel as it has been made victorious in its actual conflict with man's lower nature, that you are to preach."⁷⁹ Despite this admonition, Beecher did recognize that expository preaching had value. He set out the benefits of its use, such as: familiarizing the congregation with Scripture, diversity of topics, and protection when preaching on controversial subjects.⁸⁰ Despite his acknowledgement of and recognition of the benefits of expository preaching, Beecher avoided its use in sermon methodology.⁸¹

Rather, Beecher was the consummate topical preacher. He crafted sermons based on an audience-centered preaching theology. In other words, Beecher looked at the needs of the congregation when choosing sermon topics.⁸² How could one determine what the people needed

CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 65.

⁷⁶ Henry Ward Beecher, "Do the Scriptures Forbid Women to Preach," *The Sermons of Henry Ward Beecher*, Seventh Series (New York, NY: J. B. Ford & Company, 1873), 434.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 434.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 444.

⁷⁹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 224–225.

⁸¹ For example, in his sermon "Do the Scriptures Forbid Women to Preach," Beecher spends no time exposing the authorial intent of Paul in the sermon texts.

⁸² Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 474.

to hear from preaching? First, he spent time with people. Instead of spending time in the church office, Beecher often walked the streets of town, frequenting shops and talking with tradespeople.⁸³ By conversing with people, they provided a window into which Beecher could see into their realities. Beecher's imagination took these facts and helped him shape the contents of sermons to cater to the audiences' needs and desires.

The second way Beecher selected topics was through current events. For example, his sermon on whether Scripture prevented women from preaching was born out of a local controversy in Brooklyn. A Presbyterian church minister invited a woman to preach at one of his services. She agreed and preached for the service. According to Beecher's introduction, the decision to invite her to preach "arrested the attention and interested the thoughts of the whole community."⁸⁴ Other than her gender, Beecher found in her no lack of fitness to preach, noting her length of preaching experience and the results she obtained. As a result of the minister's decision to invite a woman to preach, the minister's Presbytery called a special meeting to rebuke the pastor and ordered the churches not to allow any further public preaching by women.⁸⁵ Because of the impact that this current event had on his congregation and the community, Beecher felt compelled to share this topic with the congregation.

Beecher's third method for selecting a sermon topic came from important social issues. Slavery served as a seminal issue for Beecher at Plymouth Church. In "The Church's Duty to Slavery," Beecher boldly condemned the American Church for failing to "meet the necessities of the lower." Christians refused to stand with the slave and "demand justice, and education, and humanity, for the low, and for the lowest."⁸⁶ He charged Americans with selfishness regarding slaves. He attacked preachers who concerned themselves more with losing their positions than taking a stand for the slave in the pulpit. He even decried President Lincoln's advocacy for colonization of the slaves.⁸⁷ Clearly, Beecher advanced the social discussions of the times through his sermon topics.

When it comes to content development, Beecher's methodology serves his imaginative strengths while limiting his exegetical weaknesses. Hughes Oliphant Old points this out, noting that "when he does open his Bible not much light pours forth."⁸⁸ But where Beecher falls short in exegesis, Old recognizes his brilliance in illustrations. Beecher relied on observations from family relationships, work relationships, and the natural world.⁸⁹ Sometimes, to make illustrations more effective, he would insert himself into the story even though he truly had no part in it.⁹⁰ Through his illustrations, Beecher's stories penetrated the imagination of hearers.

To further demonstrate the importance of illustrations to his methodology, one need look no further than his *Yale Lectures*. An entire chapter of his work is dedicated to "Rhetorical Illustrations." He defines illustrations as "a kind of covert analogy, or likening of one thing to another, so that obscure things become plain, being represented pictorially or otherwise by things that are not obscure and that we are familiar with."⁹¹ Beecher argues that a large portion of the

⁸³ Dudit, "Henry Ward Beecher," 205.

⁸⁴ Beecher, "Do the Scriptures Forbid," 433.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 433.

⁸⁶ Henry Ward Beecher, *Freedom and War: Discourses on Topics Suggested by the Times* (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 221.

⁸⁷ Beecher, "The Church's Duty," 220.

⁸⁸ Old, *The Reading and Preaching*, 481.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 481.

⁹⁰ Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 46.

⁹¹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 155.

congregation will only grasp a sermon's point through illustrations.⁹² Stories create an anchor for the hearer to hold on to a portion of the sermon during the week.⁹³ Beecher also commends the use of illustrations to pique the imagination of listeners. By doing so, sermons come alive and make ideas understandable and pictorial. Finally, illustrations give a congregation an opportunity to rest.⁹⁴ Beecher suggests that illustrations touch a different part of the brain than when developing the logical aspects of the message. Thus, one portion of the mind is activated while the other side gets a break. Whether Beecher had any scientific information to support this theory, it certainly was a novel and imaginative suggestion. Clearly, illustrations served as an important and necessary part of his sermon methodology.

The most famous example of Beecher's prowess in illustration comes after one of his sermons. On June 1, 1856, Beecher preached on Luke 10:27, calling on the Plymouth Church to love God and to love their neighbor. After the message, he informed the congregation that he would be performing something for the first time and rooted the coming action in Jesus's teaching on the Sabbath. Thereafter, he called up Sarah, a young slave girl, who was set to be returned to her master unless someone could purchase her freedom. He called upon the church to pay a ransom for her freedom. After a member of the congregation assured the collection of whatever amount of money necessary for the cause, Beecher announced to Sarah that she was free. While there are various accounts and alternative details, there is no doubt that the slave girl's freedom was purchased through the illustrative efforts of Beecher.⁹⁵ Later, Charles Spurgeon commended Beecher for his imaginative illustration that played on the emotional sympathies of the onlookers.⁹⁶ Beecher's "slave auction" illustrations have not gone without criticism, however. He has been attacked for furthering white supremacy by "staging" slave auctions and allowing his congregation to serve as heroic spectators. This participation allowed them to take part in the evils of the South while providing relief to reinforce their self-righteous idealism.⁹⁷ Regardless, this perspective does not diminish the import of Beecher's illustrative capacities in rallying an audience to join as a team in fulfilling his perceived mission.⁹⁸

Beecher's sermon methodology came from a desire to meet the needs of the Plymouth Church audience. Beecher chose topics involving current events and social issues that impacted his congregation or were topics of conversation in the community. While light on biblical exegesis, Beecher relied heavily on illustrations to assist hearers in understanding his argument and to keep them engaged in the conversation. His imaginative methodology led to his popularity as an orator, both at Plymouth Church and throughout the nation.

Beecher's Sermon Delivery

Beecher's sermon delivery allowed his imaginative ideas to be transferred visually and audibly to the congregation. His fiery oratory and outlandish gestures captured the senses of

⁹² Ibid., 157–158.

⁹³ Ibid., 159.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 160–162.

⁹⁵ Wayne Shaw, "The Plymouth Pulpit: Henry Ward Beecher's Slave Auction Block," *The American Transcendental Quarterly* 14 (2000): 335–343.

⁹⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Complete and Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), 48.

⁹⁷ Jason Stupp, "Slavery and the Theatre of History: Ritual Performance on the Auction Block," *Theatre Journal* 63 (2011): 72.

⁹⁸ Frank Decker, "Working as a Team: Henry Ward Beecher and the Plymouth Congregation in the Anti-Slavery Cause," *International Congregational Journal* 8 (2009): 35.

those who listened. While it appeared natural, Beecher conveyed to his Yale audience that sermon delivery must be honed through repetition.⁹⁹ Specifically, one's voice, body location, gestures, and extemporaneous preaching style were strategically used to impart one's message to the congregation.

Beecher saw the voice as an important instrument in the preaching process. He appropriately varied pitch. His tone was methodical and intentional, yet occasionally bombastic.¹⁰⁰ Probably due to his training with John Lovell, Beecher admonished the Yale students to spend time attending to their voices. They should exercise their voices like they would their bodies.¹⁰¹ Beecher even referenced the experiences with Lovell as reason for their need to drill their voices.¹⁰²

Beecher also considered body location as a rhetorical function in preaching. When he preached, he used "his whole body to communicate the full range of human emotions."¹⁰³ Beecher's body location arrested his concern so much that he relocated the Plymouth Church pulpit front and center to the audience so that his body could be more visible.¹⁰⁴ Beecher told the Yale students that the entire body must be involved in preaching. He proclaimed, "But bring him out on a platform, and see how much more manly he becomes, how much more force comes out! The moment a man is brought face to face with other men, then does the influence of each act and react upon the other."¹⁰⁵ Thus, Beecher pushed for preachers to make their whole bodies part of the sermon experience for the audience.

Of course, Beecher demanded an appropriate body location because of the need for gestures. Beecher was renowned for gesturing. His gestures were "dramatic" and included "subtle facial expressions." His movements imitated chewing tobacco or casting a fishing line.¹⁰⁶ As with the voice, Beecher argued that Yale students should drill their gesturing. They should "practice incessantly, so that your gestures shall not offend good taste."¹⁰⁷ Again, Beecher likely learned this militaristic drilling of gesture from Lovell.

As to the manner of sermon delivery, Beecher was an extemporaneous preacher. In fact, he often did not prepare his Sunday morning sermon notes until the early morning of the same day.¹⁰⁸ While the sermons came off as disorganized, they also carried an air of spontaneity. In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher admitted he sometimes wrote his sermons, though not as often as he would deliver them extemporaneously. He offered some benefits of written sermons, such as an appearance of orderliness and allowance for more variety than the memory might hold. He warned, however, that written sermons could come off as stale and unnatural.¹⁰⁹

Beecher only provided advantages for unwritten, extemporaneous sermons to Yale listeners. He spoke of a manuscript as if it were chains, binding the imagination and spontaneity of a preacher in the midst of the audience. He argued that extemporaneous preaching allows more "freedom and versatility."¹¹⁰ In arguing for extemporaneous preaching, Beecher did not

⁹⁹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Duduit, "Henry Ward Beecher," 204.

¹⁰¹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 129.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰³ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 211.

¹⁰⁴ Duduit, "Henry Ward Beecher," 204.

¹⁰⁵ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Applegate, *The Most Famous Man*, 211.

¹⁰⁷ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ Duduit, "Henry Ward Beecher," 204.

¹⁰⁹ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 213.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

argue against preparation. He said, “A sermon should be carefully arranged, and the material thoroughly digested.”¹¹¹ In other words, he taught that preachers should consume the sermon’s information, particularly its main idea, so that the preacher can effectively communicate the message without notes if necessary. According to Beecher, sermons, even delivered without notes, still required work to be effective.

Beecher’s modes of sermon delivery assisted him in conveying imaginative content in compelling ways. He had a pleasing voice, visible body, appropriate gestures, and preached extemporaneously. With theatrical movements and illustrative content, Beecher rose to prominence as a preacher, not only to the congregation but throughout America.

Beecher’s Contributions to the History of Preaching

Henry Ward Beecher contributes to several important historical aspects of preaching. His progressive preaching theology and methodology likely serve as his most recognizable and important contributions, paving the way for future mainline preachers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick.¹¹² Additionally, his political and social contributions, particularly regarding slavery, set an example for churches engaging in political activism.¹¹³ But another important contribution Beecher makes to the history of preaching, particularly to the preparation and delivery of the preacher, is his teaching on the imagination.

In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher claimed that a preacher’s influence in the pulpit depends heavily on the preacher’s imagination.¹¹⁴ In fact, Beecher believes it is “the most important of all the elements that go to make the preacher.”¹¹⁵ Rather than a fleeting fancy or wistful dream, Beecher defines imagination as “the true germ of faith; it is the power of conceiving as definite the things which are invisible to the senses.”¹¹⁶ His conception of imagination is not limited to mental activity. Rather, imagination assists the preacher in helping others be able to conceptually see the thoughts within the mind of the preacher.¹¹⁷

Beecher grounds his theology of the imagination in God’s nature as invisible yet ever-present.¹¹⁸ Thus, Beecher argues the preacher must be inspired by the greatness of God, so one can possess the ability to see the invisible things and proclaim them to an audience.¹¹⁹ He goes so far as to declare that “imagination is indispensable to the formation of any clear and distinct ideas of God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost.”¹²⁰ Reading the words of the New Testament evangelists alone prevents the reader from knowing Christ. One must develop an intimacy, through the help of the Holy Spirit and the power of imagination to experience Christ in full.¹²¹ Once a preacher holds such a conception of Christ in the mind, then the preacher can teach that conception to an audience.¹²²

Due to the variety of listeners in a congregation, Beecher notes the importance of imagination in the transfer of information to the audience. He explains that the congregation may

¹¹¹ Ibid., 214.

¹¹² Milioni, “The Concept of Self,” 69.

¹¹³ Old, *The Reading and Preaching*, 485–486.

¹¹⁴ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 109.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 110.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 110.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 111.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 111.

¹²¹ Ibid., 113.

¹²² Ibid., 113.

range from children, who possess vivid imaginations, to adults, who likely lack a robust imagination.¹²³ Therefore, it is the preacher's responsibility to imaginatively convey Christ to all hearers in such a way that they feel a sense of God's presence. To Beecher, historical and grammatical exegesis alone is insufficient and ineffective.¹²⁴ Such dry preaching, to him, does not present a "living Christ."¹²⁵ Without this understanding of imaginative and intimate connection, such preaching, in Beecher's estimation, is only about Christ, rather than "preaching Christ."¹²⁶ Thus, real preaching occurs when the imaginative concept of Christ within the preacher transfers to the imagination of the listener.¹²⁷

Beecher recognizes that some ignore, or even discourage, the use of imagination. He believes the problem is a lack of understanding.¹²⁸ But when properly understood in its connection with faith to see the invisible, he not only commends it for every Christian but recognizes it as necessary for ministers.¹²⁹ He proclaims that any preacher making use of imagination need not worry about topics or wonder whether the audience is listening.¹³⁰

Beecher not only lectures about imagination, but he demonstrates it in his sermons. A strong example of his imaginative prowess can be seen in the sermon, "The Duty of Using One's Life for Others."¹³¹ First, Beecher uses his imagination to deviate from the literal text of the Scripture to the point he wants to make. While his text in Titus 2:14 addresses the fact Jesus "gave himself for us," Beecher uses this verse as a springboard to argue that giving one's life while alive is more valuable than dying for another.¹³² He argues, "Christ gave, not his life, but himself. He gave himself in dying; but he also gave himself in living."¹³³ Likewise, Beecher suggests, "We give our life best, not when we die, but while yet we are living."¹³⁴

In his argument, Beecher engages the imaginations of his hearers through an illustrative contrast of wealthy New Yorkers with public police officers.¹³⁵ The descriptive detail pours from Beecher's imagination. Regarding the rich, he uses vivid terms such as heap, hoard, and selfishness.¹³⁶ He creates a picture of the rich squeezing a cluster of grapes, representative of society, into their cups.¹³⁷ Beecher wants the audience to see the poor riddled with starvation and homelessness while the rich "build palaces and fill them sumptuously."¹³⁸ By contrast, he conceives a picture of a police officer in the same ward of the rich, who protects and serves the community.¹³⁹ Through this imaginative contrast, Beecher wants the audience to see the distinctions between those who are rich and selfish against those who are serving the community.

¹²³ Ibid., 114.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 114.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 114–115.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 115–116.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 117.

¹³¹ Henry Ward Beecher, "The Duty of Using One's Life for Others," *The Sermons of Henry Ward Beecher*, First Series (New York: J. B. Ford & Company, 1873), 1.

¹³² Ibid., 1.

¹³³ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3. While not an exceptional use of exegesis, one can admire the thought and imagination Beecher employs to get to his argument from this text.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 4.

Later in the sermon, Beecher uses an illustration of the local mill to challenge the congregation to be busy serving during the week, not just on Sundays at church. He tells them that a brook near the mill appears “more musical on Sunday ... because the mill stands still, and the brook, having nothing to do with its water, gurgles over the rocks, and flounders over the dam, and makes a thousand times more merry noise than on any other day.”¹⁴⁰ One can almost see the water flowing through this descriptive and imaginative illustration. By contrast, on Mondays, the mill comes to life and the musical brook disappears among the bustle of workers, even though it is still performing its function. Likewise, Beecher charges, Christians come to church on Sunday to “play in the spirit,” but they get lost during the work week, neglecting the piety necessary because they are busy building their careers rather than serving others.¹⁴¹ Any listeners in the congregation would not only receive the logic behind the argument, but with the picture of the local mill and brook in their imaginations, they could take a picture of the message home with them.

Thus, Beecher offers a definition, description, and examples of imagination in preaching as strong contributions to the history of preaching. In his *Yale Lectures*, Beecher sets the parameters for his understanding of imagination and how to apply it in preaching. In his sermons, his content proves the beauty and *pathos* one experiences through the use of imagination. Homiletician and pastor John Stott, in *Between Two Worlds*, concurs with Beecher’s point on the importance of imagination in preaching. Stott writes, “(The) power of the imagination is one of God’s best and most distinctive gifts.”¹⁴² Thus, Beecher’s contribution impacts Stott’s teaching on imagination in preaching over a century after his *Yale Lectures*. Likewise, preachers today can follow Beecher’s teaching and example that imagination can and should be utilized in sermon preparation and delivery.

So What?

While Beecher’s imagination proved effective in his sermons and lectures, one might rightly ask why a study of a preacher from the 1800s is relevant for us today. Fortunately, this study of Beecher’s imagination presents three opportunities for preachers and homiletians.

First, this study reveals an opportunity for further study of Beecher’s imagination in sermons. One of the more important calls to action is challenging researchers to either dig deeper into a topic or suggest an additional area of research.¹⁴³ Since the focus of this article is on Beecher’s contribution of imagination through his *Yale Lectures*, only a handful of Beecher’s sermons are evaluated. After gleaning from Beecher’s teachings on imagination, students of homiletics can cull Beecher’s volumes of sermons to unearth his imaginative gems. Such additional research will solidify Beecher’s lectures on this subject, as well as open the door for more writing on the subject of imaginative preaching.

Second, this article challenges contemporary preachers to engage the imagination in preaching. Beecher declared to the Yale audience of preachers that imagination is “the most important element” for the preacher.¹⁴⁴ Certainly, preachers are busy with ministry, leaving little

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 238–239.

¹⁴³ Suzanne Watts Henderson, “Highlights and Call for Further Exploration,” *The Journal of Interreligious Studies* 36 (2022): 53–58.

¹⁴⁴ Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 109.

time to think, reflect, or imagine. Beecher's challenge, however, can serve to nudge preachers to allow the busyness of ministry to serve as a catalyst to develop their imaginations for preaching. While a preacher can and should develop imaginative capacity through poetry and the arts in the study, Frank Thomas argues that preachers can develop imagination through empathy.¹⁴⁵ Empathy requires seeing, which means being among the people. Like Beecher, preachers who spend time with their people will have a greater wealth of pictorial stories to narrate in preaching. Such storytelling will result in far superior preaching than depending on bland, overused illustrations.

Finally, this study of Beecher challenges preachers to use their imaginations outside of the confines of their preaching. Beecher not only imaginatively preached against slavery, but he also relied on his imagination to act out against slavery. The post-sermon slave auction, though critiqued by some, developed in Beecher's imagination and ultimately transferred into the imaginations of those who donated funds to set a slave free.¹⁴⁶ This use of the imagination is similarly championed by Frank Thomas. Thomas argues that preachers must use their imaginations through their physical presence in places of injustice and for more than just a "photo-op."¹⁴⁷ Where injustice abounds, so the preacher's imagination must much more abound. By studying Beecher's use of imagination outside of preaching, preachers today can commit to thinking deeply and imaginatively about how to fight oppression, as well as place a picture in the imaginations of their congregations to encourage them to join the fray.

Summary

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate that imagination played a pivotal role in the preaching of Henry Ward Beecher. A brief biographical sketch explained how his familial and theological influences shaped Beecher's reliance on imagination in his preaching. Beecher's rejection of his father's Calvinist orthodoxy in favor of his re-imagined "Gospel of love" defined his preaching theology. He poured his imagination into his sermon methodology, constructing sermons that were less doctrinal and exegetical but more emphatic and creative. His delivery was rooted in his understanding of human nature, pushing his imaginative visions into the minds of his listeners. His teaching and preaching on the imagination serve as an untapped resource for future scholars to mine. Additionally, preachers today can follow his example of developing their imaginations and implementing them into their sermon preparation and delivery.

¹⁴⁵ Frank A. Thomas, "Preaching and Moral Imagination," *Encounter* 78 (2018): 69.

¹⁴⁶ Stupp, "Slavery and the Theatre," 72

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, "Preaching and Moral Imagination," 68.