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Delighting to Preach: Teaching Towards Affective Formation

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Abstract: *Learning to preach is an activity of holistic formation involving a student's intellect, behavior, and emotions. Yet it is this last component – affective formation – that often proves most difficult to address in a required preaching course. How does one form student affections for preaching so that they come to delight in the practice when they only take the course as a requirement? What does it mean to teach in ways that aim at affective formation? What activities can students do to demonstrate formation of the affections? This paper draws on Jonathan Edwards's account of the religious affections to develop strategies for affective formation within the context of a preaching course. It reflects on one pedagogical strategy used by the author for teaching toward affective formation in preaching courses. Overall, this article seeks to foster a conversation on the importance of affective formation for preaching and pedagogical strategies for bringing it about.*

Introduction

"I only took this course because I had to, but now I can't imagine my ministry *without* preaching." If you have heard a student make such a claim about your preaching course, you know how energizing and encouraging it can be. A student reluctantly enters your class because it was either required or was the only course that fit a busy schedule. But by semester's end, they have experienced a change of heart. They become passionate about preaching and see it as a central aspect of their burgeoning ministerial call and identity. I saw this happen frequently as a teaching assistant, and as a professor have even been blessed to experience it in my own classroom.

But I must admit, somewhat embarrassingly, that my reaction in those instances had always been surprise: "*How did that happen?*" The change the student describes is not what I was aiming for. Rather, my focus was on the skills and strategies of sermon design and development. I sought to help students "carry out the fundamental components of sermon exegesis, construction, and performance" and "exercise strategies for planning and carrying out a contextually sensitive and theologically rich preaching ministry."¹ But what this student described was not a skills-related acquisition of abilities but a *conversion*. Their disposition toward preaching had changed. They were now *excited* by it, they *wanted* to do it more, and they *desired* for this practice to become a major component of their ministry. I was teaching for intellectual formation or knowledge acquisition, and what happened was the formation of the student's desires and affections so that they now delighted in the practice of preaching.

If learning to preach is not merely about proper techniques for sermon construction but an activity of holistic formation, then it is important to understand how that student's conversion happened.² Or stated more technically, if learning to preach is about entering a particular way of life – *the preaching life* – then those of us who care deeply about the formation of preachers and ministers (whether a professor of preaching, a field placement supervisor, or a ministry mentor)

¹ These were stated learning outcomes in my course syllabus.

² See, Michael Pasquarello III, *We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken: A Grammar of the Preaching Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) and David Ward, *Practicing the Preaching Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019).

must incorporate a holistic vision of formation for such a life in our pedagogy.³ Such formation includes *affective formation*, the cultivation of a student's disposition and affections so that they come to delight in the preaching life.

In this article, I take an initial step in exploring the place of affective formation within the context of a preaching course. I deploy a transversal approach to engage Jonathan Edwards's work in the religious affections.⁴ This examination focuses on what the affections are and their role in the practice of preaching and the cultivation of a preaching life.⁵ With this understanding of the affections in hand, I explore what affective formation would entail and share one pedagogical strategy I have begun to incorporate in my own preaching courses. Above all, I hope this paper fosters a conversation about the important role of affective formation within our homiletical pedagogy.

Edwards, Affections, and the Preaching Life

To gain conceptual clarity, I turn to one of the most well-known theological articulations of the affections: Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise on Religious Affections*. Edwards's account of the affections and their role in the Christian life – what Edwards calls “true religion” – provides us with a point from which to consider the place of the affections in the preaching life and how we might cultivate them in our students.⁶ Edwards wrote *A Treatise on Religious Affections* in 1746, and it represents his most mature reflection on true and false religion, and the place of human affections within the Christian faith.⁷ This was an important question in Edwards's time, as the effects of the First Great Awakening swept through New England and many wrestled with the aftermath of its revivals.⁸ As someone deeply involved in those revivals, Edwards sought both to

³ While my work with preachers and students occurs primarily within the context of the preaching classroom, I also recognize that many others contribute to the holistic formation of ministers and preachers. And while the context of our interactions may differ – the preaching classroom, the field supervisor meeting, or the coaching session with a mentee – they all share a responsibility for helping to foster the affective formation of the preacher and minister. Thus, while I write from the perspective of one who operates within the context of a formal preaching classroom (though not only there), I also believe affective formation – what it is and how one pursues it – is vital for anyone who works with those either training for or already serving in a preaching role.

⁴ My use of a transversal model allows me to focus on the question of affective formation. I engage Edwards's thinking on that issue as a means of addressing this question about affective formation and how we might develop intentionality around its formation in the preaching classroom. A transversal model of engagement allows me to engage Edwards as a resource on this specific question without committing me to a comprehensive defense of, or agreement with, his total theological project. The area of agreement is around a particular question or issue rather than adherence to a set of prolegomena assumptions. On this method, see Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁵ My exploration focuses on Edwards's most popular work on this topic, *A Treatise on Religious Affections*. This is not the only place in which Edwards explores the concept of the affections and their role in the human life but it is the most focused and it serves as a helpful starting point for my purposes. For a more comprehensive account of Edwards's conception of the affections, see Ryan Martin, *Understanding Affections in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: “The High Exercise of Divine Love”* (New York: T&T Clark, 2019).

⁶ The reader can understand this article as establishing a link between Edwards's vision of the place of affections in the Christian life and my understanding of the role of affections in the preaching life. Thus, I draw an analogy between the Christian life and the preaching life, seeing the preaching life as one specific and unique form of life within the broader category of the Christian life.

⁷ Kyle Stroble, “Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* (Eds. Michael Allen and Scott Swain; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 295.

⁸ Martin, *Understanding Affections in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 161.

defend the genuineness of the Christian faith produced within them against critics and to curtail some of the excesses that the movement produced.⁹ Polemical in nature, Edwards's *Treatise* argues for the vital role of religious affections in "true religion." Doing so, he also considers how to discern good from bad affections and thereby cultivate the affections of true religion. For our purposes, it is important to see how he defines the affections, understands their function, and perceives the path of their development.

Edwards on the Religious Affections

Edwards's account of the affections occurs within his larger theological anthropology. According to Edwards, human beings are both soul and body, with powers corresponding to each.¹⁰ The soul has a rational power by which it perceives, discerns, views, and judges. The soul also has a power which enables it to be "inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to them, or is disinclined, and averse from them."¹¹ This second power is what Edwards identifies as the affections. Thus, for Edwards the affections are an act of the will; the "more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul" (WJE 2:97). It is by the affections – by our inclination to pursue or avoid – that we act toward what reason perceives. While Edwards does not equate the affections with emotions, there is an emotive element to them. Through reason we perceive something, and by our affections our will is shaped to act toward the thing perceived in some way. We perceive the good, for example, by our reason. And through our affections, we desire that good and move our will in ways that influence our actions toward that good. Thus, it is by the affections that we demonstrate our values and our attitude toward the world we perceive.¹²

This connection to the intellect and will is what leads Edwards to distinguish the affections from the passions. Passions, according to Edwards, are those responses that correspond to our more basic and animal-like qualities. These passions are fleeting in nature and duration, lasting only momentarily (WJE: 2: 98). Passions are more "sudden" and "violent," so that the rational intellect is overpowered by them and can lead one in ways contrary to reason and the intellect.¹³ In contrast, Edwards maintains a direct relation between the religious affections and the human intellect so that "the affections themselves must be understood in partly cognitive terms."¹⁴ The affections move in concert with the intellect, leading one to act in accordance with reason.¹⁵ This relationship

⁹ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is far from Edwards's only attempt to address these questions. Rather, the work is the final in a ten-year process of reflection on the results of the Great Awakening.

¹⁰ Kyle Stroble, "Jonathan Edwards's Affective Anthropology," *JFSFSC* 16.1 (2023): 34-35. In many ways Edwards's theological anthropology mirrors that of the medieval resources on which he draws. For Edwards and his theological forbears, there is a clear hierarchy between the soul and body. The soul is the location of the "higher powers" of reason, intellect, and affections. The body is the site of the "lower" powers of the appetites. Thus, a chief aim of formation is bringing one's body and its appetites into alignment and under the control of the soul and its powers. For a more comprehensive discussion of the body and soul, and their relationship within Edwards's theological anthropology, see Martin, *Understanding Affections in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 88.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:96. From this point forward, citations from Edwards's writing will appear in the paragraph with the abbreviation WJE, followed by volume and paragraph number.

¹² Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, "The Moral Significance of Religious Affections: A Reformed Perspective on Emotions and Moral Formation," *SCE* 28.2 (2015): 153.

¹³ Ryan Martin, *Understanding Affections on the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: "The High Exercises of Divine Love"* (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵ Edwards contrasts the passions and their "beastly" quality with the affections which are an aspect of the rational functioning of our personhood as those made in the divine image. The affections belong to the soul which, when operative, guide the body toward its proper end. Whereas the passions belong to the body and oppress the soul.

to the intellect is what enables both the duration of the affections as they move us toward or away from a thing perceived. Because the affections are tied to the intellect, they are concerned with our first principles and ultimate goods. As such, the affections play in the background of our emotional lives, enduring through various stages and circumstances, and thereby shaping our decisions and actions in the world.¹⁶

Edwards makes a comparison between the place of the affections within the moral and religious life and our romantic relationships. In romantic relationships, there is an initial disposition in which we are drawn to another. And indeed, this initial passion is an important aspect of a relationship's development; without it the romantic relationship will never occur or endure. Yet one clearly does not feel that same passion all the time in the relationship with their partner. At some point, the love that exists in a romantic relationship shifts from the passion of the early stage to a more habitual disposition from which acts of kindness and love flow. It is this more habitual disposition, this more sustained orientation, to act toward a thing perceived – a partner, a moral good, God – that Edwards names as an “affection.”

The Function of the Affections

Edwards argues that our affections are an irreplaceable component of the Christian faith and what it means to live the Christian life (WJE 2:95).¹⁷ This is because the Christian faith, properly understood, is self-involving. It is not enough to assent on an intellectual level or to have a general knowledge of the content of Christian faith and doctrine. True belief, true religion, means that the one who believes has experienced the reality of God and God's work so deeply that they perceive God's activity as occurring *for them*. They become participants in the faith they believe rather than mere “knowers” of that faith's content. This experiential quality, for Edwards, leads to his claim that to truly belong to the Christian faith is to have one's entire being engaged by it. This involves our affections. One comes to perceive the realities of the Christian faith in such a way that they are not only moved intellectually, but affectively and emotionally. Edward notes that the “true religion” which God requires of us “does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wouldings, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his Word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion” (WJE 2:99). This is the case, Edwards claims, because the affections are the wellspring from which come our behaviors and actions. Human beings are not simply “brains on a stick” who make decisions through coldly rational logic.¹⁸ Rather, our affections play a prominent role in the ways we make decisions, in what we assume about the world, and in the actions we undertake. We do not first “reason” and then act; our affections are at work all along the way, shaping our reason and moving our wills to act.

Additionally, true religion requires a person's affective involvement because the call of discipleship is rarely straightforward or easy. Our previous example of an enduring marriage

Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards's Affective Anthropology,” 37.

¹⁶ It would be an interesting study to compare Edwards's notion of “affection” with the Thomistic account of “habit.” On some of the similarities, see Oliver Crisp, “Moral Character, Reformed Theology, and Jonathan Edwards,” *SSCE* 30.3 (2017): 262-277.

¹⁷ It is important to note that Edwards makes a distinction between those affections we have as human beings made in the image of God and those affections to which we awaken through the Spirit's activity. That distinction, while important to a larger vision of Edwards's conception of the affections, is not important for my general account in this section. For more on that distinction, see Martin, *Understanding Affections on the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*.

¹⁸ James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Habit of Power* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 1-26.

relationship makes this clear. At some point, if the relationship is to survive and thrive, it will require a shift from the purely romantic attraction in which it originated (though it may always be present) to a more enduring form of love with the affections at its base. Romantic, passionate attraction will not remain constant. And in those moments, what enables the relationship to endure are formed affections that enable one to continue loving another, even when they may not “feel like it,” choosing the sometimes difficult or arduous tasks which enduring love requires. In the same way, living out the Christian faith is not merely a matter of knowing at an intellectual level what we ought to believe or what we ought to do or being driven by an overwhelming passion. For it is often the case that we have a general idea of what the call of discipleship entails in any given moment, yet we struggle to fulfill that obligation because the action would be unpleasant in some way.¹⁹ Edwards notes this was the case for early Christian communities. As these communities grew in their faith, they faced immediate threats of persecution and ostracism by those outside the community. This is where one’s affective disposition becomes vital. It is through one’s affections that one can strongly will a good and act to bring it about, even though the actions might be difficult or sorrowful in some way.²⁰ And this allows one to experience genuine Christian love and joy even as one endures hardships that result from living out one’s faith in hostile circumstances. Thus, the affections are known by their “lively” and “vigorous” quality as they are expressed in our lives (WJE 2:98). By being sustained and powerful movements of the soul toward a thing perceived, we can live out the callings of the Christian life in the face of trial and hardship.²¹

The Formation of Affections

The connection of the affections to the intellect leads Edwards to suggest that they are not set in stone but are open to development over a lifetime. Our affections are influenced by any number of factors, including “the distemper of melancholy, doctrinal ignorance, prejudices of education, wrong instruction, false principles, peculiar temptations, etc.” and he is clear that all of these can hinder reason and the affections (WJE 2:180). Additionally, sin can exercise a disordering effect, such that one’s affections are deformed.²² Thus, Edwards’s account of the affections includes the assumption that while we are born with affective potential, our affections are something we will develop over a lifetime, with the help of the Holy Spirit and a host of other aides. Furthermore, that development will be, in some sense, intentional.

So how does one make the journey of affective development? As Strobel notes, a key aspect of Edward’s account is that someone’s affections cannot be moved to a more holy or developed state unless there is something better with which to replace the immature or deformed affection.²³

¹⁹ John Bowlin, *Tolerance Among the Virtues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 106-159.

²⁰ This dynamic leads Edwards to note that possessing well-formed affections does not mean that one will not experience negative feelings. Such negative feelings, according to Edwards, have their place and can lead one toward the good. Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards’s Affective Anthropology,” 47.

²¹ Edwards begins the treatise by reflecting on a passage from 1 Peter and the ways that love and joy for Christ – two primary affections – seemed to only increase for the Christian community in the face of trial and persecution. This leads Edwards to see that whatever challenge the community faced, the power of their affections – their love and joy – must be greater still (WJE: 2:94).

²² While Edwards did not have this language in his time, we might also reflect on the role of addictions in deforming the affections.

²³ Edwards uses the metaphor of “weaning” to speak of this development. We do not wean children from nursing without, at the same time, introducing other foods as a replacement. In the same way, one’s affections are not moved to the better without the immature or deformed affection having something ready to replace it. Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards’s Affective Anthropology,” 47.

This leads Edwards to take a developmental approach to the affection through which one embraces “what is better so that one’s body and soul are reformed away from what is ‘lower’ to what is higher.”²⁴ According to Edwards, affectional development is a process that occurs in three moves. First, one comes to a knowledge of what is true. This knowledge provides one with the *telos* toward which right affection is aimed, thereby avoiding deformation. Second, this grasping of the truth gives one sight of the good’s beauty. By glimpsing the beauty of the good, we find something toward which we rightly direct our affection. Finally, by grasping the truth and glimpsing the beauty of the good, one recognizes that their current state is not the good. It is this recognition that one’s current state is not the good that their affections can then move to the good and beautiful they have glimpsed through the true (WJE 2: 264).

The Affections and the Preaching Life

This sketch of Edwards’s view of the affections is brief. Yet if we take his account of the affections – what they are, what they do, and how they develop – we have a framework for better understanding the role of affections within the practice of preaching. While Edwards speaks about the affections and their importance in the life of the Christian, we can place this vision alongside a conception of preaching as *a way of life* that also calls for the development of the affections. And when we do, we see that Edwards’s understanding of the affections holds explanatory power for the experience with which I began this article.

A student enters the preaching course, perhaps reluctant to begin. Yet over the span of a semester, is introduced to various aspects of the preaching life: information on preaching’s history and its role in the Church’s life, techniques for developing sermons, strategies for engaging the biblical witness, virtues that sustain the practice, and a host of others. We might say that (hopefully) the student encounters something true about the practice of preaching and its place within the Christian faith. Additionally, the student is exposed to preaching exemplars through whom, by example, they experience the good and beautiful within the practice of preaching. As a result of their encounter with the field of homiletics and their experience of beautiful preaching, they come to recognize that their current state within the practice is not what they have experienced or witnessed. They now see a world of possibility that they experience as good and beautiful. And perhaps a new affection for the good of preaching has grown. They become someone who delights in the practice. What happens within the journey of the Christian life occurs also in their journey into the *preaching life*.

As with the Christian life, this new “conversion” into the preaching life is only a start. There is a long way for this student to go on their journey. There will be more knowledge to acquire, more beauty to encounter, more dispositions and virtues to form, and a host of other aspects of what it means to move into preaching as a way of life. What has occurred within the confines of the preaching course is merely a beginning into a life-long journey. However, Edwards’s account of the affections gives us language and a framework for understanding what has occurred in our classes when a student comes to love the practice of preaching. It is not merely that the student has rational knowledge of the practice. It is not merely that they have a toolkit of sermonic mechanics at their disposal. It is that the student’s affections have been influenced such that the soul’s powers have been moved toward this beautiful good. They have begun their movement into the preaching life and all the affective qualities such a way of life entails. They have moved from an intellectual knowledge of the practice to a delight in its work, goods, and ends. And while only a beginning, it is no less vital to a sustained and flourishing preaching

²⁴ Ibid.

ministry by being only a beginning. For it is through this beginning that the student will form the long-enduring affections necessary to sustain their preaching practice in the face of difficulties and challenge. It is this habitual disposition toward the good and the beautiful within the preaching life that will drive their continued growth and underpin their efforts on the road ahead. While only a start, it is vital for any future practice.

Teaching for Affective Formation

If such affective formation is vital for entering and sustaining the preaching life, how might we teach toward it? How might our pedagogy aim beyond the “basics” of homiletical instruction and incorporate aspects that intentionally seek the affective development of our students? How might we, in the context of our preaching courses, help students enter and begin their journey in the preaching life? In this final section I recount one pedagogical strategy I have incorporated in my introduction to preaching course.

BIBM 493 Preaching

BIBM 493 Preaching is an undergraduate-level preaching course for the Bible and Ministry majors at Abilene Christian University. It primarily consists of college juniors and seniors who are enrolled in the University’s undergraduate Department of Bible, Missions, and Ministry. I teach the spring course offering. As a university that historically serves students from Free Church traditions, students come to the course with varying levels of experience with preaching. Some students already have a considerable amount of preaching experience, having done it for years growing up in their congregations. Others are already preaching regularly at smaller congregations around town. However, some have only limited experience in preaching as part of their summer internships. Others will preach their first sermons in the course.

The variety of preaching experience is matched by the variety of discernment around their ministry callings. Students imagine themselves engaging in youth ministry, missions work, children’s ministry, non-profit and social justice ministries, family ministry, worship ministry, and a host of other options. However, it is rare that any see themselves as preachers or see preaching as something that will be a major component of their future work.²⁵ Yet this course is required for most of the ministry and Bible degree plans at the University. This contrast between the place of preaching in the students’ vocational imagination and the required nature of the course can easily create an adversarial dynamic. Students are often nervous about preaching (and receiving feedback) in front of their peers. This nervousness, combined with their resistance to being in the course to begin with, can predispose them to dislike the course before we have even begun. The course is also unique in that it does not run by the traditional undergraduate course framework (three or two meetings per week for 50 or 90 minutes). Instead, this course reflects a graduate course structure of one weekly, three-hour meeting. This format can be difficult for undergraduate students, given their work and other commitments within the university’s life.

As an introductory course, we spend most of the semester simply scratching the surface of the practice of preaching. I want them to be serviceable in the “mechanics” of preaching since many of them will be moving from that course into internships where they are expected to preach multiple times over a summer. I am aware and trying to teach to the congregational expectation of the student’s task competency around preaching. But I also want them to be aware of the wider

²⁵ I have often wondered if this is, at least in part, a function of the age of these students. As college juniors and seniors they are typically 20-22 years old. This often means that congregations are less likely to entrust a preaching ministry to them. As a result, they do not see preaching as a form of ministry that is open to them.

world of preaching that exists beyond their own experiences and traditions. We spend time exploring the wide variety of preaching diversity that exists and draw upon those diverse voices as influential for their own preaching practice. I also want them to have a foundation from which they can grow. So I devote time in that course to identifying various directions of growth they might pursue beyond our semester together. These are three ambitious aims, and the difficulty of accomplishing them is compounded by the reality of how much one can realistically cover in a single semester with college students who may or may not be interested in the course. For me, this raised the question of how I might aim at their affective formation. Indeed, is such formation even possible to accomplish intentionally, or is it simply a matter of the Spirit's activity (and divine humor) and being surprised by, and thankful for, the student who has expressed an "affective conversion" at the end of the semester? Is this something at which I can intentionally aim to bring about, or must I only accept it as a gift?

The Journey of Affective Formation in BIBM 493

My development of an assignment aimed at affective formation began with reflection on Jonathan Edwards's process for how such affective formation occurs within other arenas of life. According to Edwards, affective development occurs when we 1) perceive the truth, 2) glimpse the beauty of the true, and 3) recognize the gap between the beauty glimpsed and our present state. Glimpsing the beauty awakens our affections, and recognizing our distance from that beauty stirs us to pursue the true and beautiful. Thus, affective formation would involve some dialogue between these three aspects of Edwards's process. An assignment that sought to aid the student's affective formation would involve perception of the true, glimpsing or experiencing that truth's beauty, and recognizing the distance of their own practice from that truth, good, and beauty. What might this look like in a course that seeks to initiate students into the *preaching life*?

It occurred to me that my own journey into the preaching life began when I encountered excellent preachers; those in whose example I saw aspects of the kind of preacher and minister I one day hoped to be. It was through experiencing the beauty of their homiletical example that I gained aspirations for myself and the kind of sermons I hoped to proclaim. Those examples were often vastly different from the kinds of (rigid, fundamentalist) preaching with which I was familiar and defined my vision of preaching at that point. As I have grown in the preaching life, it has been through a continuing encounter with various exemplars that have propelled my movement. These exemplars have shifted and changed, depending on my own life and ministry, yet in each case there is something attractive in their homiletical example. I encounter the beauty of their preaching and that beauty stirs within me a movement of the affections that moves me deeper into the preaching life.²⁶ Thus, I began to wonder if such an experience reflected the kind of process of affective formation which Edwards describes.²⁷ I encountered the beauty of preaching that occurs when one is well-formed in the preaching life, and by encountering that beauty and the homiletical truth it

²⁶ This process is similar to the process of moral formation named by Agnes Callard. Callard notes that moral formation first begins by seeing examples we want to imitate, and it is through aspiring to be like that example that we begin to organize our lives around the values which lead us toward that example. See, Agnes Callard, *Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁷ In some ways, this dynamic is something we have known for a long time. I can remember being told repeatedly as a student that one way to become a good preacher was "to listen to good preaching." Yet, sound as it may be, what that advice left unarticulated was why listening to good preaching has that effect. Reflecting on that advice through Edwards's account of the affections reveals that one of the reasons that advice "works" is because it creates opportunities for affective formation, which is vital if one is to grow into the practice of preaching.

contained, my affections were stirred in ways that led me toward it. Through encountering that beauty, I was moved to explore why it was beautiful. By exploring why it was beautiful, I discovered things that are true homiletically. And through that discovery, my journey into the preaching life moved forward. If this is how it worked for me, could I facilitate such encounters for students in my own preaching course? This led to the development of an assignment whose purpose was to open the door for homiletical encounters that would foster affective formation in my students.

BIBM 493: Affective Reflections Assignment

To foster opportunities for affective formation, I created a series of reflective assignments that aimed at helping students encounter examples of homiletical beauty, reflect on their experience of that encounter, and then project forward how they might incorporate that beauty into their own preaching life. The process is straightforward. I have an evolving set of sermons – some that are videos and others that are only audio – that I have students listen to and watch.²⁸ Students listen to between six and seven sermons, then write reflections on their experience. This reflection is governed by a three-part movement that reflects Edwards’s process of affective formation.

This reflection begins by asking the student to name their emotional experience with the sermon. At this point I do not want the student to assess the sermon through the lens of sermon “mechanics” we have learned in the course. Instead, I ask them to reflect on their emotional responses to the sermon. I ask them to name the emotion they felt most strongly through the sermon and their immediate reaction once the sermon was finished. I then have them name features of the sermon they found most beautiful. Admittedly, students sometimes struggle with this reflection because they want to begin analyzing the sermon. I must be explicit about “turning off” that part of their thinking and lean into their experiential encounter with the sermon.

Having had them name and reflect on their emotional experience of the sermon, I then have them move to questions of assessing. What do they think it was about the sermon which led them to experience the emotions they did? What within the sermon fostered the experience with it that they had? In this section students begin to make a turn to what I name “homiletical truths” by reflecting on the sermon in light of what we have explored in the course. Through reflecting first on their experience and then to the sermon and how it did what it did, they are able to name some aspects of preaching that are “homiletically true”: those things that lead to better rather than worse preaching. They may name the power and clarity of a theological claim, the pathos of the speaker, a moving insight or reframing of a biblical text, or any number of other dynamics. Whatever the students name, they can make a connection with some component of the course to uncover a kind of “best homiletical practice” which that particular sermon embodied.

The final movement of the assignment is to reflect on their own homiletical growth. I ask the student to put their own preaching in conversation with the sermon example they have just experienced. I then ask them to name ways in which their own preaching is like this example, and ways that it is not like the example. My intention in asking them to make this comparison is not to make the student feel inadequate (I am very intentional in communicating that). Rather, I want to help the student see something akin to Edwards’s notion of “distance” that is required for any affective or moral journey to begin. For students to feel any need to grow in the preaching life,

²⁸ I say an “evolving list” because the sermon “taste” of my students can differ wildly for many reasons. My selection of the sermon options grows out of prior work in the semester where we surface our preaching assumptions and dispositions. This helps me do some (admittedly small) adjusting to the sermons that are available to the students for this assignment.

they must be aware of how far the road ahead of them stretches. By asking them to compare their own preaching to this example in light of their experience of its beauty, they begin to realize ways in which their own preaching can grow and expand. And, indeed, they may now *desire* for their preaching to grow and expand in these ways after having encountered these exemplars.

I recognize that this assignment is far from perfect. Indeed, there may be other avenues that better capture the affective dimension of the preaching life. For example, might there be ways of incorporating the practice of spiritual disciplines into my pedagogy that could better speak to the affective realm of preaching? Yet by asking the student to experience beautiful examples of preaching, reflect on the emotions and impact of that beauty on them, and then compare that sermon example to their own preaching, I hope to facilitate an experience of the affections that will lead the student to desire to preach in particular ways. And by seeing both what is possible and how their own preaching might move toward these exemplars, they may come to delight in the practice as their own journey into the preaching life deepens.

Conclusion

To learn to preach is to enter a way of life, the preaching life. As a way of life, it contains a holistic vision that encompasses not only the preacher's intellect and their knowledge of skills and sermon mechanics, but their affections. And through their affections, their behaviors and actions. Yet how to accomplish such affective formation within the context of a preaching course is a difficult question. It is made difficult by dynamics common to "required" preaching courses, since such affective and habitual formation requires an initial willingness to enter a process of formation. It is made even more challenging by the nature of affective formation itself. Such formation is rarely a "straight line" from activity to formation, but involves many stops and starts, and entrusting oneself to a process one can only rightly perceive at the end. By leaning into affective formation, we are asking students to step into an open and ambiguous space, trusting us as they grope their way forward. This ambiguity around the affections and how they develop poses a challenge to pedagogical attempts to harness it.

Yet the difficulty of capturing it pedagogically does not negate the importance of such formation in our students and it does not invalidate our experiences of when it does happen when students encounter the practice of preaching in ways that they come to delight in it. This paper has used Jonathan Edwards's conception of the affections and their role in the Christian life as a starting point for reflecting on how we might shape our homiletical pedagogy to better capture the important role of the affections within the practice of preaching. With this *Edwardsian* lens I then gave one, admittedly imperfect, way that I have sought to incorporate affective formation within the context of an undergraduate preaching course. My hope is that we might increase our thinking and pedagogy around the formation of homiletical affections within our courses, so that the students we teach may enter the preaching life, delight in its practice, and flourish in the good Word that God has given them to speak.

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 fourth."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 homileticians.

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.

Unearthing the Disturbing Ghosts of Postcolonial Lands That Linger After the Sermon

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Abstract: *What lingers over a wounded community after preaching? This paper argues that the disturbing ghosts of postcolonial lands linger in the pulpit and haunt the wounded hearers after the sermon. Preachers should not only acknowledge but also preach about these ghosts whose presence are found in the Bible and in Christ. Mirroring the features of the ghosts, such preaching, which I term haunto-postcolonial preaching, disrupts the conventional notions of linear time and segregated space and connects the ghosts to the hearers and the Bible. Its goal is to create a haunting space in the pulpit, unearthing unresolved postcolonial trauma to bring rupture to the existing oppressive structures in the church and society. By allowing the ghosts to haunt the congregation about a lost or a reality yet-to-be-attained, preachers invite their hearers to reimagine and pursue a better and just society beyond the sermon where the unappeased souls can be consoled.*

Introduction

What would it mean to bring hauntology into dialogue with postcolonial preaching? These two areas have many intersections, yet there seems to be a noticeable silence between them in the field of homiletics. In this paper, I delve deeply into this dialogue as I consider the disturbing ghosts that linger over a traumatized community after the sermon.¹ The term *ghost* in this discourse signifies the enduring presence of unresolved historical injustices and traumas that continue to impact present communities,² especially (but not limited to) those who have experienced colonialism and colonial-shaped migration.³ These ghosts symbolize the silenced voices, erased histories, and ongoing effects of colonial oppression that linger in postcolonial societies. I will first briefly explore the relation between land and postcolonial studies. Next, I argue that preachers should unearth the ghostly voices that are hidden beneath the postcolonial lands in order to disrupt the oppressive structures existing within both the church and society. Finally, I will use John 21:1-19 as an example of how preaching about these haunting voices from a postcolonial perspective can contribute to bringing forth justice and healing to a wounded community even after the sermon.

¹ The qualifier *disturbing* is employed to highlight the disruptive nature of the ghostly presences, which challenge the narratives of postcolonial progress and healing by insisting on recognition and redress. The ghostly capacity to disturb is applicable to most if not all communities, even to the least religious or spiritual ones. What these ghosts embody is not a supernatural force but traumatic memories that require reckoning and such traumatic memories are by nature disturbing. At the same time, the disturbing nature of these ghostly presences does not rule out the comforting effect it can bring to those who feel seen and heard when their suppressed or overlooked trauma has been brought to light.

² The term *ghost* encompasses the concepts of *spectre* and *phantom* and is used interchangeably to underscore the multifaceted nature of haunting. *Spectres* often signifies something that is both present and absent, acting as a haunting reminder of unresolved past conflicts or injustices. Also, *phantoms* emphasize the unseen or unnoticed influence of past traumas on current generations. For an in-depth exploration of these concepts, see Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," in *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 373-79, and Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³ Mayblin and Turner argue that "the history of migration globally is very much entangled with colonialism." Lucy Mayblin and Joe B. Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), chap. Introduction, sec. "Migration Studies and Colonialism."

Postcolonial Lands and Disturbing Ghosts

The relationship of land to postcolonial studies is complex and multifaceted when viewed through the lens of collective trauma and hauntology discourse, particularly within indigenous communities and immigrant populations.⁴ Land plays a significant role in the colonial experience, as European powers often sought to assert control over indigenous lands through colonization and territorial acquisition. We can find in some nineteenth-century paintings the effort of European settlers seeking to portray the land in Australia as empty, cleared, fertile, enticing for emigration, and ready for European colonization.⁵ Similar associations can also be observed in the coastal landscape paintings of Canada's renowned *Group of Seven* during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ Their depictions of wilderness and coastal landscapes often portrayed the land as a primitive space awaiting discovery and conquest by colonizers, while disregarding and marginalizing the presence of indigenous communities who had long inhabited those lands.⁷

Such colonial perception of lands was often bolstered by traditional creation theologies prevalent at that time. Scholars such as S. Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah point out that these theologies, with their emphasis on "a sovereign and transcendent God" creating the universe "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*),⁸ provided a theological framework for interpreting the Genesis narrative that supported colonization. According to this interpretation, the primordial earth was perceived as void and empty,⁹ which legitimized the belief that the colonizers, as the chosen race, had a divine mandate to exercise dominion over the rest of creation through the colonization and subjugation of lands.¹⁰ While the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is subject to debate, it remains an argument that colonizers employed in the creation narrative as a justification for their acts of colonization.¹¹ As

⁴ In this paper, *immigrant* or *migration* specifically refers to individuals who have relocated, whether voluntarily or through forced migration, from one locale to another for various reasons such as political unrest, economic opportunity, family reunification, or academic pursuits. *Diasporic*, however, refers to a broader concept originally used to describe the dispersal of Jews after the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. but now encompassing any large-scale, often involuntary dispersion of people to more than one location. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard, eds., *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World* (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2005), xiii, xxvi. While seeking to address the spectres of colonialism in a general sense, this paper acknowledges the intersecting reality of various diasporic groups within the colonial reality and does not dismiss the nuanced experience of each community, which carries their distinct historical traumas and ghosts. For more discussion on diaspora, immigration, and colonialism, see Ember and Skoggard, eds., *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*; Lucy Mayblin and Joe B. Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021); Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ Jeanette Hoorn, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2007), 43-44.

⁶ *The Group of Seven* was a group of Canadian landscape painters from 1920 to 1933. Isabelle Gapp, "Water in the Wilderness: The Group of Seven and the Coastal Identity of Lake Superior," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 55, no. 3 (2021): 590-620.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Susanah Lily L. Mendoza, and George Zachariah, eds., *Decolonizing Ecotheology: Indigenous and Subaltern Challenges* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 3.

⁹ Mendoza and Zachariah, eds., *Decolonizing Ecotheology*, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ One may question the necessity and validity of the concept of "*ex nihilo*" or creation out of nothing based on the presence of chaos and the existence of a primordial earth in the Genesis narrative. However, this is not something that this paper intends to explore. For further discussion on the topic of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, see Pao-Shen Ho, "The Modal Problem of Creatio Ex Nihilo," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 88, no. 2 (2020): 197-213. See also Gary A. Anderson, and Markus Bockmuehl, eds., *Creation Ex Nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary*

Edward Said indicates, even though European colonizers recognized the inhabitation of the indigenous population on colonized land, they assumed that indigenous people lacked the right means to govern it.¹² This perception prompted the Europeans to view the colonized territories not only as barren but also in need of Christian salvation, civilization, and creation. Distorted religious narratives became the basis on which they asserted their dominance and sanctified their colonizing acts. The well-being of the indigenous populations and their rights to owning and living on their ancestral lands were disregarded and sacrificed under the name of expanding God's kingdom as missionaries acquired land for building churches.¹³ All such colonial acts performed in the name of Christianity inflicted collective trauma on indigenous groups.¹⁴

Collective trauma and the discourse related to haunting are interconnected with postcolonial studies of lands. The notion of the phantom,¹⁵ introduced by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok through the lens of psychoanalysis, suggests that transgenerational spectrality has been deeply embedded within discourses surrounding "loss, mourning, and recovery" in trauma studies since the 1980s.¹⁶ In a sense, spectrality as the silenced voices of the past lies at the core of trauma studies. Cathy Caruth further proposes that to be traumatized is "to be possessed by an image or event" rooted in the past.¹⁷ In essence, ghost stories share similar qualities with collective trauma because they serve as persistent narratives that haunt the present through the echoes of past events.¹⁸ These haunting experiences, I argue, can be likened to the disturbing ghosts that perpetually linger on postcolonial lands. The term *hauntology*, coined by Jacques Derrida in his exploration of the enduring legacy of Marxism in *Spectres of Marx* (1993),¹⁹ is closely connected to postcolonialism. In Derrida's conceptualization, spectres emerge simultaneously from the past and the future, returning like ghosts to demand recognition and acknowledgement of traumatized experiences so that a resolution can be made.²⁰ In a sense, hauntology, shaped by a non-linear understanding of time and a transgressional understanding of space, is about something that

Challenges (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

¹² Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 9.

¹³ Sifiso Mpofu, "A Theology of Land and Its Covenant Responsibility," in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 77.

¹⁴ *Collective trauma* or *community trauma* refers to "an aggregate of trauma experienced by community members or an event that impacts a few people but has structural and social traumatic consequences." The concept of cultural trauma, closely related to collective trauma, concerns "a collective feeling they [a cultural group] have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness..." While I use the term *collective trauma* to highlight the communal nature of trauma in the lens of postcolonialism, I place equal emphasis on the necessity of cultural understanding of the community to address its trauma collectively. Pinderhughes, H., Davis, R., & Williams, M., *Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma* (Oakland, CA: Prevention Institute, 2015), 11, 22. See also Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); C.H. Thesnaar, "Embodying Collective Memory: Towards Responsible Engagement with the 'Other'," *Scriptura* 112, no. 1 (2013): 1–15.

¹⁵ Abraham and Torok use "the phantom" as the idiom to refer to the notion of ghost. Their works include Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écore et le noyau* (Paris, Flammarion, 1987; first published 1978) and *Cryptonymie: le verbier de l'homme aux loups* (Paris, Flammarion, 1976), quoted by Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," 374.

¹⁶ Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 163–4, quoted by Esther Peeren, and María del Pilar Blanco, ed., *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013), 11.

¹⁷ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁸ Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 163–4, quoted by Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader*, 11.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

repeatedly resurfaces from the past as a reminder of a lost or yet-to-be-attained alternative reality. It prompts us to lament while pushing us to pursue a better and more just future. Hauntology addresses unresolved tensions, trauma, and histories of oppression such as the violent history of colonialism, which become disturbing ghosts that haunt the related individuals and/or communities in the present. In Elaine Enns and Ched Myers's *Healing Haunted Histories*, the authors delve into their own indigenous traumatic histories on the North American continent.²¹ Through their part-memoir narratives, they navigate the ongoing haunting of transgenerational trauma experienced by indigenous communities on postcolonial lands.²² Enns and Myers argue that the lingering effects of postcolonial haunting not only impact indigenous communities but also other groups of people, particularly white people and Christians who have a responsibility to engage in the work of restorative justice.²³ The haunting of collective trauma is ever-present, repetitively returning in various forms to haunt wounded communities such as indigenous groups.

Residing on postcolonial lands, many people – especially those from colonized spaces – continue to be haunted by memories and histories tied to colonialism. Their experiences unfold in a non-linear narrative, shaped by a cyclical and spacious understanding of time and space. On postcolonial lands, where pulpits are established and where colonial violence was carried out, these disturbing ghosts linger and represent voices that have experienced collective trauma inflicted through dispossession, cultural suppression, and other forms of oppression in the process of colonization. Although closely tied to the lands from which they originate, these disturbing ghosts are not confined to their associated land or a specific location. Rather, they transcend and transgress spatial boundaries. Abraham and Torok argue that the presence of the “undisclosed traumas of previous generations” embodied by ancestral phantoms continue to haunt subsequent generations, whether the individuals are aware of it or not.²⁴ To Derrida, a spectre is “neither soul nor body, and both one and the other,”²⁵ who transgresses geographical and even ontological spaces between life (being) and death (nonbeing). Even after a people migrate to another social space, the haunting will not stop, as the spectre who has inhabited a people will travel with them. Therefore, regardless of our spatial location, we cannot escape being haunted by spectres who have the ability to inhabit both places and people.²⁶ While spectres may appear more frequently or loom larger in certain spaces – for example, the spectre of colonialism is more visible in former colonies – they are never limited by any spatial boundaries.

This is especially true considering the contemporary waves of migration. The twenty-first century, also referred to as “the age of migration,”²⁷ has been characterized by its diversity resulting from cross-border movements that have reshaped various aspects of human landscapes such as geography, economic structures, religion, and culture on a global scale.²⁸ According to the *World Development Report 2023*, there are approximately 184 million migrants worldwide,

²¹ Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

²² “We believe that past and continuing Indigenous dispossession is the “primal sin” of settler colonialism, haunting us and demanding a reckoning (Italics in original).” Enns and Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories*, xxvi.

²³ Ibid., 10-13, 18.

²⁴ Colin Davis, “Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms,” *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 374-376.

²⁵ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 6.

²⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi, 12.

²⁷ See Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

²⁸ Gemma Tulud Cruz, “When No Land on Earth Is “Promised Land,” in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 35.

making up approximately 2.3% of the world's population.²⁹ Among these migrants, around 37 million individuals are classified as refugees who have sought asylum due to political persecution, wars, and various forms of violence in their countries of origin.³⁰ Contemporary migration has a "double-edged character," encompassing both challenges and opportunities.³¹ Migrants not only bring new prospects to their designation but also carry the weight of a shared colonial history as "victims of empire."³² In the "postcolonial context of migration," the legacy of colonialism continues to perpetuate displacement, causing and shaping migration in the present day and inflicting trauma, economic hardship, loss, and suffering on many individuals.³³ In essence, communal trauma acts as a connective thread, linking the experiences of indigeneity and migration through their shared history of ongoing displacement and the loss of ancestral lands.³⁴ These unsettling spectres persist on postcolonial lands, disturbing and lingering over the pulpits even after sermons are preached.

Considering these dynamics between postcolonial lands and the haunting discourse from the perspective of collective trauma, especially within indigenous communities and immigrant populations, this paper proposes broadening homiletical horizons by establishing a connection between hauntology and homiletics. I argue that this approach, which I term as haunto-postcolonial preaching, entails not only acknowledging the lingering presence of spectres after sermons but also preaching about the ghostly voices found within the Bible and in Christ, with the goal of fostering justice and healing within traumatized communities in a postcolonial pulpit.

Unearthing the Disturbing Ghosts for Justice

At the heart of hauntology lies the pursuit of justice, as ghosts are closely connected to the unresolved injustices embedded within a culture's history. While the desire for a just society is an uncontested social disposition, the particular manifestation of this demand for justice through the lens of ghosts in hauntology can be a subject of controversy in many cultures. This controversy primarily stems from the pervasive taboo surrounding the notion of ghosts across diverse cultural contexts. Taboos, in general, function as cultural mechanisms to uphold ethical prohibitions, preserve societal order, shape cultural identities as well as foster communal solidarity within a cultural group.³⁵ The discourse surrounding ghosts falls into the category of forbidden taboos in various cultures, as it is deemed unspeakable due to the potential dangers it poses to the "liminal individuals."³⁶ Speaking openly about ghosts, therefore, challenges these established taboos and is regarded as risky behavior that can evoke avoidance, resistance, and fear at both individual and community levels.

Although introducing hauntology into preaching can pose a great challenge in cultures where ghosts are considered taboo, it is important to acknowledge that ghostly taboos are often related to the cultures' history of injustice. Many believe that the presence of lingering ghosts

²⁹ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 1.

³⁰ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2023*, xxvi, 1.

³¹ Gemma Tulud Cruz, "When No Land on Earth Is 'Promised Land,'" in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 36.

³² Cruz, "When No Land on Earth Is 'Promised Land,'" 35.

³³ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect*. Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in Religion and Theology (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 1.

³⁴ Kate Rose, ed., *Displaced: Literature of Indigeneity, Migration, and Trauma* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 1.

³⁵ Max D. Price, *Evolution of a Taboo: Pigs and People in the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 92-3.

³⁶ Price, *Evolution of a Taboo*, 93.

among the living arises from strong negative sentiments caused by mistreatment, wrongful acts, betrayal, or murder of the deceased when they were alive. These vengeful ghosts would choose or haunt a living person to help them uncover the reasons behind their death and seek justice after death. Failure to respond to these requests often leads to misfortune or even death. 竇娥冤 (*The Injustice of Dou E*) is a classic Chinese folklore tale illustrating themes of injustice and revenge.³⁷ It tells the story of Dou E, a young woman falsely accused of theft and executed unjustly by a corrupt local officer. Not only was Dou E wrongfully accused, but her family was also persecuted and driven out of their home. Because of her tragic fate, Dou E's spirit had turned into a haunting ghost targeting the corrupted officer and his family until justice was served in the end. Each culture has its own unique ghost stories and haunting experiences, so it is crucial for haunto-postcolonial preachers to delve deeper into their cultural context and history. It is important to note that “the meta-concept [of ghost] that comes to possess virtually everything” is different from the specific concept of a ghost that is rooted in its historical and cultural particularities.³⁸ Therefore, preaching from a hauntological perspective reminds preachers to uphold the tension between the transhistorical (suffering as a universal experience) and specificity (contextual traumatic stories) in traumatic experiences.

Justice is at the core of both hauntology and Christian theology, which is deeply rooted in the reconciling and redemptive work of Jesus Christ in an unjust world. As the spectres unveil absurdity and unjust rule throughout human history, they stubbornly insist to be heard and demand justice from both humans and God. Preaching about the justice of God, therefore, can be an opportunity for us to meet the disturbing ghosts face-to-face. However, preaching does not end with haunting; rather, its goal is to create a ghostly space or a postcolonial “in-between space” in the pulpit where a horror moment in the marginal space may ultimately lead to healing and transformation.³⁹ The presence of such spectres prods us into taking up the ethical responsibility of others which, to preachers, means to employ the ghostly language rooted in postcolonial spaces to unearth disturbing ghosts in preaching. This approach enables preachers to retell people's suffering and help them “find new meaning in their lives.”⁴⁰ Certainly, even when preachers decide to encounter a spectre of a lived experience from the pulpit, the spectre may or may not choose to show up and the agency belongs to this radical other. While we cannot control when or what the spectre speaks, it is the responsibility of preachers to first be willing to wrestle with the stories of God in the ghostly space and thereby create potential moments for stories of spectres to be heard.

To further illustrate the application of a haunto-postcolonial perspective in preaching, I will employ this interpretative lens to an examination of John 21:1-17 and demonstrate how preaching about these haunting voices from a postcolonial perspective can contribute to bringing forth justice and healing to a wounded community.

³⁷ Hanqing Guan 關漢卿, *Dou E Yuan 竇娥冤 [The Injustice of Dou E]* (Changchun: Jilin wen shi chu ban she 長春: 吉林文史出版社), 2016.

³⁸ Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader*, 14.

³⁹ This postcolonial “in-between space” or the “Third Space” within hybridity, according to Kwok, is a “multiple, fluid, porous” space, where hidden or marginalized voices could be heard and remembered and where transformation could take place. In this hybrid Third Space, postcolonial preachers are to question the clear boundaries of material, time, identity, and language, and assert the presence of God in between these boundaries. Yohan Go, David Schnasa Jacobsen, and Duse Lee, “Making New Spaces In Between: A Post-Reflective Essay Weaving Postcolonial Threads into North American Homiletics,” *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015), 56. See also Kwok Pui-lan. “Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts,” *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015): 8–21

⁴⁰ Jim Rendon, *Upside: The New Science of Post-traumatic Growth* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2015), 323, quoted by Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 30.

*John 21:1-19: Unearthing the Haunting Story*⁴¹

In the story of John 21, Jesus revealed himself to the disciples for the third time after his death (v. 14). While the first two encounters of the resurrected Jesus took place in Jerusalem (John 20:19-23 and 20:24-29), the third took place at the Sea of Galilee where “a mysterious twilight [took place] in which one cannot distinguish what appears as real and what as symbolic.”⁴² In the dim light from a distance, the disciples initially failed to recognize the resurrected Jesus Christ on the shore. It is only after Jesus commanded them to cast their nets and the miraculous catch of fish occurred, a scene that resembles the miraculous fishing event described in Luke 5, that the disciples recognized him. Jesus then invited the disciples to partake in a meal that he had prepared for them, which was situated next to a fire of burning coals (John 21: 9, 12-13). After the shared meal, Jesus turned to Peter and posed the question, “Do you love me?” three times (vv.15-17a), alluding to Peter’s earlier threefold denial (John 18). Later, Jesus prophesied Peter’s future martyrdom and asked Peter to follow him (vv.17b-19).

In this narrative, Jesus appeared as an apparition, crossing the boundaries of time (past, present, future), space (Jerusalem and Galilee), life and death (crucifixion and resurrection). Although the presence of this ghostly Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Messiah, initially brought a sense of strangeness and peculiar feeling upon the disciples, Jesus soon invoked the memories of their time being together over the past three years.⁴³ Through his presence, speech, and actions of breaking bread and sharing fish, this ghost-like Jesus blurs the line between past and present, challenging the very dichotomy between life and death. By re-enlivening the past in the present through his resurrected and wounded body, Jesus created a ghostly experience which not only allowed the disciples to get a taste of the eschatological tension in the present (“already but not yet”) but also empowered them to enter a future filled with predicted suffering.

There are *many* ghostly images that subtly reveal a haunting presence within this text. One such image is the fire of burning coals. This “*fire of burning coals*” or “*a fire of coals*” (ἄνθρακιάν) is mentioned only twice in the New Testament: first in the courtyard of the high priest, where Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:18), and second, here at the shore where the resurrected Jesus asked Peter the threefold questions. The image of *a fire of coals* (ἄνθρακία), therefore, acts as a ghostly image that connects these two scenes, reminding Peter of his experience of denying his beloved teacher under the threat of death. It evoked the feelings of guilt and shame within him. These feelings, brought forth by the ghostly image, provide the backdrop for Jesus’s conversation with Peter in verses 15-17 where another ghostly element emerged in the form of a recurring question.⁴⁴ When Jesus asked Peter the same question (“*Do you love me?*”) three times, Peter was grieved (v.17). His grief arises “not because Jesus has changed verbs, but because the same question is being asked for the *third time* (emphasis added).”⁴⁵ Just as he had disowned Jesus three times, his love for his Lord was now questioned three times. The threefold question asked by Jesus clearly paralleled the threefold denial of Peter. The haunting threefold questions, together with the

⁴¹ The exploration of John 21, especially the image of the fire of burning coals, is inspired by a sermon delivered by Wing Yin Li in Hong Kong, 2019. Li is currently a Ph.D. student in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

⁴² Beasley-Murray, George Raymond, *John*, World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 416.

⁴³ Haenchen, Ernst, Robert W Funk, and Ulrich Busse, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*, Hermeneia (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1988), 225. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 673-674.

⁴⁴ Haenchen, et al, *John 2*, 223-224.

⁴⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 678.

imagery of the fire, were like disturbing ghosts that unexpectedly reappeared from the past to haunt Peter. These ghostly voices brought Peter back to the painful night when he had betrayed Jesus.

According to John 18, it was a freezing night in the courtyard of the high priest, where the servants and officers had lit a fire to warm themselves. That night, Jesus was arrested and handed to the chamber of the high priest. The arrest exposed the political alliance between the members of the Sanhedrin and the Roman government (vv.18-24), which further “underlines the pervasiveness of the imperial power even in juridical matters.”⁴⁶ When the maid and the servants of the high priest confronted Peter about his relation to the “gang of Jesus” (vv. 16-17, 25-26), Peter, out of fear, lied and denied any connection to this arrested man. As a Jew, Peter was not unfamiliar with the experience of surrendering and yielding to the oppressive powers. It was a survival tactic that had been ingrained in his people for hundreds of years. Surrounded by the officials and their servants, whose presence simply reminded him of overwhelming imperial power, Peter tried to blend in and hide his true identity. While Peter’s fear of the political power of the Roman empire remained hidden in the scene, the spectre of colonialism continued to haunt him *whenever* and *wherever* he was, both consciously and unconsciously, even after he left the courtyard and met the resurrected Jesus by the sea.

That was why Jesus had come to encounter Peter and ask him the recurring question right by the fire. There, using the fire and the question, Jesus acted as a powerful preacher who employed both *show* (the ghostly appearance next to the fire of burning coals) and *tell* (the threefold question) in his conversation with Peter. Jesus created a ghostly space that invited Peter to return to the courtyard – the colonized territory – to acknowledge and unearth the disturbing ghost that had been haunting him. Jesus the preacher did not simply cast out the ghost. Instead, he allowed the haunting to emerge in a visible and audible manner, prompting a process of post-traumatic growth in Peter. This ghostly encounter initiated by Jesus reembraced Peter with love and healed the hidden wound inside him. It also directed Peter’s attention toward a future where God’s glory would be magnified, empowering him to confront the disturbing ghosts on both a personal and communal level on a colonized land.

In Peter’s story, we witness the powerful influence of a ghostly sermon that seeks to unearth the disturbing ghosts within the listeners. After Jesus’s show and tell in John 21, we can see in the book of Acts that Peter carried this ghostly encounter and shared it with his community as one of the leaders of the early church. This act of sharing allowed transformation to extend beyond the immediate moment after the words were spoken, resonating with others and potentially inspiring them to confront their own haunting experiences. Yes, the ghosts linger after the sermon, but so does the transformative power of the Word. While Peter revealed to other disciples the spectre of colonialism that had been haunting the community, he also urged the community to continuously remember and retell these collective haunting stories through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. By continuing the dialogue and communal reflection sparked by a ghostly sermon, the impact can deepen and ripple around and through the community, opening up a new way of being for a community in their search for healing and justice. This new way of being, that is living together with the ghostly God in and outside the worship space, is founded on a profound relationship rooted in the love of God, through which both Peter and all the followers of Jesus could find healing and redemption in the presence of the ghostly Christ.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Jerome H Neyrey, “‘Despising the Shame of the Cross’: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” *Semeia* 68 (1996): 119-120.

Through exploring the convergence of hauntology and postcolonialism from a homiletical perspective, this paper has addressed the silence that exists between these two fields in preaching. The relationship between land and postcolonial studies was briefly examined, revealing the crucial role that preachers have in responding to the collective socio-political trauma resulting from colonial fallout in the faith community. By unearthing the ghostly voices hidden beneath the surface of postcolonial lands, preachers are inviting themselves and hearers to challenge the oppressive structures that persist within both the church and society. The act of acknowledging and preaching about disturbing ghosts is necessary for healing and for true freedom to be conceived. Upon such recognition, preachers' biblical hermeneutics and preaching are further broadened and enriched by this haunto-postcolonial perspective. There are more ghosts emerging from different social locations, urging us to listen to their stories and preach about and for them. These disturbing ghosts will continue to demand a hearing until the suppressed voices become audible in postcolonial pulpits.

Using John 21:1-19 as an illustration, this paper has demonstrated how the haunto-postcolonial perspective can be applied to biblical interpretation and preaching. By juxtaposing the hauntings in the Bible with cultural hauntings and with the crucified and resurrected Jesus who lies at the center of these narratives, we are empowered with a sense of strength and hope to imagine a possible future in the ghostly image of Christ that is free of oppression. Ultimately, by preaching about these haunting voices from a haunto-postcolonial perspective, preachers actively contribute to the pursuit of justice and healing within wounded communities. As Paul Tillich astutely suggested, God is found by those who courageously dive into the depths in search of hope, even in the face of the looming threat of nonbeing.⁴⁷ Preaching from a haunto-postcolonial lens allows us to look deeper and beyond the pulpit, discarding false hope promised on the surface. As we delve deeper to unearth the ghostly voices that permeate postcolonial lands, through our turning to the spectres and the spectralization of this turn in preaching, we shall receive the strength of a hope that is lying in the depths where we can find the unshakable Ground.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York, NY: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1948), 59.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

**After the Sermon and Beyond the Pulpit:
Transformative, Power-Sensitive Homiletics of Polyphony and Hope¹**

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Abstract: *This article considers the connection between preaching and power in search of a more inclusive understanding of preaching and more expansive modes of sermonic expression. As feminist and postcolonial theologians repeatedly emphasize, the pulpit, in both a concrete and symbolic sense, remains oriented toward white male preachers. German-language education also continues to be dominated by this perspective. Drawing on interdisciplinary theories of power and postcolonial theology, the concluding section of this paper introduces five dimensions of homiletical practice aimed at making preaching more sensitive to power dynamics: sharing interpretive power, starting from religious experience and lived theology; taking the body seriously (embodiment); daring polyphony; and imagining and acting together on the kingdom of God.*

1. Introduction – The Heterosexual White Male Preacher

I recently attended a church service that explored the theme of “Expectations.” The sermon was based on Luke 10 and the sending out of the 72. The pastor introduced the sermon and invited the congregation to engage in an experiment by saying the following:²

“After that, Jesus appointed 72 others and sent them, two by two, ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. In addition to the 12 men Jesus had already chosen, he now selects 72 more from among the people travelling with him. He sends them out in pairs to the surrounding areas. *Pause* It’s a challenge. But I would like to ask everyone to imagine the scene in their mind’s eye. What does Jesus look like? Who are the 72 whom Jesus sends out? Just imagine that. Let a picture form. *Pause* Now, honestly, who sees Jesus sending out 72 fair-skinned men with beards?”

Almost the entire congregation raised their hands. “Who among you might imagine the men with a darker complexion? Perhaps more like what is common in the Middle East?” After this question, about eight people raised their hands. The pastor then asked: “And who imagines not only men but people of different genders?” Now, only three hands went up.

So, most of those present imagined the disciples as white men while only a few

¹This paper was the first presentation for an international panel at the Academy of Homiletics in December 2023, focused on the theme “After the Sermon.” (One of two responses to this paper is also included in this issue of *Homiletic*; the other is not available for publication.) The comments presented here are based on the author’s presentation in that context and on her latest homiletical book, written in co-authorship, *Transformative Homiletics: Beyond the Pulpit. Preaching Power-Sensitively in a Changing World*, which was published in German in 2023 and is expected to be released in English by Brill Pub. in late 2024. See Sabrina Müller and Jasmine Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik - Jenseits Der Kanzel. (M)Achtsam Predigen in Einer Sich Verändernden Welt*, Interdisziplinäre Studien Zur Transformation 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlagsgesellschaft, 2023).

² The sermon was written by Pastor A. Bosshard from Wetzikon, delivered in Swiss German, and shared with me accordingly. The excerpts from the sermon quoted in this article have been translated into English. I have also translated all other German quotes into English throughout this article to make them comprehensible to English readers. The footnotes of the translated texts reference the locations of the original German texts from which the quotes have been translated.

considered men with different skin tones. The question about diverse genders led to an enlightening silence as only three hands went up in the entire church.

This example reflects the homogeneous structure of communities as well as the homogeneous faith and church images that predominantly assume a white, male, heterosexual paradigm. Those images are, of course, shaped by the everyday experiences of the congregation.³ On the one hand, these internal images are not surprising as they reflect the reality in many communities. On the other hand, they are highly problematic because they are exclusionary for all who are not white, male, and heterosexual.

In this context, theologian Sarah Vecera asks, “How did Jesus become white?”⁴ Feminist theologian Liz Shercliff, an experienced homiletician, observes: “I don’t feel I have been taught to preach as myself. I’ve been taught to preach like a man.”⁵

Vecera’s question and Shercliff’s observation exemplify the colonial legacy of structural sexism and racism in churches and their homiletic practices. Furthermore, there is another factor that further drives these assumptions and practices: Despite all discussions and innovations that have been made since the 1990s,⁶ including feminist, womanist, and postcolonial interventions,⁷ the notion of a single type of preacher still dominates in homiletic discourses, leading to a theological concentration of power among individuals. HyeRan Kim-Cragg points out: “Yet, the pulpit is still often solely occupied by a single preacher rather than being a participatory place involving diverse people.”⁸ In other words, the pulpit and the act of preaching, which have both been shaped by centuries of tradition, remain a site of exclusion, reserved only for those with so-called theological expertise and spiritual authority. It is a space characterized by a traditional male pulpit consciousness, which is embodied spatially and institutionalized by church and society.⁹

This critique of the preaching event as a less pluralistic space is further elaborated upon here, evident not only through homiletical education (Section 2) but also through feminist critiques of the symbolic space of the pulpit (Section 3). Inspired by interdisciplinary theories of power (Section 4) and postcolonial homiletic designs (Section 5), this essay introduces elements for a power-sensitive homiletics (Section 7) based on the theological concept of *Ruach* (Section 6).

2. How About Diversity? The Homiletical Standard – A Continental European Reflection¹⁰

Feminist, postcolonial, and womanist reflections are rarely represented in German-language homiletics. Universities and theological seminars teach the so-called classical standard

³ It is important to note that I am writing from a continental European perspective, drawing primarily on experiences from German-speaking churches in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria.

⁴ Sarah Vecera, *Wie ist Jesus weiß geworden? Mein Traum von einer Kirche ohne Rassismus* (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2022).

⁵ Liz Shercliff, *Preaching Women: Gender, Power and the Pulpit* (SCM Press, 2019), XV.

⁶ Cf. for example John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 1995).

⁷ Cf. for example HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2021); HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Probing the Pulpit: Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives”, *Liturgy* 34, no.2 (2019): 22–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2019.1604028>; HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Donyelle McCray, “Playing in Church: Insights from the Boundaries of the Sermon Genre”, *Liturgy* 36, no.2 (2021): 11–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2021.1895635>.

⁸ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 58

⁹ Cf. Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 49–60.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 61–70.

works which, although advanced and highly reflective, entail a narrowing of perspectives regarding gender and diversity, mono-confessionalism, male authority, sociality, participation, and shared religious interpretive power.¹¹

A small study exemplifies this. I compared seven seminar plans from six major German-speaking universities, three of which were developed by women and four of which were developed by men.¹² This analysis yielded the following picture:

Course	Gender	Textbook	Article	Articles Written by women	Articles Written by PoC	Men in %	Women in %
1	m	0	12	1	0	91.7	8.3
2	m	1	27	1(2)	0	96.3 (92.6)	3.7 (7.4)
3	m	0	39	1(2)	0	97.5 (94.9)	2.5 (5.1)
4	m	0	14	0	0	100	0
5	f	2	0	0	0	100	0
6	f	0	12	1	0	91.7	8.3
7	f	1	10	0	0	100	0

The seminars were structured in various ways. Some involved reading a textbook, while others primarily utilized articles. However, upon analysing the number of texts read in terms of gender and race, the seminar plans suddenly began to appear quite uniform. This is because few texts by women and no texts by people of colour were included in the readings. Additionally, explicitly queer, postcolonial, and feminist voices were completely absent. Thus, the reference literature through which students learn preaching practices is, at least in this context, still white, male, and heterosexual. The textbooks most frequently discussed in the seminars, namely those by Wilfried Engemann,¹³ Albrecht Grözinger,¹⁴ Ernst Lange,¹⁵ and Martin Nicol/Alexander Deeg,¹⁶ can be seen as central reference points in the German-speaking homiletic discourse, which is dominated by reception-aesthetic approaches.

Thus, even though many universities have gender and diversity policies in place, women and PoC involved in homiletic debates are rarely included.¹⁷ These policies include provisions

¹¹ Cf. Ibid., 61–77.

¹² The methodology proceeded as follows: Seminar plans were provided by colleagues and students. The entire volume of texts for each course was marked with 100%, from which the representative percentage of male, female, and PoC (people of color) resources was calculated. Only required readings were considered. Both the universities and the creators of the homiletics seminars are discussed anonymously.

¹³ Cf. Wilfried Engemann, *Personen, Zeichen und das Evangelium: Argumentationsmuster der Praktischen Theologie*, Arbeiten zur Praktischen Theologie 23 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003); Wilfried Engemann, *Einführung in die Homiletik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2011).

¹⁴ Cf. Albrecht Grözinger, "Mit den Sinnen sprechen", *Homiletik: aktuelle Konzepte und ihre Umsetzung*, ed. Lars Charbonnier, Konrad Merzyn, Peter Meyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), 153f.

¹⁵ Cf. Ernst Lange, *Predigen als Beruf: Aufsätze* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1976).

¹⁶ Cf. Martin Nicol and Alexander Deeg, "Einander ins Bild setzen", *Homiletik: aktuelle Konzepte und ihre Umsetzung*, ed. Lars Charbonnier, Konrad Merzyn, Peter Meyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), 70. Martin Nicol and Alexander Deeg, *Im Wechselschritt zur Kanzel. Praxisbuch Dramaturgische Homiletik*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 2013).

¹⁷ See, for example, Ruth Conrad, *Weil wir etwas wollen! Plädoyer für eine Predigt mit Absicht und Inhalt*, Evangelisch-katholische Studien zu Gottesdienst und Predigt 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie 2014).

stating that research findings and publications by women must be incorporated into the curriculum.¹⁸ However, this diversity is scarcely reflected in academic study and training. Due to the situation just described, the pulpit, regardless of the preacher's identity, metaphorically remains a site of singular religious power.

3. The Pulpit as a Symbol and Site of Power¹⁹

Within the field of theology, the pulpit often appears as a metonymy for preaching.²⁰ The pulpit symbolises the church, homiletics, pastoral theological understanding, ministerial theology, and spiritual power.

This multifaceted significance has evolved over several centuries. The material pulpit emerged from the portable lecterns used by mendicant monks in the 13th century, as they needed an elevated location for their outdoor preaching. Before this, preaching was done from locations that served multiple other functions, such as the cathedra (the bishop's throne). The pulpit was permanently placed in later church buildings of the monastic orders and all other churches since the 14th century. The exact placement has always been contentious – including today, with the location primarily being dependent on confessional aspects.²¹ In the Middle Ages, the significance of the pulpit extended beyond the religious realm and served as a venue for public communication on important matters within a village community. Media scholar Jürgen Wilke observes that the church square was “a place for personal conversation [and the pulpit itself was] a site for official announcements.”²² The pulpit established itself as a site of meaning-making and societal structuring that greatly informed what is understood to be of significance, authority, and power, which primarily afforded space to influential individuals who typically were white men.²³

Feminist and feminist-postcolonial authors emphasize that the pulpit and thus the preaching event are not neutral. This is something that U.S. homileptician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale points out in her reflective book *How Women Transform Preaching*:

¹⁸ Cf. for example ‘Massnahmen zur Berücksichtigung von Gender-Aspekten in Lehre und Forschung’, accessed 22 November 2021, <https://ethz.ch/services/de/anstellung-und-arbeit/arbeitsumfeld/chancengleichheit/equal-tools/gender-aspekte-in-lehre-und-forschung.html>; ‘Leitfaden_Gender_Lehre_Layout.Pdf’, accessed 22 November 2021, https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/36012151f45f8bac44c146c88c4eb714.pdf/Leitfaden_Gender_Lehre_Layout.pdf.

¹⁹ The author is aware that the pulpit and preaching have always been places where prevailing power structures and those in power have been criticized, and unjust structures have been addressed. However, this article consciously follows the narrative of postcolonial and feminist theologians, who understand the pulpit as a site of colonialist and patriarchal power.

²⁰ Cf. for example Nicol and Deeg, *Im Wechselschritt zur Kanzel*; Kim-Cragg, “Probing the Pulpit”; Shercliff, *Preaching Women*.

²¹ Cf. Peter Poscharsky, “Kanzel”, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie Online*, accessed 22 November 2021, https://www.degruyter.com/database/TRE/entry/tre.17_599_1/html; Ulrich Bock, “Kanzel”, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart - Online Publication*, accessed 22 November 2021, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/religion-in-geschichte-und-gegenwart/kanzel-COM_11270.

²² Jürgen Wilke, *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte: Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 11.

²³ Grammar simplifies communication by establishing rules that don't need to be communicated each time. However, religious grammar not only determines the structure, making its free discussion impermissible, but also regulates its application within the structure—not every believer can ascend to the pulpit and possess the same salvific authority. Just as with money, one cannot create religion oneself, as Jochen Weiss notes in his adaptation of Luhmann in: Jochen Weiss, *MammoN: Eine Motivgeschichte zur Religiosität des Geldes* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2007), 29.

“I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s hearing a lot of sermons preached by men – many of them very good sermons, I might add. They nearly all had a three-point framework, incorporated lots of interesting examples and illustrations, and held my attention even as a child. But in retrospect, I also remember how filled they were with examples from the then-male world: sports stories, war stories, stories about cars, stories about fatherhood. It was not until I first started teaching my Women’s Ways of Preaching course twenty-five years ago, and heard one of my students use the image of her grandmother quilting in her sermon, with the visual of a quilt spread on the Communion table as she spoke, or heard another student in that same class preach the first sermon I ever heard on the story of the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, and another preach on the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1, that I realized how starved I had been to hear sermons that lifted up and highlighted women’s everyday experience.”²⁴

The pulpit and the preaching event must be seen not only as a place and practice of communicating the gospel, but as sites of religious interpretive power.²⁵ Awareness of this power and being mindful of it is fundamental to power-sensitive preaching. The pulpit proves to be a sensitive index term with high symbolic significance which postcolonial and feminist theologians directly associate with white male normativity. For example, in her article *Probing the Pulpit*, HyeRan Kim-Cragg describes the pulpit as “[...] a historical site of white colonial memory and patriarchal authority.”²⁶ She refers to, among other things, statements by Austin Phelps, who writes in his book *Men and Books*: “The pulpit should be a battery, well-armed...The gunner who works it must know what and where the vulnerable spots are...He must be a *man*.”²⁷ By the way: the quote also provides another example of the synonymous use of the terms “pulpit” and “sermon.”

4. Power Theories as a Resource for Power-Sensitive Homiletics²⁸

In religious communication systems as well as in homiletics, power dynamics and relational dynamics play a crucial role on various levels. The form of preaching itself implies a claim to interpretive power, authority, and theological responsibility. Pulpits are supposed to be places of significance. Meanwhile, a preaching event without a claim to significance is, literally, meaningless. Thus, power is fundamentally part of life and of homiletics and is not simply to be evaluated as something that is negative per se. Rather, it is closely connected to questions of values and plays a role in preserving them. Power goes hand in hand with assuming responsibility, questions of competence, and decision-making ability. Furthermore, it is an indispensable part of every societal system. At the same time, it is important to critically question power to prevent it from being abused and to ensure that certain individuals, groups, communities, and ethnicities are not restricted by established power systems.

Theories of power have been a major topic in sociology since the time of Max Weber. Current discourses can, in my opinion, also be useful for homiletics. It is important to understand that the ability to act and exert influence is the most fundamental form of power. This ability to act and to be self-efficacious is also defined as personal power, which can manifest as self-

²⁴ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *How Women Transform Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021), 60.

²⁵ Cf. Martina Kumlehn, “Deutungsmacht”, accessed 14 December 2019, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/200577/>.

²⁶ Kim-Cragg “Probing the Pulpit”, 22.

²⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁸ For this section, see also Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 33–60.

referential power when directed toward oneself or social power when directed toward others.²⁹ Fundamentally, power refers to influencing (one's own or others') probabilities of thinking and behavior. As a result, power is always a relational and systemic concept.³⁰

Recent discourses on power, like the very influential discussions from Hannah Arendt, can provide clues for power-sensitive homiletics. According to Arendt, power is a relational phenomenon that, even in its most negative form, acts to build communities (and is geared toward a common practice).³¹ The power of an action is evident in the involvement of all those affected by said action. It manifests through the active support of the participants.³² Arendt's approach is essentially based on a communication-theoretical understanding of power which states that all actions are ultimately aimed at power. While Arendt was mainly referring to political action, her considerations are equally relevant to social and religious contexts in addition to numerous transformative goals in general. She conceptualises power in a broad sense in relation to participation and empowerment which makes her an important figure in feminist theory.³³ Arendt, therefore, views power from the perspective of individual actors. She does not conceptualise the individual's ability to act but rather considers collective practice. "But an individual person has no specific interests; these only arise for him in the common space, in which he [...] participates."³⁴ Action occurs as an unbounded exchange among individuals, devoid of material intermediaries. Within this dynamic, what Arendt identifies as the cohesive force of power for building communities, resides the interplay among these actors. According to Arendt, genuine power arises only when it can rely on the active support of the involved individuals. This typically entails that the participants should ideally share a certain consensus regarding their actions.³⁵ Only through this does genuine active support arise, which, for instance, becomes particularly crucial when there are threats to an action or project, or when a participating individual is temporarily absent. This active support from all participants engaged in an endeavor effectively challenges the notion that a single person can sovereignly command, determine, or direct a larger system to act. According to Arendt, any seemingly sovereign power of individual actions ultimately relies on authorization from the many. Thus, individual agency is always understood as interactive empowerment. Crucial in this context is the non-instrumental relationship that participants develop toward collective action which enables a non-strategic conception of power. For Arendt, the essence of collective action lies in the primacy of the communal aspect from the outset. For a collective beginning to be possible at all, individuals must remain open to others while seeking to relativize their own preferences and the norms that guide them. The openness to a shared practice, which can only be developed collectively and surpasses what any single individual already plans and desires, presupposes that concerns of sovereignty theory and strategic action do not take precedence. Such a practice of acknowledging

²⁹ Cf. José Antonio Marina, *Die Passion der Macht: Theorie und Praxis der Herrschaft*, Schwabe reflexe 12 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2011), 23–24.

³⁰ Cf. Katharina Inhetveen, "Macht", *Handbuch Soziologie*, ed. Nina Baur et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 256ff.

³¹ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft*, 4th ed. (München: Piper, 1986), 27–28.

³² Cf. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 42; Cf. Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 94–97.

³³ Cf. Mirko Wischke and Georg Zenkert, eds., *Macht und Gewalt. Hannah Arendts „On Violence“ neu gelesen* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019).

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (München/Zürich: Piper, 2003), 335.

³⁵ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Macht Und Gewalt*, 6th ed. (München: Piper 1987), 42.

one's own dependence, being open to others, and relinquishing strategic interests necessarily demands the radical acknowledgment of equality. Thus, being open to the actions of others to collectively initiate something requires egalitarian relationships.³⁶

A participatory understanding of power aligns with Christian theological narratives. For example, one might recall Acts 2, where a diverse gathering and multilingual speaking are emphasized, as well as the concept of the priesthood of all believers, or the sending out of the 72 in Luke 10.

5. Power-Sensitive Preaching: Postcolonial Homiletics

Reading Arendt in the context of homiletics could mean, for example, that listeners become participants and are empowered to act even in a traditional church service. This implies that control over the ongoing process, or even the worship event itself, must be relinquished. Metaphorically speaking, those who preach detach themselves from the pulpit, which is a place of overview and direction.

“It also means declaring voices on the (supposed) sidelines to be part of the center. In the homiletic context, it means sharing or completely relinquishing control over the pulpit event. This means, for example, taking people on both sides of the church or church community context seriously not only as recipients, but as co-creators of the sermon.”³⁷

Participatory discourses on power, as led by figures like Hannah Arendt (and then subsequently by many feminist and womanist thinkers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cathy Cohen, etc.), call for a readiness to share, thus enabling power. For homiletic practice, this would mean developing the courage to embrace diverse voices and to tolerate the polyphony, or even cacophony, that ensues. However, it goes even further. Essentially, this approach is about continually questioning the perceived certainties and normativity, as well as one's own constructions of knowledge, and acknowledging that these are relative. Postcolonial homiletic designs pick up on these considerations and are, therefore, indispensable for practicing power-sensitive homiletics. Two such designs are presented below.

An outstanding example of a participatory understanding of power in postcolonial feminist homiletics comes from HyeRan Kim-Cragg who describes postcolonial homiletics as a “circular multidimensional movement, with the purpose of creating a ripple effect in people's hearts and minds for the sake of the Kin-dom.”³⁸ In this short description, Kim-Cragg integrates a participatory understanding of power and the transformative dynamics of postcolonial homiletics. This is evident from her use of certain terms. The term “movement” emphasizes the relational dimension to foster collective progress and engagement. The idea of “ripple effect” illustrates the transformative dynamic, aiming to bring about sustainable changes in the thinking and actions of participants. A holistic human perspective is stressed by emphasising “hearts and minds” while addressing the participants' emotional and intellectual dimensions. Finally, the reference to the “Kin-dom” underscores the theological goal of power-sensitive and transformative homiletics, aiming to promote justice and well-being for the entire creation. Kim-Cragg's approach demonstrates how postcolonial and feminist perspectives in homiletics can promote a participatory understanding of power.

³⁶ See Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 94–98.

³⁷ Ibid, 99.

³⁸ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 6.

Cláudio Carvalhaes also deals with pulpit power in homiletics and liturgics. He emphasizes the disruptive and transformative potential of homiletics and liturgy “from below” that is critical of power and the overall system.³⁹ According to Carvalhaes, colonial practices lead to the levelling of diverse views in homiletics and liturgics, so that “the multiplicity of the sacred [turns] into cultural uniformity and monotony.”⁴⁰ A central concern of his work is to develop a postcolonial practical theology that makes these power structures transparent, detaches itself from a Eurocentric perspective and increasingly refers to subjugated knowledge.⁴¹ He attempts to focus on these “often hidden, forbidden, made negative and shameful treasures”⁴² in his work. For Carvalhaes, pursuing postcolonial practical theology means “to search and use subjugated knowledges, practices, vocabularies, and sources of the people at a certain place, which might lead us all to unforeseen [...] theological possibilities.”⁴³ Similar to Kim-Cragg, Carvalhaes also argues in favor of questioning the lone preacher’s model and, thus, the theological centering of power on individual theological experts. Instead, he argues for promoting participatory and collaborative approaches that strive for shared power: “[...] the preaching of a sermon [is] to be understood in expanded ways, going from the image of a lone pastor/preacher and understanding preaching in expanded ways, as a part of entire communities and social movements that preach with their actions, gestures, and wrestling with and within public spaces.”⁴⁴

As shown in the two aforementioned examples, postcolonial homiletics aims to share theological power, empower people, and transform communities and society as a whole.⁴⁵ Homiletical approaches that focus on power-sensitive communication have similar paradigms. The focus is often on collectivity and polyphony, perspectivity and contextuality, imagination, social and communal empowerment, sensitivity to structural disadvantage and intersectionality, criticism of the status quo, and a Kingdom/Kin-dom of God perspective, in which the importance of the Ruach (the power of the Holy Spirit) is emphasised.

The Ruach is also the theological foundation for the power-sensitive considerations of this article and will, therefore, be examined more closely in the following section.

6. The Ruach as a Theological Foundation for Transformative, Power-Sensitive Homiletics⁴⁶

The Ruach is particularly important from a theological framework as this part of God stands for aspects considered important for power-sensitive homiletics: female and non-binary images of God, multilingualism, dynamism, as well as lived and experienced theology. “Ruach or pneuma always opens up new ways of perceiving, hearing, or speaking, and new possibilities and vitality. From a biblical perspective, there is no immovable Ruach.”⁴⁷ The Ruach sets things in motion. She leads from narrowness to breadth and brings life. The Ruach is not simply audible breath or wind itself, but rather the vitality, energy, and power that becomes and is effective.

³⁹ Cf., Claudio Carvalhaes, *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the End of the World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020); Cláudio Carvalhaes, *Praying with Every Heart: Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021).

⁴⁰ Cláudio Carvalhaes, "Liturgy and Postcolonialism: An Introduction", in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives. Only One Is Holy*, ed. Claudio Carvalhaes, Postcolonialism and Religions (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 9.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴ Cláudio Carvalhaes, "Forms of Speech, Religions, and Social Resistance," *Cross Currents* 66, no. 2 (2016): 138.

⁴⁵ "Preaching in the congregation ends so that service in the world can start." Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 14.

⁴⁶ Cf. for this chapter Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 159–76.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

Moving air and moving energy that is “[...] not as something essentially present, but as the force encountered in the breath and gust of wind, whose whence and whither remains mysterious.”⁴⁸ It is, among other things, a breath that is only slightly perceptible to many others (Isa 57:13), a hurricane-like storm (John 1:4; Hi 1:19), a sign of God’s dynamic presence and God’s messengers (Ps 104:4), a sign of God’s creative power (Gen 1:2), the breath that God breathes into all living things (Gen 2:7), and much more. This is precisely what characterises the Ruach. It is dynamic and cannot be summarised in an adynamic concept or in a rigid, immovable idea. The Ruach cannot be dogmatically defined either as a Hebrew word or as a theological concept. The transitions between the Old Testament’s ambiguous Ruach, which also fills the prophets, and the spiritual power of *pneuma* are fluid. *Pneuma* is the power that people experience as bringing them into contact with the realm of the divine. Jesus was announced as one who baptises with *pneuma* (spirit) and fire (Mt 3:11 par Lk 3:16; probably a cleansing/destructive act; cf. Isa 30:27 f.). Finally, reference to the Acts of the Apostles is formative for the church’s self-image. The story of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is described in Acts 2:33. This Spirit gives power for mission, among other things (1:8). According to the interpretation, the divine *pneuma* gives direction to the young church (Acts 8:29.39; 10:19), guides decisions (Acts 15:28), and appoints leaders of the church (Acts 20:28). A striking element of this New Testament narrative, which is formative for church history, is the polyphony of voices. This represents the multilingualism that *pneuma* triggers and, at the same time, makes it possible to understand this polyphony. The diversity of voices implies the participatory element of the Spirit’s activity. It is not a single person who is chosen as a prophet and empowered by the Spirit to speak prophetically but a large number of people, each with their language, who receive a share in this Spirit which only expresses itself in this relational event of the many who are gathered and gains its power and effectiveness from this.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Kim-Cragg, for example, also associates postcolonial homiletics with the Ruach: “The lofty and humble task of postcolonial preaching will, it is hoped, contribute to the church’s witness to God’s love in the face of the deadly winds of our time, as it is inbreathed by the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit, the Ruach of God’s creative possibility for all people and creation.”⁴⁹ Kim-Cragg emphasizes that a homiletic rooted in the Ruach reveals that this energy is fed by the dynamic relationship between God, man, and creation, that it lives from this inspiration, and, at the same time, must remain fluid, polyphonic, and sensitive to power. Sermons and religious communication processes that follow this view carefully point out instances of injustice. This may be illustrated by Isa 61:1, for example, in which the Ruach is seen as a driving force that leads to the unheard being heard. Another example can be found in Micah 3:8, where the Ruach gives us the strength to raise our voices against unjust superiors (i.e., exploitative systems of leadership and power). Overall, the Ruach stands for the critical voice that does not fall silent in the face of oppressive structures but instead calls for and inspires transformation or, as Rudolf Bohren puts it: “The spirit denounces the injustice of the world and laments the suffering of the world and gives voice to the misery. This is a way of beginning to change the world.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rainer Albertz and Claus Westermann, “Art. Rûah - Geist,” *Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum AT II* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 726.

⁴⁹ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 10.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, 3rd ed., Einführung in Die Evangelische Theologie Bd. 4 (München: C. Kaiser, 1974), 87.

7. A Way of Beginning to Change the World – Dimensions of a Transformative Power-Sensitive Homiletics

What implications do these considerations and theories have for a power-sensitive homiletics that aims to transform traditional white homiletics? What aspects of the work of preachers must change when knowledge of transformative, power-sensitive homiletic discourses is reflected in practice?

In principle, such approaches should lead to an increased sensitivity to power dynamics and claims to interpretive power, which equally looks at who and how diverse voices, perspectives, and images of God are heard (or silenced) in the sermon (work).

Five dimensions—sharing (interpretative) power; starting from religious experience and lived theology; taking the body seriously (embodiment); daring polyphony; imagining and acting together on the Kingdom of God—can guide concrete action in practice. Each of these dimensions is briefly explained below.⁵¹

The first dimension, *sharing (interpretative) power*, promotes the diversity of theological discourse and joint theologising. It encourages us to recognise and take this form of shared theology as a preaching event seriously. The perspectival nature of theological knowledge-building is emphasised. Power and knowledge are closely linked. Sharing interpretative power would mean giving equal centrality to practical knowledge, or as Tubbs Tisdale puts it (when referencing the work of womanist homiletician Donyelle McCray):

“McCray urges us to expand our usual definitions of preaching to recognize that there are many people today – including many laypeople – who [...] are not preaching in pulpits in church sanctuaries or in modes and forms we usually associate with ‘preaching,’ but who nevertheless are preaching through their lives and their oral and written witness.”⁵²

An example of this comes from Switzerland. In the Protestant Reformed parish of Straubenzell in the canton of St. Gallen, an experiment was carried out in which no sermons were preached for a month. This was publicised under the slogan “No sermons here in May” or “No sermons in May.” The parish’s pastoral team decided to ban themselves from preaching for a month after being inspired by an article in a magazine. The author of this article, Pastor Hanna Jacobs, called for an end to preaching and argued that the monologue sermon was no longer in tune with the times. She asserted that discursive spaces were needed instead. The Straubenzell pastoral team was inspired by this article, which led them to scrutinise traditional preaching practices and decide to try preaching without a sermon. As a result, no sermon was preached in the Straubenzell parish in May. Instead, other forms of preaching were chosen such as creative and participative ways of organising the sermon. Parishioners were able to choose between various activities, such as practicing songs, meditating, sharing the Bible together, or engaging in kitchen discussions. The aim of the sermon-free month was to create discursive and participatory spaces in what was otherwise a rather monological setting, such as the reformed church service. Most members of the congregation welcomed the experiment with sermon-free services, although a general renunciation of sermons was not an option for the congregation. The parish team considered the experiment to be a success, as it led to a great response and a variety of conversations during the service.

The second dimension, *starting from religious experiences and lived theology*,

⁵¹ For a more detailed description of these, see Müller and Suhner, *Transformative Homiletik*, 183–218.

⁵² Tubbs Tisdale, *How Women Transform Preaching*, 40.

emphasizes the relevance of individual faith experiences for homiletics. Lived theology, as an experienced and reflective practice of faith, is considered one of the guiding aspects for homiletic action.⁵³ For the individual and the community, the experience of the Christian perspective of hope, which initiates a transformative process in the service of freedom, is at the center. The focus is on forms of worship and liturgical expression that promote participatory and contextualized spaces of experience. In this way, the task of homiletic practice is changing in such a way that creates spaces where people can enter into dialogue about spirituality, theology, their experiences, and their lives. The prioritization of contextual religious experience brings homiletics right into the heart of life. According to feminist theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "theology is about the messy particularity of everyday lives examined with excruciating care and brought into conversation with the great doctrines of Christian tradition."⁵⁴ This leads to the existential, meaningful, and liberal hopeful perspectives of human life. These, in turn, are the central objects of transformative homiletics.⁵⁵

There are many concrete methods and examples of this. A well-known practical example of how homiletical theologizing can be done is Bible sharing (or the seven-step method), which completely replaces the single-person sermon. This method was developed in South Africa. It is intended to encourage people to enter into dialogue with each other about Bible texts and their lives.⁵⁶ Another example from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) is from Herbert Moyo who describes the process of moving the church and worship toward an experience-oriented, participatory church by shifting from a colonial to a postcolonial worship service:

"The postcolonial ELCZ has transformed and adapted liturgical practices to the African worldview. [...] Musical instruments have now become holy and are allowed in the liturgy. Traditional African drums, jingles, Amahlwayi, guitars, and any form of musical instrument is welcome, while still accommodating Eurocentric instruments, such as the organ and the piano. In terms of holy things, the church has shown a high level of hybridity. The unholy are made holy by the holiness of God. Having introduced instruments to the liturgy, dancing became a reality in the church. Africans are naturally charismatic, and singing choruses, playing drums, and dancing isitshikitsha during liturgy allow people to be themselves before God. Congregants no longer watch the minister doing liturgy, but do liturgy with the minister."⁵⁷

This example leads directly into the next dimension, which is about *taking the body seriously (embodiment)*. In classical Protestantism in particular, the body still has little place in homiletics and, depending on the denomination or tradition, is even categorised as bad. However, as the

⁵³ Cf. Sabrina Müller, *Lived Theology: Impulses for a Pastoral Theology of Empowerment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

⁵⁴ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology", *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 86.

⁵⁵ For the connection between religious experience and hope, see Chapters 8 and 9 in Sabrina Müller, *Religious Experience and Its Transformational Power: Qualitative and Hermeneutic Approaches to a Practical Theological Foundational Concept*, (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2023).

⁵⁶ Cf. "Bibelteilen.Pdf", accessed 16 August 2022, https://www.erzbistum-koeln.de/export/sites/ebkportal/kultur_und_bildung/schulen/.content/.galleries/downloads/schulpastoral-downloads/pdf_schulliturgie/Bibelteilen.pdf.

⁵⁷ Herbert Moyo, "Liturgy and Justice in Postcolonial Zimbabwe: Holy People, Holy Places, Holy Things in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe", *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy*, ed. Claudio Carvalhaes, Postcolonialism and Religions (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 99.

example of Herbert Moyo shows, it is precisely the body that is central to communal worship. In deed, worship is, therefore, about the essential connection between faith, homiletics, and physicality. The fact that experiential knowledge is knowledge of the body has long been discussed in numerous disciplines. This is often referred to, in general terms, as *embodiment*. The common point of view is the assumption that living beings always have a body and, therefore, both the cognitive and mental states as well as the processes of living beings are fundamentally embedded in a world.⁵⁸ The body can be integrated into religious communication or even become a sermon in and of itself. This is the case with the dancing Jesuit, Prof. Dr Saju George SJ, a Catholic priest from India, who shared biblical stories and his faith through dance in church services and in workshops with children, young people, and adults.⁵⁹

The fourth dimension is *polyphony*. The aim of this dimension is to establish a transformative-participatory preaching practice. Compared to conventional approaches, this polyphonic perspective emphasizes the inclusion of different voices and experiences. Feminist-postcolonial approaches argue in favour of understanding the sermon as a polyphonic event. Various elements are mentioned: participation in the preparation and follow-up of the sermon, dialogue-based forms of preaching, such as those proposed by John McClure in his 1995 *Roundtable Pulpit* designs,⁶⁰ as well as alternative communal forms in which the sermon is integrated into meals and conversations, as suggested by Donyelle McCray.⁶¹ McCray criticises the classic preaching model by saying:

“[...] when this Moses model of preaching stands alone...it presents enormous hurdles for the Miriams and Aarons among us who preach in different ways. Such a narrow conception of prophetic voice hinders the sermon from functioning as emancipatory discourse in the fullest sense, and the sermon becomes a medium for propping up tired conceptions of God and authority.”⁶²

As an alternative to an authoritarian model in which only one person preaches, McCray proposes the following, also for the role of the preacher:

“Because we integrate forms of expression that African-American women and laypersons have used to express their spirituality in and out of the pulpit, the sermons are not beholden to the typical discursive frame of the preacher as a singular spokesperson. More often, the preacher emerges as a sage who bears witness by drawing from an archive of communal stories, songs, symbols, dances, and templates for survival. Preaching emerges as a mode of faith-sharing. In other words, the messages consist of less telling, explaining, and informing, and more stirring, imagining, reinventing, and eliciting.”⁶³

In McCray's reflections, the preacher functions as an enabler of polyphonic, homiletical, and worship events. She creates space for experiences and the diverse voices of all. In this

⁵⁸ Joerg Fingerhut et al., *Philosophie der Verkörperung: Grundlagentexte zu einer aktuellen Debatte*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 2060 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 9.

⁵⁹ See for example: "Saju George SJ – Der Tanzende Jesuit – Performance & Interview" https://youtu.be/UWh9_X1VDdQ?feature=shared. Accessed 13 March 2024.

⁶⁰ McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership & Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995).

⁶¹ McCray, "Playing in Church," 11-17.

⁶² Ibid., 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 12.

manner, the worship service becomes a participatory space for everyone—or vice versa. If this also goes hand in hand with a broad understanding of homiletics, the participatory religious-communicative space can become a worship space.

The final dimension is *imagining and acting together on the building site of God's kingdom*. German-language homiletics is strongly focussed on the individual, which has continued from Schleiermacher to the present day. In contrast, power-sensitive and postcolonial feminist approaches emphasize a homiletic program that is aimed at relationality and social effectiveness. This is particularly evident in the emphasis on preaching as a communal act that builds community and has a caring effect. To pick up on Kim-Cragg's idea of the Kin-dom of God: preaching means practicing and rehearsing the Kin-dom of God. It is the rehearsal of a new perspective of a just world:

“[...] preaching as rehearsal points to what the community of faith does, in anticipation of the coming realm of God. Preaching as a rehearsal of the realm of God anticipates a Kairos moment and engages a foretaste of the new reality. Postcolonial preaching as rehearsal helps to expound the goal of preaching as a kind of anticipation of the realm of God in a Kairos sense.”⁶⁴

Words and action, especially communal action, belong together.⁶⁵ A very practical example of a place where the idea of the kingdom of God is the guiding principle is the Open Place. The Open Place was launched in 2014 as a project of the Evangelical parish of Kreuzlingen to create a new form of church focusing on encounters, social justice, and offering assistance to others.⁶⁶ It provides various services and activities, including free food in the *verwertBAR*, catering in the café, a clothes exchange, an art studio, educational events, as well as communal cooking and eating. Although the project was initially met with resistance within the church, it eventually established itself as a new form of church community. Open Place is an inclusive setting that offers help for mentally impaired and financially needy people. It is also a meeting place for the neighborhood and people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. In short, Open Place is a refuge that provides hope to many people. It is a place where the message is proclaimed less through words and more through deeds.

Of course, these homiletic approaches may be accused of being overly idealistic. They are not neutral or objective but contain assumptions and normativity, just like all other approaches. In principle, however, power-sensitive approaches are, first and foremost, an invitation to experiment together, to dare to do something together, to experience theology in discourse and to experience religious communication, including the pulpit, as a joint activity.

Conclusion

The processes of change beyond the pulpit described here are based on changes in the attitudes of theologians, ordained ministers, church employees, and church members. The ordained ministry has the central task of creating space to imagine and act together in order to build the site of God's kingdom so that, for example, the charisma of a congregation can develop and unfold. The process of moving toward dialogue-based preaching formats is traditionally

⁶⁴ Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 13.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Wir Als Open Place...", Evangelische Kirche Kreuzlingen", accessed 3 March 2022, <https://www.open-place.ch/wir-als-open-place>.

described metaphorically as a process from the pulpit to the round table. The round table is often used as a metaphor for joint, participative, and sometimes even interreligious settings.

But we may need to go further than this in the 21st century, especially if many diverse voices are to be integrated into homiletic teaching and practice. Perhaps we also need to renegotiate the image and place of the pulpit completely. Perhaps the image and place should be determined by polyphonic practice. Perhaps there will suddenly be many round tables, but even more, perhaps we will be standing together on many homiletic testing spaces and building sites, where we can engage with the unknown that is still to be discovered. “If the future is to remain open and free, we need people who can tolerate the unknown, who will not need the support of completely worked out systems or traditional blueprints from the past. Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For indeed, that’s all who ever have.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Margaret Mead, *The World Ahead: An Anthropologist Anticipates the Future*, Margaret Mead-the Study of Contemporary Western Cultures (New York ; Berghahn Books, 2005).

**Beyond the Pulpit in the Catholic Church of South Korea:
Responding to Dr. Sabrina Müller**

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Abstract: *Dr. Sabrina Müller advocates nurturing diversity in preaching by integrating feminist and cultural insights into the field of homiletics. In response, this paper compares her research to another study on feminism, emphasizing that gender and culture encompass more than just sex and race. Further, this paper attributes the stagnancy of the preaching ministry within the Catholic Church in South Korea to a lack of motivation to adapt to changing times and a tendency to rest on the laurels of past triumphs, particularly in the realm of modern democratic history. To address the issue, embracing the Synodality of the Catholic Church, which aligns with Dr. Müller's focus on diversity in the preaching ministry, is imperative. This approach offers a remedy for the church to overcome the monotonous tendencies of clericalism and the gender-discriminatory practices influenced by Confucianism.*

Introduction

The Catholic Church in South Korea has historically been male-centric, influenced in the East by Confucianism. However, encouraging signs suggest that change for diversity may be on the horizon, both within and outside the church. Movements such as feminism in the 1970s and the Synodal journey of the Roman Catholic Church from 2021 have challenged the status quo. Notably, Pope Francis established a new commission to study the possibility of Catholic women deacons in 2020.¹ In 2022, the proportion of international residents in South Korea had reached nearly 5% of the total population, signaling a shift toward a more multicultural society.² The church provides conditions for nurturing such diversity.

While agreeing with Dr. Müller's assertion about the importance of enhancing diversity in ministry, I seek to encourage individual and qualitative solutions rather than statistical and quantitative ones. The matter is not about the number of female or male instructors/writers in the teaching ministry but about the ability of all preachers and teachers to recognize and appreciate preaching talents across gender and cultural identities since representation in gender and race do not guarantee the values and fruits of equality.

Diversity in Gender and Cultural Issues

In recent times, there has been an increase in female participation in leadership roles within Catholic churches in South Korea. However, entrenched clericalism and male-dominant tendencies remain. While I agree with Dr. Müller's suggestion that more female preachers, writers, and teachers of preaching could amplify the voices of women, critical questions remain as to whether biological sex inherently dictates any gender behaviors and values.

Feminism, or feminist philosophy, consists of diverse discourses across its developmental history. Eric Matthews provides an insightful summary of feminism and feminist

¹ Bernadette Mary Reis, "Pope institutes new commission to study women deacons," *Vatican News*, April 8, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/pope-commission-women-deacons.html>.

² Bo-eun Kim, "Korean society grows more diverse but still struggles with multicultural integration," *The Korea Times*, October 26, 2023, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/01/177_361433.html.

philosophy in French, exemplifying its multifaceted nature.³ After feminist activists achieved women's voting rights in 1945, feminist thinkers and writers such as Simone de Beauvoir developed their ideas, questioning the premise that "women are not regarded as subjects in their own right, merely as objects in the world of men."⁴ De Beauvoir has endeavored to identify sexual differences and to fight against the proposition.⁵ Her thoughts have influenced Luce Irigaray, who has argued that language itself is a product of masculine society and thus it is not an efficient tool to identify the full subjectivity of women.⁶

Irigaray's linguistic and psychoanalytic study urges women "to create a language of their own, fitted to female subjectivity and recognizing sexual difference as existing between subjects."⁷ Julia Kristeva is another feminist thinker and has claimed that "the subject, although it has its roots in biological drives, only comes to fulfillment in the symbolic order, so that its identity is social and changeable rather than biological and fixed."⁸ Unlike Irigaray and Kristeva, Michèle Le Dœuff does not utilize linguistic nor psychological analysis but focuses on philosophy.⁹ Le Dœuff criticizes philosophers such as Bacon and Sartre for their use of feminine images with negative connotations.¹⁰ After securing female voting rights in 1946, feminist thinkers such as de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Le Dœuff, expanded the discourse of feminism, incorporating linguistics, psychoanalysis, and philosophical imagery into their exploration of gender dynamics and subjectivity.

Reflecting on the development of gender dynamics, amplifying the voices of more female members through participation in preaching ministry, as suggested by Dr. Müller in her presentation, could serve as a catalyst akin to the impact of women's suffrage. The political participation of women did not fulfill the goals of feminism; similarly, the church would not achieve the diversity of gender in homiletics simply by inviting more female preachers, teachers, and writers. All of God's people, including preachers, need to learn how to recognize and value the unique gifts of female or male preachers.¹¹ Like gender discourse in the educational environment of homiletics, Dr. Müller asserts that inviting instructors from diverse ethnic backgrounds will increase sensitivity and support for cultural diversity in teaching preaching. However, racial representation alone does not guarantee support for these values, as race and performance are separate entities.¹²

Among second-generation immigrants or even the one-and-a-half generation who arrive in a foreign country at a young age and feel at home in their new country, many traditional parents raise them to practice the cultural values and behaviors of their country of origin while others encourage their children to quickly adapt to the foreign language and culture of their new home. I have encountered a few Korean Americans in the US who are more like Koreans than some Koreans living in Korea, enjoying Starbucks coffee and American dramas via Netflix. Not all Korean immigrants in foreign countries are born with cultural sensitivity simply because they are from another country unless they recognize and choose to nurture the cultural values of their

³ Eric Matthews, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 187.

⁴ Ibid., 188.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁷ Ibid., 193.

⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁹ Ibid., 200.

¹⁰ Ibid., 201, 202.

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 94.

¹² Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 93.

country of origin.

The authenticity and traditionality of a personality are not solely determined by his or her place of origin but rather by dedicating time and energy to intentionally nurturing their identity and practices in light of their first culture. On the one hand, diverse witnesses can represent their particular identities, e.g., a female preacher proclaims the Good News with her insights that male preachers cannot access. On the other hand, for the sake of cross-referencing and reconciliation of two extremes, a male preacher may learn from feminist theology and demonstrate their appreciation of this, while a European teacher may inspire Asian students from their perspective. In such cases, truth may be conveyed across differences not necessarily on the basis of a person's gender or nation of origin but according to the message they hope to share.

Character Formation

Dr. Müller pointed out a crucial issue by quoting Liz Shercliff's observation, "I don't feel I've been taught to preach as myself. I have been taught to preach like a man."¹³ The issue could potentially arise in Korea when the Catholic Church accepts female students for diaconate ordination at some time in the future.¹⁴ She reasoned that, statistically, male Europeans have written most of the teaching materials for preaching in Switzerland. However, statistics alone cannot fully represent the breadth of diversity represented in the literature. An author's sex or race might not determine their insights and perspectives for preaching; rather, it is what they have developed for preaching from their society and culture that is most influential. For example, an Asian male preacher who has not invested time and energy into understanding the inherent privileges afforded to men in his own culture will not address them effectively in ministry. Thus, students need more male and female instructors to help them gain self-knowledge of their gender and culture as well as the gifts and liabilities of these.

Preachers and students studying to be preachers may not agree on what constitutes feminine or masculine gifts for preaching as these are conveyed by teachers or writers of preaching resources. Still, they will likely agree that everyone has a unique journey toward shaping their preaching talents and styles. Although the Catholic Church does not name which preaching gifts belong to each gender or culture, many preaching professors expect their students to demonstrate certain developmental markers in their preaching and students tend to fit themselves into the expectations of gender and culture in their professional performance before recognizing how gender and cultural expectations have influenced their performance.¹⁵ Making effective volume, pitch, and articulation to deliver a message is one thing, and expressing one's interpretation, personality, and experience of gender and culture is another thing.¹⁶ As they try out various models and styles, students may begin to discern what they have learned through their experiences in childhood, school, and into the present time. In the process, they may distinguish both their innate, God-given gifts and those of their societies.

The multiple aspects of feminism encourage the importance for homiletic practitioners to nurture diversity not only by making the quantitative balance between female and male instructors and writers but also by recognizing gifts that arise from their experiences of "doing"

¹³ Liz Shercliff, *Preaching Women: Gender, Power, and the Pulpit* (United Kingdom: SCM Press, 2019), xv.

¹⁴ Joshua J. McElwee and Christopher White, "Synod Ends without Action on Women Deacons, Mention of LGBTQ Catholics," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 10, 2023, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezp.slu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=173422729&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁵ Richard F. Ward, "Finding Voice in the Theological School," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

gender as preachers.¹⁷ Understanding how preachers' society forms their gender/cultural identity and performance in preaching, teaching preaching, and writing about preaching, preachers may begin to name the connection between their gender/culture and their performance in preaching. Unless instructors recognize the interrelationship of gender, culture, and preaching gifts, they cannot help their students to do so. As a male instructor, for example, I wonder if I can effectively teach male Korean seminarians about their unique masculine Korean character, strengths, and tendencies for preaching. To do so, I need specific training to enhance my understanding of gender, race, and other social factors.

Synodal Church in South Korea

The preaching ministry within the Catholic Church in South Korea has straggled far behind Dr. Müller's discourse on transformative, power-sensitive homiletics characterized by polyphony and hope. Preaching itself is not a significant subject among Korean Catholics, but acting for practices, especially social justice, is. During the tumultuous period from the 1960s to the 70s, Koreans suffered from dictatorships, and Catholic lay ministers, religious sisters, and priests went out on the streets to promote civil movements and democracy. Dictators threatened and jailed the protestors. Nevertheless, Catholic priests celebrated Masses and prayed in front of police lines, standing together with workers and the persecuted.

Preachers during this time focused on exposing the apparent evils of abusive powers. Even non-Christians found solace in the church's teachings of justice. Catholics endured persecution and won the war against dictators, savoring the sweetness of triumph. There was no urgent need to refine preaching or even to invite people to Catholicism because people naturally gravitated toward the church, aligning themselves with the victors' side. As a result, the church was satisfied with how it had chosen to respond to the crisis. The survivors hesitated to accept diverse thoughts and revitalization. Ironically, the nostalgia for the church's achievements in the past impeded its leadership in preparing for next steps in the future. In addition, Confucianism, a national philosophy for over five hundred years in Korean and its cultural tendencies of male chauvinism and hierarchical structure remained within the Catholic Church. Often, many members have justified the remnants of Confucianism as a tradition of the church.

Fortunately, an increasing number of both female and male lay lecturers are emerging with compelling messages, prompting Catholics to recognize the problems of clericalism and the lack of diversity within the church. Instead of leaving the church, they are raising their voices in advocacy for participation, diversity, and collegiality. Moreover, the universal church is also inviting the local churches to undergo revival. The world meeting, the Synod, was for the bishops but Pope Francis invited all members of the Catholic Church to participate in Synodality, "the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journey together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim Gospel."¹⁸

In adapting the synodal message for the preaching ministry, preachers no longer operate as solo performers but invite support groups of his or her church members to aid in preparing their sermons, learn from civil experts to explore intersections between biblical messages and

¹⁷ Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, 62.

¹⁸ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 70 a, accessed 17 February 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.

social issues, and receive feedback from their congregations.¹⁹ By doing so, the church acknowledges that “all the baptized are qualified and called to be missionary disciples.”²⁰ Both preachers and congregations can enhance the ecclesial diversity for the preaching ministry as they challenge themselves “to intensify the mutual collaboration of all in evangelizing witness based on everyone’s gifts and roles, without clericalizing lay people and without turning the clergy into lay people.”²¹

Conclusion

The Korean Catholic Church has historically lacked strong motivation to enhance the diversity of gender and culture in the preaching ministry. This is due in large part to Korea being a predominantly single-ethnic country that is highly influenced by the male-dominated and hierarchical culture of Confucianism. However, as it transitions into a multicultural society and as some church members challenge traditional Confucian practices, there is a growing recognition of the need for diversity. Additionally, the synodal church requests preachers to nurture diverse perspectives in the preaching ministry, inviting all church members to play a role in the development of sermons. Reflecting on Dr. Müller’s insights in her presentation, this respondent hopes to see further developments of preaching with greater awareness of gender and cultural influences that impact this important ministry of the church in Korea.

¹⁹ Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1982), 12, accessed 17 February 2024, <https://www.usccb.org/upload/fulfilled-in-your-hearing-homily-Sunday-assembly.pdf>.

²⁰ *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Review Related to Pedagogy for Teachers of Homiletics

Christine J. Hong. *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021. 226 pages. \$39.99.

At the outset of *Decolonial Futures*, Dr. Christine Hong states that the book does *not* provide a map for theological educators, nor does it offer best practices for classroom teachers and learners. Rather, Hong offers this book as a “posture” or “approach” to theological education. She writes, “This book emphasizes a posture of humble modesty, the reframing of classrooms, lives, and livelihoods for a free and liberative future.” Hong weaves together personal narrative, thoughtful research, and dreams for the future of theological education.

The book is divided into two parts: deconstruction and reconstruction. Both the deconstruction and reconstruction are guided by three questions: “What makes education intercultural and interreligious?” “How might we rethink and redesign spaces of learning as hospitable to cultural and religious differences and dismantle the coloniality of theological education?” “How might we subvert traditionally colonial spaces to model the engaged intercultural and interreligious world we seek?” (pg. 6). As the landscape of theological education and religious identity changes, these questions become especially pertinent.

Guided by these questions, Hong lays out a vision for theological education that is decolonizing and anti-colonial. The first step to realizing this vision is the deconstruction of our inherited, colonizing modes of operation. Hong describes the ways that white, Christian, patriarchal ways of doing theological education bind us. These systems limit us as they emphasize concepts like mastery, binaries, and American exceptionalism. In contrast, Hong reconstructs a framework for theological education that emphasizes intelligence—a posture of humility, deep listening, and understanding. *A Decolonial Future* is one that is embodied and connectional; it honors various epistemologies, stories, and histories; and it values diversity, justice, compassion, formation, and service.

This is a book that names the hard realities of contemporary theological education, challenges the reader to create interreligious and intercultural spaces of teaching and learning, and dares to dream about how we can flourish in theological education. Hong does not shy away from calling out the real harm that our current systems of colonial education inflict on students, especially students in marginalized communities. At times the book conveys hope and conviction that things can be different and at times the reader may feel overwhelmed and hopeless. This reflects the reality many of us experience in our day-to-day work in theological education.

As our seminaries shift and change, attempting to meet the needs of today’s students, books like this are needed to stir us from complacency and challenge us to re-examine our classroom practices. For the teacher of preaching, this book is especially helpful. It offers language to describe what many in the practical disciplines sense but may not be able to articulate. There is a nuance and depth to the way Hong describes education that enriches and challenges the reader.

The most challenging aspect of Hong’s work may be her commitment to interreligious education. The idea is strong and convincing. Interreligious education lives into shared values like dialogue, community, and humility. However, these kinds of communities (especially if there are multiple languages spoken) create some practical problems for some of our institutions. This tension between good ideas and practical realities may come up for the reader throughout the

book. This tension proves the pervasiveness of colonization and the difficult work that lies ahead as we decolonize our classrooms and institutions. This is not a book about preaching or teaching but it may radically change the way you do both.

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Greg Carey. *Death, The End of History, and Beyond: Eschatology in the Bible. (Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023. 350 pages. \$34.49.

What does the Bible say about the end of time and the completion of history? What does it say about what happens after we die? These questions are of ultimate concern for Greg Carey in this engaging journey through the scriptures. This book is a deeply honest and careful analysis of the complex landscape of apocalyptic biblical literature. In this contribution to public biblical scholarship, Carey engages a broad range of eschatological perspectives arising within scripture. While Carey admittedly privileges New Testament writings, he accomplishes his goal of bringing a diversity of scriptures into conversation as he puts forth “integrated Christian theological proposals” (29). He extends hospitality to multiple viewpoints without reaching for a grand synthesis. In other words, he allows the authors of the biblical texts to come into conversation with one another rather than attempting to suppress difference. The author claims that ancient thought is both fluid and diverse.

Tremendously knowledgeable about the variety of scholarly arguments on biblical eschatology, Carey explores ancient thought as it is represented in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean region, in the Hebrew scriptures and Judaism, and in early Christian thought in the Gospels, other traditions about Jesus, and the writings of Paul. In his treatment of Paul, for example, Carey names Paul’s letters as apocalyptic literature because they describe God’s intervention in history in the person of Jesus Christ. For Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus signal “the beginning of the end for this current age and, looking ahead to Jesus’ return, the beginning of the beginning for the age to come” (205). Carey traces the apocalyptic themes and images that emerge in both testaments, always with an eye toward answering the question, “Why does this matter for us today?” At the same time, Carey honors the reality that contemporary readers have a very different perspective from the ancient witnesses. “Our task requires an attempt to take full account of the diverse biblical witness, to understand it in its own historical contexts, to account for the ways in which we modern people cannot conform our imaginations to ancient mindsets no matter how hard we try, and to bring our own cultural resources to the work, all of this to resource our contemporary theological imagination” (260).

Homileticians will be especially interested in Carey’s appendices, which are aimed at preaching eschatological texts and cover such topics as preaching on Advent gospel lessons, Revelation, hope, bodily resurrection, and the Holy Meal. Asking the question, “Does eschatology matter?” Carey offers insights that will guide the preacher in their assessments of eschatological texts as they construct sermons on challenging topics. For example, Carey acknowledges that while many preachers avoid preaching Revelation, it offers a distinctive witness and must be preached. Carey tends to tie Revelation’s ancient ponderings to the here and now, wondering about the implications of Revelation for sermons that deal with the climate emergency, for instance. For Carey, bodies matter. It matters what happens to our physical beings while they are alive and after they die. Thus, Carey sensitively approaches the belief that eschatology has no bearing on the present, arguing instead that Christians must not neglect the bodily needs of individuals and communities because we are too heavenly minded.

Carey fulfills his intent to “invite readers into the construction of meaning, offering suggestions more than complete theories and leaving explicit room for curiosity” (31). Rather than point us to a conclusion, the author makes space for the reader to engage in their own analysis and consider their own faith commitment. This means that Carey is tentative at times,

leaving it up to the reader to decide which proposals are most fruitful. Carey is candid about his interpretive choices, and he is clear about how his own mind has changed over time. Despite the complexity of the topic, this is an immensely readable book that will challenge long-held assumptions about eschatological perspectives while opening the possibility of fresh visions of the future that awaits creation. The reader does not come away with a grand sweeping narrative but rather a sense that these ultimate questions are best asked and answered in a community that includes a plurality of ancient voices as well as a diversity of scholars and followers of Christ.

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Mitzi J. Smith. *Chloe and Her People: A Womanist Critical Dialogue with First Corinthians*. Eugene: Cascade, 2023. 136 pages. \$16.85.

In *Chloe and Her People: A Womanist Critical Dialogue with First Corinthians*, Mitzi Smith provides an ingenious and needed womanist dialogue with 1 Corinthians. Recognizing the authoritative position of the Pauline biblical corpus within traditional Christian doctrine, its influence in historical and contemporary society, and its problematic assertions toward women, enslavement, and the bodies and knowledge production of enslaved and formerly enslaved persons, Smith offers a womanist critical rhetorical reading of 1 Corinthians that engages both scholars and pastoral practitioners who are concerned with issues of injustice, inequity, and non-inclusion that have been historically justified by Pauline texts. Unlike most Pauline scholarship that has used historical-critical methods to justify or offer apologetics for Paul's teaching, this reading places the contextual analyses of 1 Corinthians chapters 1–4, 7, 11–14 in dialogue with Africana women's histories, artifacts, epistemologies, voice, traditions, and struggle toward unconditional liberation (Smith, 6). Her analysis sheds light on the embedded misogyny, patriarchy, and ambivalence toward enslaved persons in Paul's message to the Corinthians.

In chapter 2, Smith uses Antoinette Clark Wire's reconstruction of the Corinthian women prophets as a basis for her identification of the Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1 as a prominent freedwoman who was an owner of enslaved persons. Recognizing the prevalence of Chloe in the nomenclature of enslaved persons, Smith ingeniously places the 1 Corinthians Chloe in conversation with Frances Watkins Harper's Aunt Chloe poems to give voice to Chloe's stigmatization. In Chapter 3, Smith analyzes 1 Corinthians' discourse on divine and worldly knowledge to reveal Paul's rhetorical construction of binary epistemologies aimed at dismissing alternative cultural methods of wholistic knowledge production. Smith envisages Apollos as a revival for control over the Corinthian community. Diminishing the authority of the Alexandrian-born apostle Apollos' eloquent teaching privileges Paul as the sole arbiter of divine proclamation and authority. The diminishing of Apollos' culturally based knowledge is juxtaposed against the contestation of Black bodies and Africana wholistic ways of knowing.

In chapter 4, Smith provides a womanist critical reading of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 by placing Paul's directives on the respective covering and uncovering of women's and men's hair and the glory, length, and cutting of hair in dialogue with issues concerning the natural hair of African-descended persons. Hair becomes a symbol of a divine hierarchy in which women are subordinated to men. Furthermore, the Pauline discourse on hair length and glory has served to dishonor Black natural hair and normalize whiteness. Placing Paul's hair doctrine in conversation with the historical and contemporary criminalization and policing of Black hair, Smith brings to light the ways in which Black women have struggled to conform to images of normative whiteness regarding their hair while others have "transgressed gendered and racialized norms" regarding hair (65). Her discussion reveals Paul's need to control bodies in Corinth and continued attempts to control Black bodies through constructed norms of white superiority and anti-Blackness.

Smith further discusses Paul's rhetorical construction of sexual politics and sexual ethics in chapter 5. Smith's close contextual reading of 1 Corinthians 7 and 13 identifies Paul's sexual ethic and politic of monogamy to be motivated by a need to avoid sexual immorality and promote self-control, not a commitment to love or marriage. Smith places Paul's 1 Corinthians 7 and 13 texts in conversation with the historical context of the African American quest for affirmed loving relationships, recognizing the systemic barriers that have impeded successful

Black partnered relationships and the ways in which the language of self-sacrifice and esteeming another above oneself have contributed to domestic abuse.

Chloe and Her People is an invaluable contribution to womanist scholarship. It is a bold rhetorical analysis using Smith's impeccable biblical scholarship to address Pauline texts that have continued to perpetuate gendered and racialized trauma for generations. As a scholar, I am elated by the wealth this book brings to womanist biblical discourse. Preachers who are committed to proclaiming a liberative message of racial and gender justice will find this book an indispensable resource. As a pastoral practitioner, I recognize, as Smith does, the ways in which Paul's doctrines have become embedded in the foundation of Christendom. Thus, there remains a need for further scholarship that employs Smith's groundbreaking work, particularly in the areas of homiletics and pastoral theology, in order to disrupt the status quo of the patriarchal, culturally denigrating Pauline apologetic and Pauline-affirming interpretations that are so pervasive in the Christian church and androcentric and racist cultures.

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Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer. *In Search of Jonathan: Jonathan between the Bible and Modern Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 392 pages. \$100.91.

Protesting the lack of scholarly attention paid to the biblical character Jonathan in his own right, *In Search of Jonathan: Jonathan between the Bible and Modern Fiction* represents Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer's exploration of Jonathan for Jonathan's sake. Tiemeyer clarifies at the outset that hers "is not a 'David and Jonathan' book" (3). Rather, her aim is to rescue Jonathan from the biblical and literary margins. Despite narrative gaps in 1–2 Samuel that leave Jonathan "a fractured and elusive character" (5), Tiemeyer argues that it is possible to establish him as a cohesive figure by putting the biblical text in conversation with modern fiction. Tiemeyer's method is two-pronged. First, she examines the biblical Jonathan through careful exegesis, exposing both the complexity of his characterization and the textual fractures that obscure him. Second, Tiemeyer endeavors to resolve those fractures with the help of modern fictional portrayals.

Chapter 1 explores questions of genre, literary criticism, and biblical exegesis before introducing the selection of fictional works (eleven novels, two poems, and one short story) with which the author will engage throughout the book. Tiemeyer acknowledges that the portrayal of David's rise in 1–2 Samuel is, at least in part, an attempt to justify his kingship over Israel. However, she disagrees with the notion that Jonathan's character exists solely for narrative reinforcement of David's legitimacy. Following Robert Alter (*The David Story*, 1999), she affirms the text as a literary creation whose authors employed imaginative approaches to historical writing, and she explores the possibility that the lack of a cohesive Jonathan narrative, rather than an accident of the editorial process, is an intentional storytelling strategy that invites the reader to fill in narrative gaps in the life of the character through creative interaction with the text. Tiemeyer's own creative interaction combines historical-critical exegesis of the final form of the Masoretic text, through which questions arise from within it, with reception exegesis (as distinct from reception history), whereby she draws on the midrash-like quality of certain modern depictions of Jonathan in order to answer her questions by highlighting aspects of the text that might otherwise remain hidden.

Although this study pursues a cohesive Jonathan, the question of his relationship with David remains significant to that task. Chapter 2 investigates the question of homoeroticism and discusses homosexuality and masculinity in the Bible and its ancient Near Eastern context. Tiemeyer contends that all three interpretations of David and Jonathan's relationship—as outlined by Markus Zehnder in his 2007 article, "Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality": the relationship as homosexual/homoerotic, the relationship as homosocial, and the relationship as an example of friendship and loyalty—are possible. She therefore considers the text ambiguous as to the question of homoeroticism. Given this persistent ambiguity, the question for Tiemeyer becomes which interpretation "is best suited to support a well-rounded and psychologically plausible literary persona" (37). She concludes that a more coherent version of Jonathan materializes "if the reader assumes that his feelings for David include erotic undercurrents" (63).

Chapters 3 through 8 constitute the study in earnest, discussing thematic units of 1 Samuel 13–2 Samuel 1 that confront the reader with contradictory aspects of Jonathan's character. For example, can one reconcile Jonathan the popular and brave military leader (1 Sam 13–14) with the Jonathan who willingly yields his throne to David (1 Sam 23)? Likewise, can the Jonathan who in 1 Samuel 20 rebels against the father who had been prepared to kill him in 1

Samuel 14 be reconciled with the Jonathan who remains loyal to his father even unto his own death in 1 Samuel 31? These are the Jonathans from which Tiemeyer attempts to draw a single, coherent personality, offering in Chapter Nine her “very personal, distinctly modern, rather female, yet also definitely biblical, retelling on Jonathan” (323).

Reception exegesis will, of course, not be the preferred method of every biblical scholar, yet Tiemeyer’s honesty about its potential shortcomings combined with her charming enthusiasm for the project go a long way in making a compelling case for its effectiveness. By employing insights from literature, this straightforward and well-paced monograph offers a creative interdisciplinary approach to questions that arise from robust critical engagement with the Bible. Scholarly through and through, the book assumes the reader’s background in critical biblical studies, if not literary theory. However, Tiemeyer’s clear explanation and artful demonstration of her methods would benefit any exegetical novice willing to settle in for a thorough reading. Preachers in particular will find in this volume a model for responsible scriptural engagement that inspires and encourages a vibrant theological imagination.

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Jeremy Kangsan Kim. *Preaching on Social Suffering: Formulating a Homiletical Theology for the Contemporary Korean Context*. Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 2023. 244 pages. \$29.40.

This book is an attempt to formulate a homiletical theology for preaching on social suffering in the contemporary Korean context, focusing on Sewol Ferry Sinking in 2014, a tragic event that claimed 304 lives in South Korea. Since the tragedy occurred a few days before Easter Sunday, Korean preachers were faced with theological questions, such as why God left the innocent to die helplessly and how Christians could understand it and respond to such a calamity. Jeremy Kangsan Kim argues that Korean Protestant preachers failed to adequately respond to the tragedy due to the limitations of the theological framework they employed to interpret suffering. Therefore, he proposes a new model of preaching on social suffering as lament grounded on Confucian ren (仁, meaning "co-humanity" or "humaneness").

In the 1st chapter, Kim sets the foundation for understanding the concept of "social suffering" by locating it in the scholarly discussions from the research in the eighteenth century to contemporary academia. After describing the traumatic events in modern Korean history to catch the characteristics of social suffering in the Korean context, he defines social suffering as "collective suffering that emerges from sociopolitical violence and oppression" (30-31).

The 2nd chapter takes the Sewol ferry incident as a case study, focusing on how social suffering was expressed in the aftermath of the tragedy. Consequently, the author reveals that Korean society's response to the tragedy was identical to the reaction to earlier national traumatic events and criticizes Korean Protestant preachers for failing to effectively offer sincere comfort and support for those who were suffering.

In chapter 3, the author analyzes twenty-nine sermons delivered after the traumatic event, focusing on how preachers addressed three topics —suffering, the Sewol ferry incident, and applications related to the incident. As a result, the author uncovers two approaches to Korean preaching that show distinctive theological-homiletical perspectives on social suffering. The first interpretation views the incident as a result of egocentric actions and desires based on original sin or a sign or warning from God (86), while the second considers it a consequence of sociostructural corruption. (87)

In chapter 4, Kim traces the theological-homiletical foundation of the two streams presented in the sermon samples. He identifies the theological foundation of suffering as the result of original sin, which is emphasized by Western missionaries and the conservative majority of Korean churches. On the other hand, there is the view of suffering as the result of sociostructural matters, as presented in Minjung theology. The author argues these two approaches have limits in proclaiming an integrative gospel since they tend to lack either compassion or resistance in response to social suffering. For instance, if one emphasizes resistance to correct social discrepancy resulting in a social traumatic event, it tends to fail to comfort the sufferers with sincere compassion, and vice versa.

In chapter 5, Kim proposes preaching as lament which is an alternative homiletical model to overcome the limits of both groups. He believes that preaching as lament can provide a space for mourning and build solidarity among sufferers. In such a case, lament interplays compassion and resistance. He says that lament is "a declaration by the people of God who are encountering unexpected suffering in their lives while God is silent" since it is "a vehicle to deliver people's emotions of suffering to God in order to call for God's presence and saving activity" (136). In his view, lament is an act of protest against the evil experienced in human existence and an act of hope to encounter the compassionate God who suffers with sufferers,

crying out for justice against existing injustices (146-7, 155).

In chapter 6, the author presents the otherness of ren (仁), in place of Levinas' otherness, as a theological foundation for preaching on social suffering, which contains both compassion and resistance. Kim argues that the Confucian concept of ren can overcome the dichotomy of self and other, which is the foundation of Levinas' theory of otherness.

This well-structured book deserves to be acclaimed because it enriches the understanding of Korean preaching formulated throughout modern history. It deepens the homiletical discussion about how to preach on social suffering in a particular context. Also, its fresh claim of preaching as lament presents an alternative homiletical model for preaching on social suffering. Its sharp critiques of a traditional hermeneutic on suffering beneath Korean preaching reveal problems that hamper the proclamation of the gospel to the people in social suffering. It serves as a clarion ringing to awake Korean preachers from a theological slumber that is blind to the pain of the sufferers from a social tragic event spawned from systematic evils and sins. Although non-Korean readers or those less familiar with Korean preachers might feel challenged due to the cultural distance, it offers an intriguing opportunity to widen homiletical perspectives and obtain valuable wisdom for preaching on social suffering.

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Rob O'Lynn. *Digital Jazz: Preaching, Media, and Technology*. St. Paul: Working Preacher, 2023. 47 pages.

On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared an end to COVID-19 as a public health emergency. Although the virus is not as lethal now, it has caused lasting changes in individuals' values, communication, and interrelationships. The church is no exception; many had to cancel in-person worship due to the safety protocol, and clergies who had no help from their small congregations had to quickly learn how to use technology to continue to lead the worship, preach the words, and care for their people. Even now, after the pandemic, technology has become a vital part of ministry for many churches.

In the given context, Rob O'Lynn's *Digital Jazz* is a timely work that evaluates the various aspects of technology and suggests how to use them effectively and responsibly for ministerial work, including preaching. The author derived the title of his book from *Tron: Legacy*, in which Kevin Flynn explains to his son Sam how his creation of technology called ISOs became the "key to revolutionizing almost every human idea," therefore calling it "digital jazz" (3). While technology such as printing, radio, and TV has often been utilized for preaching, O'Lynn believes that the recent advancement in technology is revolutionary by allowing preaching to reach into "even the remotest ecclesial enclaves" (3).

The book comprises 7 chapters. In the 1st chapter, "Preaching and Creativity," O'Lynn encourages readers to engage in multi-sensory approaches to preaching. He points out that Jesus not only proclaimed words, but also used objects, dined with people, and hiked to mountains for preaching (15). As creativity is the very nature of God, preachers should also be creative to reach their audience more holistically. In the 2nd chapter, "Preaching and Graphic Design," O'Lynn discusses several benefits of using graphics for sermons. He explains how graphics could help preachers communicate their messages more clearly, generate interest in the sermon theme, and resonate with today's visual culture. Additionally, he provides a list of platforms for graphic design and offers guidance on how to create images.

In chapter 3, "Preaching and Podcasting," the author describes the prevalence of podcasts in today's culture and provides an overview of the pros and cons of using them for preaching. Since podcasting is one-way communication, listeners may be easily distracted. Nevertheless, O'Lynn believes that podcasting is a valid venue to proclaim the gospel, help the audience encounter God, and form a community. In chapter 4, "Preaching and Livestreaming," O'Lynn raises similar concerns about livestreaming as with podcasting, since the latter is often the recorded version of the former. He also offers practical tips on how to livestream with minimal equipment, engage listeners effectively, and uphold copyright laws.

In chapter 5, "Preaching and Social Media," the author discusses potential dangers of social media, such as the spread of misinformation, doomscrolling, and control. However, O'Lynn argues that when used faithfully and responsibly, social media can be an effective tool to connect with current congregations and reach out to others. In chapter six, "Preaching and Platforms," O'Lynn expands the scope of ministry to suggest which platforms could be useful for the ministries of communication, administration, preaching, and pastoral care. Many readers will appreciate the list of apps and websites that the author tested in his teaching career and ministerial work.

In the final chapter, "Preaching and Plagiarism," O'Lynn shares his personal stories about the time another person stole his illustration from a sermon and a student preached his sermon word-for-word. While various perspectives exist on whether it is faithful or ethical to use

someone's illustration or sermon, O'Lynn encourages preachers to be authentic to themselves by bringing their "doubts, insecurities, and unanswered questions—into the pulpit as possible (44).

Technology is rapidly changing, developing, and improving to the point that any writing about it could quickly become outdated. As such, O'Lynn's critical discussion of how and why preachers should use technology for their sermons is not only timely but also commendable, especially in his practical suggestions of various platforms. However, since the book is rather short, some may wish that O'Lynn would expand more on critical questions, such as how to bridge the gap between online and offline individuals, how to invite the online audience to a deeper spiritual growth and discipleship, and how to measure the effectiveness of the use of technology for preaching. Is it based on the number of views or the theological depth of comments?

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recently been the center of conversation in the technology world, further questions may demand responses from homileticians regarding the intersection between preaching and AI. Therefore, O'Lynn's work lays the foundation for others to pay attention to the evolving role of technology as a medium for preaching to contemporary audiences.

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Joni Sancken. *All Our Grievs to Bear: Responding with Resilience After Collective Trauma*. Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2022. 212 pages. \$16.65.

Living in a post-COVID world, where people continue to grapple with shared traumatic experiences stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, racial injustices, climate change, and global conflicts (15), how can communities heal from the invisible wounds of such collective trauma? Joni Sancken, a professor of homiletics with a focus on theological and interdisciplinary approaches, offers her insights to this critical question in *All Our Grievs to Bear: Responding with Resilience After Collective Trauma*. Aiming to “help nurture hope and resilience in congregations and Christian groups” (16), Sancken provides a trauma-informed liturgical blueprint for churches confronting these crises. This book is designed for a broad audience, including clergy, pastoral counselors, laypersons involved in ministry or community leadership, and scholars at the intersection of theology and trauma study.

In chapter 1, Sancken sets the stage by exploring the multifaceted and lingering nature of the impact of collective trauma, detailing how it can unravel a group’s “self-understanding, relationships, worldview, and sense of future possibilities” (52). Building on this framework, Sancken centers her subsequent discussions around three pivotal church practices: lament, storytelling, and blessing—each chosen for its profound potential to facilitate communal healing.

Chapter 2 examines the practice of lament and posits it as “a deep prayer practice” rooted in the Bible and “a primal expression of human anguish and protest” (55, 58). Lament not only addresses spiritual needs but also promotes bodily and social healing by allowing communities to openly confront and mourn their losses (80-1), fostering reconnection to God and others (59, 61). Chapter 3 explores storytelling “as a means to process collective trauma” (107), with Sancken arguing that it can restore survivors’ agency by enabling them to *remember*, *retell*, and *reshare* their traumatic memories within the community’s ongoing narrative (109). This practice is deeply connected to the “identity, priorities, mission, and behaviors” of the church (141). The final chapter engages with the practice of blessings. Typically, as one of the last liturgies in a worship service (right before sending out the community), the practice of blessings manifests God’s love and goodness, acting as a spoken testimony to God’s presence in the world (143). Sancken overviews the practice from both biblical and theological perspectives and shows how giving blessings can comfort and support communities “in times of transition and struggle” (174), suggesting that it allows us to “experience God’s blessings hidden in the cross” (146).

Sancken’s interdisciplinary approach, which merges biblical and theological insights with collective trauma studies in worship settings, stands out as one of the book’s main strengths. Her ability to make complex concepts approachable through scholarly analysis and various lived examples is notably effective. Her nuanced understanding of how collective trauma disrupts community life is both academically rigorous and practically applicable. She provides practical suggestions for readers to employ different forms of lament, storytelling, and blessings in worship spaces. These suggestions are adaptable for both in-person and online worship and fellowship formats. By reflecting on the usage of these elements in liturgy, ministers could

formulate a trauma-informed worship service that effectively responds to the needs of the wounded community.

Although Sancken points out that this book is primarily designed to address community trauma within the Christian context, the practices of lament, storytelling, and blessings are powerful and resonate across various faith communities. As Sancken rightly points out the danger of using a single story by referencing Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's speech (117), the book could be further enhanced by expanding its scope to include diverse stories and practical examples beyond Eurocentric settings. This expansion would align with the global impact of COVID-19, emphasizing all humans are connected by this shared trauma. Such an approach would enrich the discussion with a spectrum of cultural insights and reinforce the universality of these healing practices in addressing trauma. Additionally, including a complete and coherent worship liturgy that integrates these three elements at the end of the book would make it even more substantial and practical for readers to implement.

In an era where trauma seems increasingly pervasive, *All Our Grievs to Bear* is a vital and timely resource for understanding and healing collective trauma through a spiritually enriching and church-grounded lens. Sancken offers not merely strategies for recovery but a vision for transformation, urging a move beyond mere survival to a revitalized communal life filled with hope. Although trauma can "[steal] love, physical well-being, hope, and the ability to express, process, or share about one's experience" (16), this book demonstrates how worship can transform stealing into sharing, and ultimately leading to an experience of God's unconditional love amid shared suffering. This work is recommended for anyone involved in guiding faith communities through times of disruption and suffering, and for those seeking to foster resilience and renewal in the aftermath of trauma.

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Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song*. New York: Penguin Press, 2021. 304 pages. \$14.99.

The Black Church by Henry Gates tackles the gargantuan task of chronicling the over four-hundred-year history of the Black church. Gates' work begins with the depiction of the embryonic steps of what would evolve into African American religious traditions that are first taken in the soil of African religious traditions. Gates contrasts this evidence of early religious exposure to religion broadly, and Christianity in particular, with later missionary efforts to introduce Christianity to the enslaved to illustrate how later presentations of Christianity would pervert its purpose, being tailored to justify the enslavement and subjugation of Blacks. Christianity serving as a tool of empire and oppression while simultaneously being used by Black communities as a means of subverting oppression is a recurring element of its history with Blacks.

Gates describes how, over time, captured Africans, despite facing the gut-wrenching realities of enslavement, found the capacity to fuel their religious imagination in the hidden spaces of the invisible institution. He rightly highlights the multiplicitous manifestations of Black religious imagination in the music and spoken word of the religious expressions of the enslaved. Gates is attentive to the democratization of religion during the First and Second Great Awakenings, a period instrumental to the influx of Blacks into Christianity. While Gates emphasizes the varied religious traditions of Blacks, inclusive of the prominence of Islam, he highlights this period as one of the central moments in the growth of Protestant engagement by Blacks.

The growing scope of religious practices and the ability of those practices to address both spiritual and material concerns is evident throughout Gates' work. Whether it is the religious instincts evident in the rise of the Pentecostal church and the Holiness movement in the late 1800s or the Black church's role in the run-up to emancipation and reconstruction, his account emphasizes both the importance of Black churches as spaces for religious experience and as centers of communal action for the Black community. Additionally, the paradoxical role of the Black church in supporting the pursuit of the rights of Black men or the election of Black political figures following the Fifteenth Amendment while concurrently denying equality to the women of its own community would repeat itself throughout the history of the Black church. Gates' portrayal of the Black church extends to its cultural contributions, tracing the lineage of gospel music from spirituals to its influence on secular music and political movements. Gates examines the critical and complex historical role of the Black church during the Great Migration and Civil Rights, along with the challenges faced by the Black church post-1960s, including its role in social justice movements. In essence, this book sheds light on the multifaceted nature of the Black church, noting that it has been a source of spiritual renewal, political power, and a force for change throughout history.

However, this book is but one of many well-written attempts to chronicle the history of the Black church. As such, it is reasonable to ask what this effort offers that prior efforts did not. It may well be that the answer to this question is more about timing. The history of the Black church affirms its historic role as a communal institution, consistently and courageously affirming the potential and promise of Black life under the most arduous of circumstances. Yet, in this contemporary moment, the demands from the Black community for justice birthed by the many occasions of social, political, and economic assault on Black life bring the Black church's role into sharp critique. Additionally, deteriorating socio-economic conditions are pointed to as

evidence of the Black church's diminished impact or influence. It may well be that Gates has responded to the particularity of this moment by offering a timely reminder of the power and historical impact of the Black church. Gates offers an objective review of the Black church's history and is unsparing in his attention to the many places where the Black church has fallen short of its lofty aspirations. Nonetheless, ever present in this work is the portrait of an institution whose gifts and contributions to the Black community may, in this moment, go under-appreciated.

The Black Church offers a compelling and insightful analysis of the Black church's historical significance, cultural relevance, and its continuous impact on the American story. With rich storytelling and historical evidence, the book showcases the resilience, community, and empowerment found within the past of the Black church and hoped for in its future.

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Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. 177 pages. \$28.00.

The upheaval of anti-Asian hate crimes during COVID-19 has brought attention to the severity of racism against Asian Americans only recently. Grace Ji-Sun Kim, an ingenious Korean American theologian, uncovers in her book, *Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women*, the history of racism against Asian Americans that has been dismissed for too long. While addressing the plight of Asian Americans as a whole, Kim's emphasis lands on the intersecting axes of "Confucian culture, patriarchal Asian history, and racism and sexism in America, which create multiple layers of oppression (131)" for Asian American women. This book embodies Kim's commitment to bringing "voice to the voiceless and color to the invisible (162)" for doubly marginalized Asian American women.

The book includes five chapters. Chapter one, "Motherland: War and Comfort Women," lays the foundation of the book by tracing back the agonies of Korean women: the wars, domestic violence under the patriarchal system, silent endurance of pain, and the horrors of the systemic sexual enslavement of Korean women governed by the Japanese Imperial Army. Chapter two, "Immigration: Old Doors, New Doors," focuses on the stories of the Asian indentured workers who lived in "dismal conditions, enduring the indignities of discrimination and racism as invisible noncitizens (42)" after having sacrificed their safety to build the transcontinental railroads in the U.S. and Canada. Chapter three, "Racism: Yellow People," centers on the systemic racism against Asian immigrants, which has too often been dismissed. By controlling the representation of Asians, creating stereotypes, and displaying the "yellow people" through a white lens, Western dominance has deprived Asian Americans of the right to tell their own stories. Asian men were emasculated, and Asian women were hypersexualized by the white gaze. In chapter four, "Sexism: Home, Church, and Society," readers follow Kim's journey from joining the church to getting ordained, and the sexism she encountered throughout. Kim delineates how patriarchal culture of Asian immigrant churches create double marginalization for Asian American women rather than offering empowerment to overcome the oppression in the white dominant society. In the final chapter, Kim proposes a "theology of visibility"—a call to envision new ways of understanding the divine by using non-Western tools. Kim argues that theology must embrace four Asian concepts of Ou-ri (which means "our"), Han ("unjust suffering"), Jeong ("sticky love"), and Chi ("the spirit") to make Asian American women visible as full participants in the kin-dom of God (139).

What is most powerful in this book is the interweaving of real-life stories and personal narratives in addressing the difficult topics of racism and sexism. While reading the book, one learns effortlessly about the essential Asian American histories of wars, immigration, xenophobia, and Exclusion Acts through stories. Different stories guide each chapter and offer readers a palpable comprehension of each topic. Kim tells the pains of Asian Americans not as an academic outsider but as an inside storyteller whose personal experiences carry the flesh-and-blood stories of Asian American history. The interweaving of personal narratives invites the readers to a more intimate level of understanding of the suffering of Asian American women. *Invisible* is not only a phenomenal book that powerfully tells the stories of Asian American women but also an incredible example that gives insights for an effective preaching pattern to engage the audience.

In the meantime, I would have loved to see a more nuanced proposal of the “theology of visibility” for Asian American women. If we were to be mindful of the margins within the margins, as Kim herself notes, we need to be aware of the hegemony behind the concept of “Asian Americans” and how it is being dominated by people of East Asian descent. While Kim uses “Asian Americans” as a monolithic term, the stories of racism and sexism against South and Southeast Asian Americans are rarely addressed. Ironically, by introducing four concrete tools for theology of visibility, Kim excludes the readers who do not, or cannot, resonate with the Korean/East Asian concepts from embodying the theology of visibility. I wish Kim, rather than suggesting the four concepts as a generalized tool to encompass theology of visibility for all Asian American women, suggested the concepts as “a” set of examples for her own and invited the readers to also find their own concepts that could reflect their own theology of visibility.

Despite such weakness, *Invisibility* is an excellent model of rediscovering and reclaiming one’s community’s silenced history by sharing stories and giving voice to the voiceless. Anyone reading this book will experience the power of storytelling and gain great insights for interweaving personal narratives with social history in writing, preaching, and teaching.

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Sarah Bereza. *Professional Christian: Being Fully Yourself in the Spotlight of Public Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022. 200 pages. \$25.00

As the title indicates, Sarah Bereza wrote *Professional Christian: Being Fully Yourself in the Spotlight of Public Ministry* with professional Christians in mind. With her engaging and intimate writing style, Bereza invites us to “explore the foundation for ...being fully ourselves in the spotlight of public ministry” (11). A church musician and worship leader with a PhD in music and theology, she based this book on interviews of church leaders including pastors, church staff, and denominational leaders, as well as seminary professors, chaplains, and activists. Her interviewees are mostly from North America but nevertheless represent various traditions, identities, and cultural experiences which provide a wide array of perspectives. Notable contributors include homileticians, respected preachers, and church musicians, as well as professors of theology, ministry, and Christian education. Regarding preaching in particular, the reflections of these scholars and practitioners provide insights about the importance of understanding self and the balance between the public face of the preacher and vulnerable embrace of one’s identity.

The book is organized in chapters outlining seven obstacles Christian leaders face all the while modeling the vulnerability Bereza espouses as the antidote. The end of each chapter provides “Key Takeaways” followed by a set of questions that become a guide for the reader to consider the relationship between their identity and their leadership role.

The first obstacle she tackles concerns the expectations placed on Christian leaders which she rightly argues are far higher than leaders in other professions due to the fact they “are often held to high moral standards as role models...” (35). Second, she explores some concepts such as authenticity, sincerity, and the multiple roles of a leader—all of which complicate a leader’s public presentation of self. Her reframe through the lens of vulnerability provides a “conceptual framework” she will use throughout the book to delve into what it means to be our true selves in the realm of public ministry (3).

Third, Bereza addresses the inherent barriers to full revelation in communication and obstacles when communicating through social media. Fourth, she discusses the balance between self-revelation and appropriate boundaries. Fifth, she encourages leaders to read their context when planning a message so they can bring their full identity to the moment while also enhancing the chances of their message being heard. Sixth, she shares the importance of acknowledging personal vulnerabilities without allowing them to obscure the message. And seventh, she explains the difference between performance within the role of Christian leadership as a means of caring for others and performance as theater. She suggests that even though there are times when a leader may not feel completely present or emotionally available, they can still trust that through a framework of vulnerability and willingness to care for the other, the Holy Spirit will allow their true self to shine through.

Bereza explains that this work originated with her research into “how vocalists communicate their personal beliefs while leading worship” (9). Expanding her research, she seeks to reveal the difficulties that arise when a leader proclaims the message they have been given based on their values and experiences. Ultimately, she wants leaders to understand how their “full self relates to the incomplete picture that other people have of you in public ministry...[and] develop the tools you need to engage with the challenges and opportunities stemming from this reality” (5). She states upfront that this book is not meant to engage the

reader in deep “interior work” of self-discovery but rather assumes the reader is already engaged in these practices of personal growth (15).

One of the most compelling aspects of Bereza’s work is her transparency about her own context and a clarity of her ongoing process of self-discovery that models a deep reflexivity for the reader. Through this lens she achieves her stated goals and provides a book that is useful for faith leaders within many contexts, especially for those who are new to ministry. *Professional Christian* offers both theoretical concepts and practical tools which will enhance faith formation and engagement with practical ministry. The concepts and the questions posed could lend themselves to worship teams as they grow together and develop into leaders. They would also be applicable for seminary classes in leadership, faith formation, or practical theological disciplines such as preaching and worship classes. Through the exercises, preaching and worship professors can help students discover their self-understanding of the role of preacher and worship leader, become cognizant of the ways their message can be heard within their contexts, and articulate how all the aspects of their lives and experiences come into their hermeneutic, liturgical theology and praxis, and their homiletic.

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Mitzi J. Smith and Michael Willett Newheart. *We are All Witnesses: Toward Disruptive and Creative Biblical Interpretation*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023. 166 pages. \$35.

We Are All Witnesses is an introductory text on biblical interpretation intended for college and seminary students. With an emphasis on how the context of the biblical writer shapes what is written and the context of the reader shapes interpretation, the authors disrupt the history of white, supposedly objective ways of doing interpretation that ignore the plight of the oppressed. The goal of the book is “to model how to engage in critical justice-oriented disruptive interpretation that places the testimonies of the vulnerable of our world, and our own testimonies, in conversation with the testimonies in biblical texts” (8).

In the Prologue, both authors offer their “Testimony about Testimony” (1). Mitzi J. Smith reflects on her experiences in the Black Seventh-Day Adventist and African Methodist Episcopal traditions and points to places where testimony happens in the wider Black Community (e.g., rap music). Michael Willett Newheart shares experiences of testimony as a White male in various Baptist contexts and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Both describe testimony as “storytelling that is constructive and disruptive, as well as subjective” (11).

Chapter 2, “Context is Everything,” spends two pages explaining “context” in familiar terms. The authors then offer testimonies about their “personal contexts as leaders,” “theological trajectories,” and “hermeneutical journeys” (22). Newheart shows us a “Conversion Testimony” he wrote nearly fifty years ago and interprets it, revealing its original context and the different context from which he reads it now. Smith speaks about the influence of her mother, who was raised to love patriarchy but managed to avoid worshipping it or the biblical interpretation and church that grew out of it (40). Smith also speaks about the challenges of being a Black woman in the academy who refuses to perform or center whiteness. Both testimonies show us by concrete example the difference the reader's context makes in interpretation.

Chapter 3 claims that “the Bible is testimony” (50). The complexity of that testimony includes the Bible’s male authors and the largely cisgender male scholars who translate (interpret) that testimony into English. Diverse people are, in some contexts, invited to the translating table; however, they are expected to use White methods at that table. Consequently, their presence and concerns do not impact the translation. “Power determines whose testimonies are shared and heard, how or if they are constructed, shared, and heard, when and where, and who hears and shares them” (51). In response, the authors encourage readers to do their own responsible translating if possible and to employ a “deconstructive and/or oppositional justice-focused hermeneutical perspective,” including a “counter-testimony” whenever the wellbeing of all is not being promoted (58).

In chapter 4, Smith walks students through a process of interpreting Luke 13:10-17 (Jesus healing a woman with a spinal deformity). She acknowledges her womanist and African American approach and names that her reasons for choosing this text are connected to being “raised by a Black mother confined to a wheelchair” (66). She asks questions about how chronic illness in mothers impacts children and communities and recommends related resources for students to read before turning to the biblical text. In her textual turn, much would be familiar to those trained in biblical exegesis, including an emphasis on saving the commentaries for the end so as not to surrender one’s “interpretive agency” (84).

Chapter 5 walks us through Newheart’s analysis of John 18:33-38 (Jesus’s conversation with Pilate). He names his background as a John scholar and current context as an interim pastor framing his present interests as pastoral. After his playful interpretation of the text, he puts it in

conversation with his congregation's mission statement and asks questions about it. Chapters Six through Nine take similar approaches to the previous two with different texts.

Many chapters include poems and artwork by the authors. Readers are sometimes invited to pause their reading to watch a short comedy clip or to stand and read a poem aloud. The authors encourage artistic engagement and creativity. They also speak directly to readers by asking many questions, inviting students to ask their own, and pointing to many resources inside and far outside biblical studies.

As the authors state, "context is everything." I can imagine this text being a breath of fresh air for progressive members of marginalized groups and allies. It would serve as a more challenging entry point for students coming from more moderate and conservative contexts who might raise concerns about biblical authority, eisegesis, and God's role in interpretation. The disruption this would cause is, in some ways, precisely the authors' point. The professor would simply need to be ready to navigate that conflict with compassion.

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Ryan P. Tinetti. *Preaching by Heart: How a Classical Practice Helps Contemporary Pastors to Preach Without Notes*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021. 114 pages. \$19.

Preaching by Heart makes the clear declaration that preaching requires the speaker and the hearer to have a relational connection for the best possible engagement. This connection is something they both need from each other. The “villain” often disrupting that connection is the sermon notes or manuscript the preacher takes into the pulpit (2). In this book, Tinetti makes clear connections between the need for more engaging preaching and the capacity to move away from the written page. Instead of “practice, practice, practice” to memorize the sermon, *Preaching by Heart*, looks at the ancient and classical practices of crafting a “Memory Palace” using images and places to craft a sermon that the preacher can utilize both in creating and delivering the sermon (14-17).

In the first part of the book, Tinetti lays out the key elements of ancient rhetorical practices. There are five elemental canons of rhetoric. These include *inventio* (discovery), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *pronuntiatio* (delivery) (30-36). Many of these rhetorical elements are already part of the modern preacher’s toolbox. Preparing, exegeting, writing/crafting, and delivering – with or without notes – are what most preachers are taught. According to Tinetti, it’s the memorizing and delivery process that needs more focused attention. *Memoria* is the foundation of the Memory Palace process and allows preachers to internalize their sermon and thus ensure a more engaging delivery as well as reception by those listening (42). The main thrust of *Preaching by Heart* is in this fourth canon and is described with thorough details in the subsequent chapters.

The second part of the book is where preachers will find the application portion, the step-by-step process that leads to the creation of the images and places in the preacher’s Memory Palace (73-94). Determining the number of images (87-89) and the exact places of the preacher’s experience or imagination is vital in this process (75-77). One of the helpful pieces for the Memory Palace is determining the locations that take the lead in crafting sermons. There are three kinds of places to focus on. The first is a real place. Preaching with this type of concrete location can be quite helpful, especially if the preacher has been there themselves (74-75). The second is an imaginary place made up by the preacher, which can be just as impactful to the preacher’s Memory Palace (75-76). The third uses hybrid places, both real and imagined, wherein a real place can have imagined pieces thrown in for more effective preaching (76-77). Chapter four summarizes and clearly shows the entire process in detail (97).

As a preaching professor, I teach my students to minimize the use of notes as much as possible. However, they often share their anxieties about the expectations of the course during the first session. Often, someone says, “I’m terrified of not using a manuscript.” To help them, I have long used Joseph Webb’s book, *Preaching without Notes*. However, Tinetti goes a bold step beyond Webb’s approach. Whereas the “practice, practice, practice” method is Webb’s memorization technique, the process of memorizing the document, manuscript, outline, or key words of the sermon can be daunting for some. In contrast, Tinetti’s Memory Palace offers a different method of memorization that goes beyond words and activates the brain’s use of images and places instead.

Tinetti’s book is convincing and effective. His clarity of purpose is undergirded by a thorough synopsis at the conclusion of each chapter. I think the reader will find the construction of his argument and the very practical steps in the book helpful. For Tinetti, the goal is to craft a sermon that first touches their own heart and then the hearts of their listeners as it is proclaimed

with little to no notes. That's the purpose and the promise of *Preaching by Heart*. If the preacher desires to be more effective and connected to their audience – the people in the pews – an internalization needs to occur (26-28). That desire of the preacher is addressed well in *Preaching by Heart*.

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Tyshawn Gardner. *Social Crisis Preaching: Biblical Proclamation for Troubled Times*. Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2023. 208 pages. \$18.57.

In *Social Crisis Preaching: Biblical Proclamation for Troubled Times*, Tyshawn Gardner redraws the boundaries of preaching in light of what seems to be cultural upheaval. While many homileticians such as Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. and James Earl Massey have done so before, Gardner tackles the task of addressing the public square where the church meets with culture. *Social Crisis Preaching* brings the homiletic academy up to date as it accounts for the unresolved tensions in culture that foment social crises.

He defines social crisis preaching as “biblically rooted, Spirit-enabled proclamation that develops and drives congregations to compassionately care for and radically confront social crises in the communities where their neighbors live, work, worship, and play.” (2) The thrust of Gardner’s definition is driven by an indirect yet intentional diagnosis of culture that consistently confronts one social crisis after another. In fact, at certain points the cataloguing of the social crises, at both macro and micro levels, presents the firehose-like intensity that parishioners face week after week without relief. The definition is further supported by his steady commitment to faith-based principles throughout the balance of the book. Gardner’s remedy draws upon discourses from sociology to make the homiletical and theological case that the pulpit is an appropriate place to respond to the social ills that afflict regular church attendees.

Arguably, Gardner sees preaching as an enterprise that is flexible enough to respond to culture, but also grounded enough to have authority. Invoking Black liberation theologian James Cone in the introduction sets the tone for the ultimate direction of the book. Cone’s Black liberation theology serves as both compliment and foil to his ethical rationale for social crisis preaching. On the one hand Gardner retrieves from Cone an assessment of racism and white supremacy in the United States that he agrees with. On the other hand, Gardner rejects Cone’s insistence that the gospel must come from oppressed communities arguing that “the depth and breadth of Christian theology encompasses more than the Black experience.” (13) Rather, Gardner’s ethical aim for social crisis preaching is an incarnational one where pastors are encouraged to *be* with their congregations “developing them to intentionally care about and confront the crises in their neighbor’s communities.” (18) The preacher’s task, according to Gardner, is to be like the pre-exilic prophet Ezekiel and sit with the people in their lament.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 lay the groundwork for social crisis preaching, offering insights into its hermeneutic, the preacher’s habitus, and a heuristic for practical application. In chapter 1, Gardner introduces the concept of “cues and clues,” serving as a guiding principle for identifying social crisis themes within biblical texts, serving as a central thread throughout the book. He challenges conventional hermeneutics by advocating for preachers to adopt a Ricoeurian approach to stand “in front of the text.” Gardner emphasizes the significance of this approach, stating that “for social crisis preachers, this is vitally important, because the preacher is positioned to cast God’s intended vision before a congregation ripe with social calamity and upheaval.” (52) Chapter 2 introduces the notion of the preacher as a “sacred anthropologist” tasked with “both the text at hand and the pew before them.” (62) As this chapter directly confronts the fault lines of race in America, Gardner logically moves through a paradigm that ultimately identifies congregational involvement as the preferred end result. Gardner names pulpit swaps and prayer meetings as anemic responses toward racial reconciliation, thus issuing a demand that it is the duty of congregations to “interrupt the habits, systems, and policies that continue to perpetuate pockets of communal despair.” (93) Chapter 3 provides practical guidance

for sermon design, and emphasizing the importance of incorporating cues and clues while embodying the role of sacred anthropologist. Though the heuristics Gardner offers for sermon development may seem extensive, each element is indispensable for seminary students or parish ministers engaging in social crisis preaching.

Chapter 4 considers the basic pastoral questions of when one should preach on social crises. In this regard, Gardner focuses largely on those who pastor, rather than the ministry of itinerant preaching. Ultimately, he suggests relying on Aristotle's modes of persuasion—ethos, logos, and pathos—to determine both delivery and timing of social crisis preaching. In chapter 5, he concludes by highlighting the preaching careers of Kelly Miller Smith, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, and Helmut Thielicke as examples of sacred anthropologists who practiced social crisis preaching.

It is no coincidence that the victims of the social crises that Gardner names throughout the book live in communities that are most easily distinguished by race. Yet, one may wonder whether his dismissal of James Cone's emphasis on the gospel originating from oppressed communities and the rejoinder that Christian theology is broader than the Black experience is a point worthy of contention. To put it another way, Gardner's disagreement with one of the core tenets of Black liberation theology seems to function as a dog whistle to readers that may perceive him as bringing politics into the pulpit. While such a decision is left up to the reader, Gardner's direct confrontation of the third rail of social crises as it pertains to race, is theologically and biblically supported by his objective that preachers have a duty to respond to social crises.

As this book resists the oversimplified idea that there is a correct doctrinal theology that will solve the world's social problems, it opens itself to a wider audience so that the reader can adapt as needed to their context. *Social Crisis Preaching* provides grist for the mill that can aid pastors who struggle with how to make homiletical connections between theology, the Bible, and culture as well as seminarians learning how to address matters of culture in their preaching courses.

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Ruthanna B. Hooke. *Sacramental Presence: An Embodied Theology of Preaching*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023. 238 pages. \$100.00.

In *Sacramental Presence: An Embodied Theology of Preaching* Ruthanna B. Hooke directs readers toward the sacramental possibilities of preaching. Hooke guides readers through a careful explication of the relationship between Word and Sacrament, especially preaching and the Eucharist. “The purpose of this book is to explore theologically how it is possible that God’s gracious presence is made known in these two events” (ix). This rich approach is concretized through embodiment and a participatory model of the Trinity. Preaching and the Eucharist are both means of grace centrally involving the body and, because of God’s self-disclosure, “draw humans into the divine life” (6). The book follows a fourfold structure of the Eucharist which involves taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. This fourfold structure develops in conversation with preaching moments and insights from Linklater’s phenomenology of speaking. Importantly, the four moments also contribute to Hooke’s participatory vision for preaching as sacramental Trinitarian participation.

Chapter 1 is a survey of different theological approaches to preaching and the sacraments. Hooke draws out interconnections between theologies of preaching and theologies of the sacraments through historical figures like Luther, Calvin, and Barth as well as more recent figures like Rahner, Schmemmann, Morrill, and Chauvet. The survey is not merely an overview, it moves toward the book’s kenotic paschal approach to sacramental preaching as a meeting place between God and humanity. The 2nd chapter considers silence before the spoken word as a location of embodied alignment and generating space for God’s presence to interact with the particularity of the gathered bodies. The chapter continues to reflect on the movement of breath, bodies, and the Divine throughout the process of preaching and the wider liturgy. Chapter 3 moves from silence in preparation to preparatory breathing as primary theology developed alongside pneumatology. Like the *epiclesis* for the Eucharist, the Spirit can be present in and through the preacher’s and congregation’s breaths in manners which do not confuse differences between humanity and the Divine or negate the importance of selfhood. This chapter also includes an ethical orientation to others through the work of Levinas.

Chapter 4 centers on the “breaking” of bread and the breaking of silence with spoken words. Yet, these spoken words come from bodies and reach out to bodies, including the body of Christ crucified. Preaching invites listeners to engage Christ through a “breaking open of the Word” (149). In other words, Hooke constantly envisions preaching as an embodied theology not as disembodied words. Chapter 5 brings additional eschatological and ethical avenues to bear on the proclamation of Scripture stemming from the free voice of the preacher and the free voices of the congregation. Hooke brings the sacramental concept of *anamnesis* into conversation with disruptive preaching. The conclusion presents possible ways of integrating Hooke’s approach to preaching on the environmental crisis and preaching on race and racism.

One of the gifts *Sacramental Presence* offers is the embodied connections between preaching and theology, especially offered through performance theory. Because Hooke offers this homiletical approach through sacramental theology, numerous theological loci are systematically woven throughout the book. Hooke’s work is impressive in its scope and depth. The centrality of embodiment deepens the theological turn in homiletics and connects preaching to wider liturgical and sacramental movements within the Christian tradition. While homiletics continues to be influenced by philosophies of language and the New Hermeneutic, *Sacramental Presence* bases the work of preaching in real bodies and an ethical orientation of free voices.

While Hooke writes from an Episcopal perspective, the work engages theologians and theologies across many different Christian traditions and is by no means exclusively Episcopalian. Those interested in preaching and embodiment, or preaching and the sacraments, will find a wealth of knowledge. A background in sacramental theology is not necessary to read the work, but it would be helpful as the book seems to presume an academic audience. Hooke's clear writing and continual guidance on the importance of the topics at hand help readers through the technical material. With Christ at the center, *Sacramental Presence* helps us approach preaching and the sacraments through divine participation. Hooke's clarity, depth, and ethical orientation in *Sacramental Presence* make the book an invaluable embodied resource on sacramental preaching.

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Cláudio Carvalhaes. *How Do We Become Green People and Earth Communities? Inventory, Metamorphoses, and Emergenc(i)es*. York: Barber's Son Press, 2022. 190 pages. \$29.99

In an age of climate crisis, how do people become “more aware of the ways of the earth...more aware of our mutuality and more aware of our lack of mutuality – especially within the patch[es] of land where [people] live” (16)? Cláudio Carvalhaes’ latest book seeks to reflect on his own journey to answering this question and offers a theological reflection on how readers might do the same. The book records Carvalhaes’ 2021 Students’ Lectureship on Missions at Princeton Theological Seminary. Rather than a highly revised manuscript, Carvalhaes has preserved the oral style of his lectures. The text is punctuated by line breaks, green type, and visual art – elements readers might not get by watching or listening to the lectures. With these features, the book communicates not only the fierce urgency Carvalhaes conveys but also the style of its original delivery. If one has heard Carvalhaes preach, teach, or lecture, it is difficult to not hear his voice and passion making their way through these pages.

In addition to an introduction, the book is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters replicate the three lectures delivered at Princeton. Chapter 1 invites readers into an “inventory,” by which Carvalhaes means understanding how various “traces” of history, particularly those unseen forces of coloniality shaping people. Carvalhaes is especially interested in how the “brutalism” of colonialism impacts the relationships among bodies and earth, as colonialism’s violence “deprives people everywhere from their ability to breathe and exist” (35) and disconnects us from one another. The work of inventory is highly personal and critical, naming the ways that identities are formed, identifying humanity’s interconnectedness and opening possibilities for how we build our relationality with all creation.

Chapter 2 explores “metamorphoses,” the type of transformation that means “a conversation that entails bodies relating, moving, and affecting each other” (51). Carvalhaes directs us away from the solipsism of modernity and toward “a theology through a larger cosmology where we are never alone but rather are constituted by so many – we are legions of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, and phosphorus that exist in so many other forms of life” (56). Theology, then, attends to our interconnectedness which is more than just interhuman but involves the entirety of creation. This transformation is one in which humans live in recognition that we are more than ourselves. While Carvalhaes expresses urgency and conviction, he also displays grace in calling readers to the difficulty of this transformation.

Chapter Three’s title of “Emergenc(i)es” develops a sensibility that attends to “emergencies” and “emergences,” prompting readers to carefully consider how they notice the “despair, anxiety, and fear and hunger” (87) that demand attention but also to cultivate practices that help notice new life continually unfolding, despite the emergencies the earth faces. Carvalhaes advocates for communities of faith to develop ritual practices by which they can adopt a dual posture of gratitude and focus on what demands our attention. For Carvalhaes, ritual is an act of paying attention by which readers can develop “a more generous cosmology and a heart for other beings and other spirits” (94).

Chapters 4 and 5 are shorter than the preceding chapters. Chapter Four traces some instances and possibilities of the kind of “paying attention” to emergencies and emergences through which readers can “make kin,” “care for the earth,” and transform our “ways of relation.” Carvalhaes traces examples of practices that can simultaneously cultivate a cry for God’s mercy, voice lament, claim willingness to fight, and express joy. Chapter Five concludes the book by naming a different path for theology as a way of being: crossing different disciplines

(theological and otherwise), encountering different living beings, and engaging different practices of both mind and body. Here Carvalhaes demonstrates what he calls for: the chapter is punctuated by confessional storytelling, an exercise to develop our sensitivities, and ends with a benediction.

It is also important to note the book's substantive foreword and afterword from different authors, as well as a short chapter with reflections from the artist who painted a response to Carvalhaes' lectures. Each contribution sheds light on Carvalhaes' intentions and the book's substance as the prompt for an ongoing conversation.

Although the foreword admits that this is not a how-to manual but a theological method, the book could be strengthened with examples of communal liturgies. Readers hear moving stories of Carvalhaes funeralizing animals that have been struck by cars, in addition to recounting "Plantgate" at Union Theological Seminary. These examples stretch the imagination. At the same time, the book makes significant claims about the power of ritual to shift our collective attention, relationships, and affections. Readers might remain curious how Carvalhaes imagines more communal and congregational ritual-making, particularly in contexts with lower thresholds for the kind of risks Carvalhaes takes.

Despite this minor criticism, throughout the book Carvalhaes exemplifies a postcolonial epistemology and theological framework, citing critical theory and liberation theologies, traditional theological voices, alongside poetry, visual art, prayer, lived personal experience, biology and the sciences, the experiences of indigenous people, embodied practice, and more. These weave together in seamless ways, beckoning readers simultaneously into deep analysis, wonder, and action that fosters possibilities for our cosmos.

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Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, eds. *Worship & Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023. 210 pages. \$29.

In the Afterword to *Worship & Power*, John Witvliet rightly notes that this collection of essays about Free Church traditions "is an invitation to explore the interface of liturgy and church polity." (204) It is a needed exploration since—as others among the nine contributors point out—much of liturgical scholarship until quite recently has concentrated on traditions that were governed by relatively stable liturgies as seen in Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. This book means to correct that lack, asserting that Free Churches, residing in a different liturgical world, deserve scholarly attention.

The editors have assembled essays with the assumption that "liturgy is what religious communities do when they gather" (3), that all "liturgy is power-laden" and is "manifested in distinct ways in Free Church traditions." (1) The editors additionally characterize the Free Church as expressing three key qualities: being free of civic interference, valuing local autonomy, and holding to "voluntarism" (8). Running through all the essays are the central tenets that Free Church worship prides itself on: spontaneity, egalitarian leadership, and strict adherence to the Bible.

A portrait of a "tradition" emerges of multiple "traditions" including the liturgical experiences in the Mennonite, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Womanist, Pentecostal, and Korean Free churches on a range of topics. Here I can touch on only a few of the essays to convey the rich diversity of foci.

Sarah Kathleen Johnson distinguishes types of power exerted in the construction of a new Mennonite hymnal—"Power-to, Power-over, and Power-with"—emblematic of the difficulty of involving all voices despite Free Church insistence on egalitarianism. Jonathan Ottaway points to the roots of Pentecostal "praise and worship" based in Amos 9:11-12 ("the tabernacle of David") and Psalm 22:3 (offering a sacrifice of praise to which God must respond) that made worship "fundamentally musical in nature." (115–119) Emily Snider Andrews emphasizes the "biblically based" worship of the Southern Baptist Convention. Essays by Chelsea Brooke Yarborough and another by Dorothy Mendez, Tanya Riches, and Andrew Davies claim that authority for women to preach and teach in some Free Churches comes through a feeling of God's call welcomed by others' responses—considered to be ordinations as valid as through "ecclesial structures." Such contrasts with non-Free Church practices delineate theirs from the liturgical traditions they eschew. Most pointedly, Free Churches share a history of worshipping in ways distinct from the traditions they have left behind, namely the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Their one shared characteristic is local autonomy, with decisions determined to varying degrees apart from a regional or worldwide body.

Because these essays raise so many crucial matters, the reader is drawn to crave more detailed engagement with many of the Free Church's central values. A second volume to more incisively define Free Church values and practices could bring needed clarity. For example, what does "egalitarian leadership" mean among the churches that prohibit women from presiding and preaching? Given that all churches are voluntary organizations, what does "voluntarism" in the Free Church mean? That Free Churches refuse "civic intervention" begs discussion of how and where the U.S. government intervenes in the church life of any denomination. The meaning of spontaneity for Free Churches could helpfully outline in what ways it manifests itself.

In every tradition, preachers often deeply feed, teach, and nourish those who listen to their sermons, making it a significant conversation to have on how—and how differently—a

roundtable pulpit or testimony feeds the people's faith. Does such a conception of preaching change the very purpose of gathering? If worship is organized around personal testimony, how is it "universal"?

Furthermore, while every church tradition, liturgy, and polity grows out of assumptions about biblical interpretation, an underlying suggestion in this volume is that Free Churches see biblical witness as more central than it is in non-Free traditions. Martin Luther, who was not a Free Church pastor, taunted the Vatican with his reliance on God's word alone (*sola scriptura*), insisting that the Bible is the plumb line for everything. Basing worship on the Bible is a matter of how biblical interpretation informs the liturgy, especially given the variety and paucity of texts describing the early church's worship.

All of these questions are honest requests toward greater understanding for the sake of ecumenism. The wealth of insights presented in this book regarding what Free Churches stand for demonstrates how enriching it is for all of our Christian traditions to share our histories and the experiences that have fed our liturgical aims. Each tradition's liturgical gifts enhance others even through differences. We are in this together, and that seems to be the underlying purpose of this book: to begin pulling aside the curtain to share and celebrate who we are as people of faith.

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