

**HOMILETIC JOURNAL**  
**Vol. 50, No. 2 (2025): Special Issue**

**Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics**

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## Foreward

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The essays in this volume, and the empirical research that undergirds them, have become in 2025 even more critically important to the future of homiletical theory, pedagogy, and practice than when they were first conceived.

Using empirical methods and data, these projects take stock of the adequacy of pedagogical practices in North American homiletics to the realities and demands of our present historical moment. These scholars' work tests the mettle of our teaching practices for an increasingly diverse student population in today's seminaries, divinity schools, and lay training programs. Most importantly, these authors point ahead to the future of homiletical pedagogy, raising pressing questions about the adequacy of homiletical pedagogy to an ever-more challenging reality: voices in high places are urging us to mask and forget the social, economic, political, and spiritual legacies of chattel slavery in the U. S. and of colonizing imperialism abroad.

In the U. S., the ongoing legacies of slavery continue to shape the communities in which our homiletics students will preach and teach. Likewise, the ongoing legacy of American or European imperialism is felt by colonized peoples across the globe. Telling and owning the truth about these legacies is, in fact, a crucial spiritual discipline for anyone who hopes to preach with integrity in North American churches, whether north or south, east or west.

It was my duty as 2019 president of my academic guild, the Academy of Homiletics, to specify the theme of that year's annual meeting. The Executive Committee joined me in planning a meeting focused on "unmasking" white bias in homiletical theory, theology, pedagogy, and praxis. It was true that many scholars in our field, including white scholars, were regularly drawing on the theoretical work and sermons of persons of color in our teaching plans and syllabi. Yet, whiteness tended to dominate the theoretical center. Papers presented in our workgroups often continued to pay *homage* either explicitly or implicitly to our guild's white founders.

The Academy of Homiletics had been established in the mid-1960s by a handful of highly creative and influential homileticians—nearly all of them white males (a reflection of the demographic in our profession at that time). The theoretical and theological work, as well as sermons, of homileticians and master preachers of color informed many projects as the field developed; yet the impact of non-white traditions tended, in the final analysis, to be muted and "supplementary." Not only preaching traditions, but theoretical and theological perspectives, arising from communities of color, remained on the margins.

My determination to plan a meeting where these issues could be confronted developed, in part, as I wrestled with the results of an historical audit conducted in 2015 by the institution at which I taught, Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton, New Jersey).<sup>1</sup> The audit had one main purpose: to investigate the relationship of the seminary, especially its faculty and student body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the economic and social facts, and moral issue, of the ongoing

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<sup>1</sup>"Princeton Seminary and Slavery: A Journey of Confession and Repentance," <https://ptsem.edu/princeton-seminary-and-slavery/>, accessed August 18, 2025. For critical analysis of Princeton Seminary's efforts to respond to its ongoing struggle with racism, see Mark Lewis Taylor, "Seminaries and Slavery: An Abolition Paradigm for Research," *Theology Today* 76 no. 4 (2016): 308-321.

practice of chattel slavery in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The results of that audit were, truth be told, unsurprising. They were also disheartening and disturbing.

A handful of early faculty members had indeed had one or more enslaved persons in their households. In most cases, these faculty members had married women from the southern states. As was customary in the American south at the time, one or more enslaved people were included in these women's dowries. Particularly distressing to the auditors (and, later, the readers of the report) was the discovery that a past president of the school had had his salary paid, in part, by his home church in the south. The church covered this expense by renting out enslaved people owned by the congregation's members.

Equally disturbing was the seminary faculty's prominent role as promoters of the concept of deporting Black Americans to Liberia. Members of the Princeton faculty continued to promote this "back to Africa" scheme long after other early proponents had abandoned it. Their rationale was twofold. First, the supporters suggested, Black people could put down roots in Africa (presumed to be their "native" home, although the vast majority of Black people in America had been born in America). In Liberia, they could become property owners, establish institutions and businesses, and advance their education. Then, said the "Liberian homeland" promoters, they could return to the United States, should they choose to do so, having achieved parity with white Americans in terms of education, business acumen, and wealth. Perhaps to make the whole business less morally distasteful, this deportation scheme was glossed with a second, spiritual rationale: while they "improved themselves" in Liberia, Black deportees could spread the Christian faith across Africa!

Needless to say, those who conducted the audit and everyone who received the report—which was made accessible immediately to the whole seminary community—shuddered at the enmeshment of Princeton Seminary's 19<sup>th</sup>-century faculty in practices of enslavement. Additionally, the audacity, patronizing tone, and sheer naivete of the deportation proposal were galling. Outrage spread across the campus. Faculty and students alike could draw slight comfort from the fact that, unlike some of Princeton Seminary's most influential faculty members in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, the student body of the seminary at the time had no interest in the "back-to-Africa" deportation scheme. In fact, most students spoke out in support of abolition.<sup>3</sup>

Reading the report left me troubled about my institution's past and present; it also left me troubled about the past and present of the Academy of Homiletics. I could imagine no more urgent task for us to address at the 2019 meeting than an "audit" of our guild's practices, one in which we who identified as white would take up the work of exposing the whiteness of many of the theoretical and theological assumptions that continued to shape our research as well as our pedagogies and standards of assessment.

As the 2019 meeting of the Academy of Homiletics got underway, there was a palpable sense of determination among those of us who identified as white to tear away blindfolds and scrape away layers of denial about the entrenched white-centrism of many assumptions hallowed as "seminal" for ongoing theory and practice. Through workgroups and major presentations, white scholars began to unmask the pervasive, dominating influence of white-centric theology and theory in the design and content of our field's literature and, to our chagrin, in the overall

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<sup>2</sup> For a more comprehensive summation of the results of the "slavery audit" at Princeton Seminary, see Gordon Mikoski, "A Failure of Theological Imagination: Beginning to deal with the legacy of Princeton Seminary on matters of slavery and race," *Theology Today* 73, no. 2 (2016): 157-67.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Mikoski, Presentation to the faculty; Fall Faculty Conference, August 31, 2015.

design of our masters- and doctoral-level programs. We began to examine our programs' core subject matter and reading lists: should the *de rigueur* standard reading lists in Ph.D. seminars on the history of homiletics be discarded and replaced? Or was it necessary for future teachers of preaching to be well aware of the Eurocentric and overwhelmingly white story of our discipline? Each new discussion session seemed to expose yet another layer of complexity.

In the months and years after that meeting, it has been gratifying to witness the determination and courage with which both early-career scholars and seasoned ones have leaned into research that exposes the "webs of whiteness." This work reveals that whiteness pervades our theoretical constructions and theological frameworks, raises critical questions about current practices, and requires us to imagine and undertake reconstructive initiatives.

Call this perhaps a typically "white" failure of imagination—but I confess that in 2019, I could not have imagined the assault on critical theory in general, and critical race theory, in particular, that has been launched in 2025 against universities, public schools, research centers, museums, and libraries in the United States. Much of this has been undertaken under the guise of a "patriotic" concern that children should not learn the worst that their country has been, but only the "best." Unsurprisingly, "best" is defined as a slavery-denying, white-exonerating version of history that attempts deliberately to erase decades of evidence that the damaging legacies of slavery and colonialism have continued, unabated, to this day. Among those legacies are ongoing efforts to redraw voting districts to the disadvantage of populations of color, a pattern of inferior educational opportunities and resources allotted to schools where students of color are in the majority, and economic policies and trends that make it difficult for families of color to build trans-generational wealth.

As I write, libraries and museums are being purged of evidence—whether in books, papers, recordings, or visual art—that for over 250 years (1619-1865), this country not only condoned, but eagerly embraced chattel slavery, while touting itself as "the land of liberty." Stolen labor, particularly in the cotton-producing southern states, greatly advanced the prosperity of the colonies that later gave birth to the United States. In churches, prior to 1865, there were pockets of protest and bursts of moral outrage, but on the whole, churches passively tolerated and often actively maintained the institution of slavery. Long after, black worshipers remained segregated in church balconies—some of them painted black.

After the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, the economies of both North and South and the expanding West prospered through reliance on underpaid laborers of color and immigrants for nearly another century. Reconstruction briefly lit a beacon of hope, but ultimately, weak enforcement of its provisions for Black land ownership, Black representation in state and federal government, and Black education left Reconstruction vulnerable to manipulation. It was steadily undermined at the state and local level and efficiently dismantled across the South. Jim Crow laws in state after state and in the territories of the West were designed to keep Black Americans—as well as native peoples and non-white immigrants—socially, economically, and politically weak.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> My understanding of the dynamics of slavery in the United States and its aftermath, from south to north, and from the east coast to the west, has been shaped by two works in particular: Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (Random House, 2020); and Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (Oxford University Press, 2020). A helpful summation of the intentions, limitations, and sadly predictable unraveling of Reconstruction in the southern states can be found in Richardson, chapter 3. I am likewise indebted to Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Augsburg Fortress, 2011). Gilbert's insights into the dynamics of the Great Migration, laid alongside Wilkerson's sweeping saga of migration north and west from the American south (Isabel

It is this historical record that persons in positions of power are currently determined to at least mute—and if possible, entirely expunge—from museums, libraries, and public educational curricula. Efforts are underway to erase evidence, written and otherwise, of the brutality the enslaved suffered, along with the historical record of both the struggle that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ongoing white resistance to its implications.

This is not only a political, historical, and educational problem; it is a theological problem and, as a corollary, a homiletical one. Our theological identity is inevitably shaped, for better or worse, by our political, historical, economic, and cultural experience and self-understanding. Any attempt at systematic and strategic erasure of the inconvenient truths of the American past undermines the historical truth-telling that has an essential role to play as persons of faith arrive at a truthful *theological* understanding of who they are and where they have come from.

Arriving at truthful theological self-understanding has a long history going back to the origins of Jewish and Christian faith. Over centuries, Jewish worshipers came to the Temple at the festival of Shavuot to present the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord. That presentation was accompanied by a confession which began, “My father was a wandering Aramean,” and then continues with a historical recital that includes the memory of their 400-year enslavement in Egypt and goes on to celebrate God’s acts of deliverance from captivity. Centuries later, the apostle Paul testifies to his Christian faith by rendering an account of his personal history. As a devout and educated Pharisee, Paul had persecuted followers of the Way. His blinding encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus road shattered his false self-understanding. He who had been so sure of the correctness of his views was actually fighting the redemptive trajectory of divine action, rather than advancing it.

Today, truthful theological self-understanding for Christians in the United States is impossible without alertness to the socio-economic realities, and particularly the economic inequities, of our social context. We who profess Christian faith, in particular those who identify as white, can only render an honest accounting of our theological identity when we have clarity about social, economic, and political vectors that have favored the aspirations of white persons and frustrated the aspirations of all others. In other words, our theological self-understanding will be false precisely to the extent that we—wittingly or unwittingly—fail to examine ways that the inequitable distribution of social, political, and economic power across racially and ethnically defined populations has shaped our religious experience, our theological vocabularies, our religious practices, and our openness to the theologies and experiences of others.

In the present moment, it is exponentially more critical than ever before that we and our students should be equipped with imperial-critical—and more specifically, post-colonialist—interpretive lenses that radically shift our readings of both texts and contexts. In addition, our students need to emerge from our classrooms keenly alert to the impacts of racism and colonialism on their *prospective listeners’* historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, as well as their own. Emerging preachers must be equipped to do the work of developing reconstructed (that is, no longer white-centric) hermeneutical lenses as they work with biblical texts. This includes reading more critically commentaries informed by white-centric theories and theologies.

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Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (Random House, 2010).), present a helpfully stereoscopic and granular orientation to the ways that slavery’s legacies of inequity have impacted, and continue to impact, the social, political, economic, and ecclesial dynamics of life in the United States—south and north, east and west.

The research presented in this volume demonstrates that, while we have made progress in the effort to de-center white preaching traditions, theologies, and theories, there is much distance yet to be covered.

I am grateful for the work of these colleagues. They call upon us to face inconvenient truths that others are actively attempting to bury or erase today. Their work takes up the mission Jesus entrusted to his followers: to grant new vision, to liberate captives, and set free the oppressed (Luke 4:16-19).

Those of us who identify as white must actively embrace the work of deconstruction and Reconstruction of our theological self-understandings, theoretical assumptions, and pedagogical practices. Whether we are just beginning to wrestle our way free from white-privileging assumptions, both theoretical and theological, or are well on our way to radically changed thinking and praxis, these essays will shed welcome light on our path.

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**Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics  
Special Issue Introduction**

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The Academy of Homiletics (AoH) exists to “bring together professors and teachers of homiletics for the study of the place of preaching in theological education, for the discussion and sharing of ideas and methods, and for the fostering of scholarly research in this and other related areas and disciplines.”<sup>1</sup> The AoH was first convened by three white, mainline Protestant homiletics in 1965, and since that time has met continuously, growing to more than two hundred in its membership at the time of this writing, including full-time faculty, adjuncts, independent scholars, doctoral students in homiletics, and those who have retired from their teaching duties. Despite the demographic expansion of its membership over the years to include Black, Latinx, Asian, and international members as well as more expansive perspectives from other social locations, the guild has been primarily shaped by white homiletics whose methods, styles, pedagogy, and scholarship were assumed as normative.

In 2019, the AoH began a multi-year effort to understand and act upon the ways that whiteness has systematically impacted the research, practice, and teaching of preaching. This effort was initiated by Sally Brown of Princeton Theological Seminary, who, in her role as president of the guild that year, chose the theme “Unmasking Homiletical Whiteness.” The programming of the annual meeting challenged members to interrogate the ways in which institutional racial hegemony has shaped their teaching, preaching, and research.

While the AoH does not have an official working definition of whiteness, we might operate from Sara Ahmed’s work, which names whiteness as “a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience.”<sup>2</sup> Within this experience, white bodies obtain and exercise privilege through habits, orientations, and institutions in such a way that it becomes “a background of experience” for them, albeit invisibly and insidiously so.<sup>3</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James add that there is an inextricable link between whiteness and the violence of capitalism, in that “the individual, social, and cultural meanings attached to whiteness together create a kind of white habitus: a system of enduring dispositions, tastes, practices, preferences, moral norms, epistemologies, and ideologies—all of which are deployed in symbolic and material contests for capital.”<sup>4</sup>

Theologian Willie James Jennings clarifies that “the term ‘whiteness’ does not refer to people of European descent but to a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning

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<sup>1</sup> “Constitution of the Academy of Homiletics” (1990).  
<https://www.homiletics.org/sites/default/files/assets/docs/AOH%2520Constitution.pdf>, accessed March 29, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” in *Feminist Theory*, 8, no. 2 (2007): 150.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” 150.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel C. Schneider and Sophie Bjork-James. “Whither Whiteness and Religion?: Implications for Theology and the Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 1 (2020): 191.

making.”<sup>5</sup> Or, as J. Kameron Carter puts it, “white signifies not merely pigmentation but a regime of political and economic power for arranging (*oikonomia*) the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Taking a cue from Jennings, discourse about whiteness in the AoH is less about specific people or groups of people and more about ways that white homiletics is privileged while dismissing and colonizing the many ways of being, thinking, doing, and belonging, specifically around racial and ethnic formations. Moving whiteness into the discourse of the AoH has uncovered ways that the “cognitive and affective structures” of white homiletical research, practice, and teaching were formed, how they persist as the dominant and dominating background of homiletical experience, and how the work of repair has begun and might continue. This work is essential to the integrity of the guild because, as Schneider and Bjork-James have noted, “to not substantively address whiteness in the study of religion has consequences. Not only does it reinforce an analytic division between race and religion, it also works to obscure the racial dimensions of dominant Western forms of religion, particularly Protestant Christianity in the United States, as well as the religious dimensions of white supremacy.”<sup>7</sup> Sifiso Khuzwayo states succinctly that “any work of redeveloping theology and decoloniality must contend with the very base of modern theology and its casting of humanity as a reflection of whiteness.”<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent AoH annual meeting themes built on the work of dismantling homiletical whiteness, including preaching and trauma (2020), sparking a preaching renaissance inspired by African American preaching (2021), and reimagining the center of homiletics to embrace perspectives once relegated to the margins (2022). Many conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) emerged in various settings during this time, which helped to frame the AoH’s response to the challenge of unmasking homiletical whiteness.

To be clear, DEI is not the “answer” to the insidious problem of whiteness. Rather, it is a way to counter some of the assumptions and norms of whiteness and disrupt the hegemony that white colonialism has imposed on theological education. Inherent in this work is naming the assumptions, narrow views, and distortions of anti-blackness, colorism, eurocentrism, and americanism that are built into the existing field of homiletics. For example, a 2020 online town hall entitled “Teaching Praxis for Solidarity,” under the leadership of David Jacobsen as that year’s president of the guild, surfaced the need for a wider, more comprehensive view of the pedagogical commitments, values, and practices regarding DEI. The three town halls addressed the following areas of inquiry: research and visibility of scholarship, networking and support of emerging scholars, and teaching praxis for solidarity.

From those discussions, several key points emerged. For one, efforts to “decenter” whiteness still reify whiteness; thus, the goal must be to *dismantle* whiteness and any ideological ranking based on race. As Valle-Ruiz and Wymer point out, changing the discourse to center homileticsians of color still leaves “white preaching and its dominance in the guild practically unexamined and unchanged.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, what is required is work that carries out “sustained critique of whiteness and amplifies subjugated and racially minoritized practice, pedagogy, and theory.”<sup>10</sup> This involves uncovering and naming the vast array of both implicit and explicit homiletical

<sup>5</sup> Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Eerdmans, 2020), 9.

<sup>6</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion,” 177-78.

<sup>8</sup> Sifiso Khuzwayo, “Western theology’s whiteness and some liberation theologies, two sides of the same coin,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2024): 3.

<sup>9</sup> Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, “Beginnings,” in *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, eds. Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer. (Lexington, 2022), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, “Beginnings,” 2.

“tentacles” of whiteness that manifest in homiletical pedagogy and scholarship. Such a process entails naming and exiting from the universalizing nature of white, Western homiletics while embracing an agency grounded in the broadest array of traditions, viewpoints, and epistemologies.

Like other academic disciplines, homiletics plays a significant role in perpetuating and facilitating epistemological colonialism and white supremacy. For example, the books homiletics professors use, the models of preaching they teach, and the style of pedagogy they use can either directly or inadvertently continue and reinforce whiteness. As Schneider and Bjork-James note, the realities of institutionalized racism alongside white supremacist political movements and terrorism demand that scholars of religion “critically interrogate how religion is imagined and practiced by white subjects and what role white racial formation plays in shaping religious discourse and practice.”<sup>11</sup> From our perspective, this includes homiletics scholars and pedagogues as well.

Another key point that emerged is that unconscious bias and universalized assumptions often shape the formation of homileticians in profound yet unexamined ways. For instance, Ph.D. students are often traditioned into primarily white understandings of scholarship, pedagogy, and preaching practice. For established and emerging scholars alike, there is a need to develop criteria for assessing unconscious bias and embedded racism while also engaging in disciplined habits of self-critique that disrupt and dismantle the normativity of white hegemony. At the same time, homileticians must also uncover and dismantle unconscious bias, assumptions, cultural/racial/ethnic centering, and the use of non-inclusive theological language and images in the homiletics classroom as well as their own scholarship. In all, intentionality around creating spaces of interrogation and accountability regarding matters of race and identity can disrupt the normativity and universality of whiteness. This, in turn, can lead to commitments and liberative practices that deconstruct the colonized and imperialist mindset that has dominated Christian preaching for centuries.

Following the 2019 annual meeting, two scholars, Lis Valle Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, formed an AoH work group entitled “Unmasking White Preaching” that met for three years from 2020 to 2022 and resulted in the edited volume *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics* (Lexington, 2022).<sup>12</sup> While the editors of the volume do not define “white preaching” per se, they do point to the ways that the theories and practices of white preachers and scholars of preaching have long served as “the norm, the center, or the invisible force that permeates all spaces, forcing preach[ers] of other colors to situate themselves in reference to and distinct from white preaching.”<sup>13</sup> The volume contains fifteen chapters divided into two sections: Racial Hegemony in Homiletics and Resistance and Possibilities in Homiletics.

The editors state that the goal of *Unmasking White Preaching* was to “cue us to more fully identify the harm of white preaching, increase our awareness of the possibilities for resistance, and spur our imagination of alternative possibilities in homiletics.”<sup>14</sup> They note that

<sup>11</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion,” 177.

<sup>12</sup> This publication resonates with recent work in the wider theological academy that acknowledges and seeks to dismantle the ways that whiteness has formed the study of theological disciplines and practices of ministry. This project works along these trajectories. See, for instance, Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Eerdmans, 2020); *Religious Education* 114, no. 3 (2019); HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Invisibility of Whiteness: A Homiletical Interrogation,” *Homiletic* 46, no. 1 (2021): 28–39.

<sup>13</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, “Beginnings,” 3–4.

<sup>14</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, “(In)conclusion,” 231.

the collection of voices in the volume makes it obvious that “the status quo of white-dominant homiletics is untenable” and that change is needed if we are serious about attending to “racial hegemony, resistance, and possibilities in homiletics.”<sup>15</sup> They also call for “new structures” that model self-examination.<sup>16</sup>

It was in that spirit of self-examination that the two of us, Leah Schade and Richard Voelz, both of whom are white homileticians, submitted a proposal to the AoH Executive Committee in 2022 for a grant project entitled “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics” to be funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. In our proposal, we noted that while collaborative conversations and narrow research projects give snapshots into the effects of whiteness and efforts toward pedagogical diversity, equity, and inclusion, the AoH did not yet have a sense of the whole of its membership’s pedagogical commitments and practices either prior to the introduction of unmasking homiletical whiteness or in response to it. There were several questions we sought to answer: In what ways have members of the AoH reshaped their pedagogy to reflect the values of DEI since undertaking the task of “unmasking homiletical whiteness” in 2019? What can we celebrate? What gaps, barriers, and opportunities lie before us as we continue to interrogate our intentions, practices, and outcomes of this work?

With the approval of the Executive Committee and having received the grant, we assembled a team of racially and culturally diverse senior scholars, Ph.D. students, and outside researchers to assist with the project. We are grateful to HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Kenyatta Gilbert, who served as our accountability consultants; Kizzy Bush-Boyd, Samantha Gilmore, Larry Morris, and Wing Yi Wong, who served on the research team; and Amanda Wilson Harper and Wayne Thompson, who were our research consultants. Together, we distributed a survey to AoH members in August-September 2022 to assess attitudes and practices for teaching diverse student bodies, dismantling whiteness, and centering diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the homiletics classroom. We also collected syllabi from members of the Academy from 2016-2019 (pre-intervention) and 2020-2022 (during intervention) to analyze for DEI within homiletics courses.

Overall, this project sought to move the AoH beyond theoretical prospects or anecdotal, aspirational, or exemplary narratives around homiletical pedagogy and DEI toward a more realistic, data-driven picture of the on-the-ground reality in our classrooms. As a result, you will see in these articles that we have acknowledged the positive outcomes of the AoH’s emphasis on unmasking homiletical whiteness as it directly relates to homiletical pedagogy. At the same time, we have identified the pedagogical gaps, challenges, and opportunities that the Academy as a whole, smaller subgroups, or individuals might take up for study, experimentation, or implementation of DEI.

Since the AoH exists as a scholarly hub for research and conversation about the teaching of preaching in seminaries and other institutions for theological education in the U.S., Canada, and increasingly across the globe, this research project was designed to benefit teaching and learning across a wide variety of institutions. For example, seminaries and divinity schools might refer to this study to encourage their faculty across a range of disciplines to engage in efforts to diversify their pedagogy. Also, those who teach preaching in these institutions could benefit from this study’s efforts to gain knowledge of expansive resources and surveying attitudes and practices across our membership. We not only wanted to reflect an accurate picture of where the

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<sup>15</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, “(In)conclusion,” 232.

<sup>16</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, “(In)conclusion,” 232.

AoH stands vis-à-vis unmasking homiletical whiteness in its teaching, but also to recommend resources and further steps that members might take to make good on our collective efforts to dismantle whiteness and white supremacist pedagogical practices in the homiletics classroom. Still others might take inspiration from the data collected to pursue their own questions. The data collected in both phases of this project's opening belong to the whole of the AoH and, as such, are available to those who would like to pursue research beyond the limits of this preliminary study.

At the invitation of the editors of *Homiletic*, members of our team now present a selection of the findings from our project with the hope that what we have learned will encourage the continual work of unmasking and dismantling homiletical whiteness while encouraging an expansiveness in our scholarship, teaching, and collegiality. Leah Schade and Wayne Thompson provide a comprehensive quantitative overview of the survey results as well as findings from the analysis of the syllabi ("Conducting a 'DEI Audit' to the Academy of Homiletics: Overview of Teaching and Research Practices"). Drawing on respondent comments in the survey, Amanda Wilson Harper and colleagues conduct a study of homiletics professors' experiences with DEI in their classrooms and within their institutional milieus ("Contested Commitments: A Study of Homiletics Professors' Experiences with DEI"). Wing Yi Wong critiques the narrow Black-white binary of DEI emphases that excludes other racialized voices while asserting homiletic pedagogy as a radical site of social responsibility, global justice, and theological reimagination ("Expanding Homiletic Pedagogy Beyond Colorblindness"). Rich Voelz reflects on the introductory preaching course as a site of possibility for practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion ("Introducing Homiletics with DEI Commitments: Challenges, Opportunities, and Options"). The issue is bookended by the observations and reflections of senior scholars who have dedicated their careers to interrogating and dismantling whiteness and colonialism in preaching and teaching. Sally Brown offers the Foreword, in which she considers the ramifications of her initial effort to guide the guild in examining and interrogating its whiteness. An interview with HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Kenyatta Gilbert concludes the issue, in which they discuss the fact that this research began in a political and cultural climate that villainizes the language and emphases of DEI, and that this culture persists and has intensified, especially as it relates to the pressures of the current U.S. presidential administration on higher education. They offer their wisdom and sagely advice for continuing this work in the years ahead.

We recognize, along with Schneider and Bjork-James, that "it is not enough to simply observe a connection between religion (particularly Christianity) and white racial identity. Rather, because categories of race and religion deeply inform one another, the relation of these categories to ideologies of domination needs to be theorized, discussed, and debated in ways that do not shy away from explicit discussions of both power and racism."<sup>17</sup> This project was undertaken with the intention of fully engaging in these discussions. While we recognize that DEI is not a panacea, we continue to believe that this avenue of research is a faithful and fruitful continuation of the impetus behind unmasking homiletical whiteness. Also, approaching the project through the lens of DEI allowed us to interrogate intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other demographic markers and to do so through categories at work in wider academic and cultural conversations.

Ideally, we hope this project will spur AoH members and the guild as a whole to continue probing the connections between homiletics and race, whiteness, colonialism, and

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<sup>17</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, "Whither Whiteness and Religion," 177.

Americentrism. We are grateful to Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, editor of *Homiletic*, and the editorial board for the opportunity to share the findings from our research in this special issue. While we recognize both our limitations and our hopes, we note that this project establishes a baseline for future research, which we hope will continue to push boundaries and elicit even more textured and nuanced studies.

### **For Further Reading**

Ahmed, Sara. "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149-168.

Jennings, Willie James. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. Eerdmans, 2020.

Khuzwayo, Sifiso, "Western theology's whiteness and some Liberation theologies, two sides of the same coin." *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies*. 80 no. 2 (2024).  
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9342>.

Kameron, J. Carter. *Race: A Theological Account*. Oxford University Press. 2008.

Valle-Ruiz, Lis, and Andrew Wymer, "Beginnings," in *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, edited by Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer. Lexington, 2022.

Schneider, Rachel C., and Sophie Bjork-James. "Whither Whiteness and Religion?: Implications for Theology and the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 1 (2020): 175-199. doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfaa002.

**Conducting a “DEI Audit” of the Academy of Homiletics:  
Overview of Teaching and Research Practices, 2017-2022**

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**Abstract:** *In 2019, the Academy of Homiletics (AoH) launched a multi-year effort to understand and deconstruct the ways that whiteness has systematically impacted the research, practices, and teaching of preaching. In 2022, the AoH received a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to study its efforts to “unmask homiletical whiteness” and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in homiletical pedagogy, research, and scholarship. The first part of this article shares general findings from the survey distributed to 81 members, gauging their attitudes, intentions, and practices regarding DEI. The second part reports on the team’s analysis of 179 syllabi submitted by members from before and after 2019 to track changes in pedagogy regarding DEI. In this “DEI audit,” we note correlations between increased sensitivity to and engagement with DEI while also pointing to differences according to the demographic intersections of members and the topics of interest.*

**Background and Introduction**

The Academy of Homiletics (AoH) is an academic guild based in the U.S. made up of professors of preaching, Ph.D. students in homiletics programs, independent scholars, and retirees who study the art and craft of writing and delivering sermons. Founded in 1965 by a small group of white mainline Protestant homileticians, the guild now has more than two hundred members comprised of scholars, teachers, researchers of preaching from the U.S. and Canada, as well as several other countries. In 2019, the president of AoH, Dr. Sally Brown of Princeton Theological Seminary, challenged members to “unmask homiletical whiteness” in preaching and pedagogy. The following year, Dr. David Schnasa Jacobson of Boston University School of Theology, in his role as president, hosted a series of online town halls on “Teaching Praxis for Solidarity” for members to explore their pedagogical commitments, values, and practices regarding DEI. In response, the guild undertook a multi-pronged effort to study ways in which structural racism has shaped the scholarship and teaching of homiletics. This effort challenged scholars of preaching, and indirectly, preachers to counter and dismantle whiteness through a concerted effort of centering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Expressing Whiteness and DEI Within Theological Education and Homiletics**

Along with Schneider and Bjork-James, “We take as a starting point that U.S. society has been structured by white supremacy since its founding in ways that continue to shape public life.”<sup>1</sup> “Whiteness” is a term that refers to conceptualizations of power, status, and identity within

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel C. Schneider and Sophie Bjork-James. “Whither Whiteness and Religion?: Implications for Theology and the Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 1 (2020): 175-199, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfaa002>.

racial hierarchies, privileging those perceived by self and others as white. The salience of this identity varies over time as well as between and among individuals within the social hierarchy. Helms describes whiteness as “the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the white racial group over all others.”<sup>2</sup>

The normativity of whiteness conveys a taken-for-granted quality, leaving it unquestioned due to unreflective attitudes and self-concepts. Joseph Barndt has asserted that whites push awareness of whiteness and privilege to the margins of consciousness because they benefit from racism.<sup>3</sup> Bringing those benefits into awareness compels responsibility and action; thus, denial remains a viable tactic for evading accountability. A deeper unpacking comes from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists*, where he details rhetorical and apologetic strategies whites employ, including historical amnesia and personal distancing.<sup>4</sup> The result is that the central reaction to systemic privilege is to pretend it does not exist or minimize the impacts of systemic oppression, allowing whites to claim that racism is not real and has nothing to do with them personally.

To counter whiteness and white supremacy, there have been movements of tolerance, welcome, belonging, reclamation, reconciliation, and justice to blunt or ameliorate the effects of whiteness while centering and embracing historically marginalized and oppressed peoples. The contemporary term for this movement is “DEI,” short for diversity, equity, and inclusion, which finds its roots in the Civil Rights era when the country responded to legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. At that time, employers and schools took initial steps to diversify their workplaces and integrate women and people of color. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, initiatives for creating more inclusion and diversity ranged from hiring dedicated staff to creating coalitions and interest groups to establishing formal networks of support for historically marginalized groups. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the elevation of DEI leadership in the form of chief diversity officers and data-driven efforts to verify not just compliance with DEI requirements but also the adoption of DEI as a core institutional value. At the same time, there has been a backlash against DEI, parallel to its growth and development in mainstream America. Deeply ensconced racial inequality fueled the white Christian nationalist movement, which has grown in numbers and influence since the 1950s, organizing in ways that contributed to the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and again in 2024. At the time of this writing, the current administration has stripped DEI initiatives from all government programs,<sup>5</sup> challenged numerous universities to rescind their DEI efforts,<sup>6</sup> and either reintroduced or reinforced racial hierarchy and white supremacy vigorously.

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<sup>2</sup> J. E. Helms, “The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles.” *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45, no 5 (2017): 718.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Fortress, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The White House, “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>, Jan. 20, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> PBS News, “More than 50 universities face federal investigations under Trump’s anti-DEI campaign,” <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/more-than-50-universities-face-federal-investigations-under-trumps-anti-dei-campaign>, March 14, 2025, accessed July 29, 2025.

Schneider and Bjork-James note that both whiteness and DEI have shaped theological education. “White racial imaginaries have shaped the normative academic ways in which religion as an object of study came to be defined and pursued, even as this racial frame has been taken for granted and concealed.”<sup>7</sup> Willie James Jennings puts it more pointedly: “Theological education vacillates between a pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming white self-sufficient men and a related pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming a Christian racial and cultural homogeneity that yet performs the nationalist vision of that same white self-sufficient man.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, attention to whiteness in theological education is necessary not just for understanding how white supremacy has functioned but also for identifying opportunities for resistance and dismantling.

As Richard Voelz points out, this has certainly been the case with the practices and pedagogies of preaching. “When we begin to analyze the ways that this particular [white] identity is formed and performed via pedagogy, we can begin to comprehend and unravel the ways that a multitude of oppressive forces manifest and persist in preaching. In short, to more fully ‘unmask White preaching,’ the homiletics classroom must also necessarily come under scrutiny.”<sup>9</sup>

## Overview of Study

One of the actions undertaken by the Academy of Homiletics to deconstruct whiteness and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in teaching preaching, research, and scholarship was to conduct a self-study in 2022. Funded by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, a team of nine individuals<sup>10</sup> conducted both quantitative and qualitative research, including a member survey and analysis of syllabi provided by members. Two questions guided the research: 1) In what ways have members of the AoH reshaped their pedagogy to reflect the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion since undertaking the task of unmasking homiletical whiteness in 2019? 2) What can we celebrate, and what gaps, barriers, and opportunities lie before us as we continue to interrogate our intentions, practices, and outcomes of centering DEI?

Sifiso Khuzwayo cautions that “to preserve the integrity of theological developments, one must resist the temptation to embrace trendy catch phrases or concepts that dilute its essence into a superficial trend lacking impact.”<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, our purpose in studying DEI in the AoH was not an effort to be trendy. Rather, the goal was to discover the ways in which whiteness has limited the diversity, equity, and inclusion of the guild's research, practices, and pedagogy,

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<sup>7</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 179.

<sup>8</sup> Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (William B. Eerdmans, 2020), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Richard W. Voelz, “Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletic Pedagogy: A Reflection on Teaching ‘Proclaiming Justice in the Church and Public Square,’” in *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, edited by Lisa Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer (Lexington Books, 2022), 142.

<sup>10</sup> Grant co-directors were Leah D. Schade and Richard Voelz. Accountability consultants were Kenyatta Gilbert and HyeRan Kim-Cragg. The members of the syllabi analysis team were Kizzy Bush-Boyd, Samantha Gilmore, Larry Morris, and Wing Yi Wong. The two outside research consultants were Amanda Wilson Harper and Wayne Thompson. While the project co-directors were white, which may entail some levels of bias or limited perspective, both the accountability consultants and three members of the syllabi analysis team were scholars from racially or ethnically minoritized communities.

<sup>11</sup> Sifiso Khuzwayo, “Western theology’s whiteness and some liberation theologies, two sides of the same coin,” *HTS Theologese Studies/ Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2024): 9.

especially since the AoH's leadership and membership have traditionally privileged white voices since its founding.

The first part of this article will share general findings from the survey completed by 81 of its members, gauging DEI attitudes, intentions, and practices. The second part will report on our team's analysis of 179 syllabi submitted by members from before and after 2019 to track changes in pedagogy regarding DEI. In this study, we note correlations between increased sensitivity to and engagement of DEI while also pointing to differences according to the demographic intersections of members and the topics of interest. The article concludes with recommendations for guild and member implementation.

### **Part One: Survey of AoH Members to Assess Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Methods**

The Academy of Homiletics Survey of Members Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity and Inclusion sought to reveal the ways that its members reshaped their pedagogy to reflect the values of DEI since undertaking the task of unmasking homiletical whiteness in 2019. We designed a 52-item instrument with a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, multiple-answer, Likert scale, and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative information about member experiences with teaching homiletics classes, navigating institutional barriers, and conducting research. Respondents were anonymous to encourage forthright and honest answers. The questions aimed to elicit opinions, attitudes, and reflections about incorporating DEI into professional practice, providing baselines for the guild to assess future shifts and trends.

From the survey pool of 234 members, 81 completed questionnaires, a 34% response. Thus, the confidence level for the data is 85%, with a margin of error of 6.5%.

We provided respondents with the following definitions of DEI at the outset of the survey:

- **DIVERSITY:** Diversity refers to all aspects of human difference, social identities, and social group differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, creed, color, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, (dis)ability, mental and physical health, military/veteran status, political perspective, and associational preferences.
- **EQUITY:** Equity refers to fair and just practices and policies that ensure all community members can thrive. Equity differs from equality in that it implies treating everyone as if their experiences are the same. Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities — historic and current — that advantage some and disadvantage others. Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities.
- **INCLUSION:** Inclusion refers to a community where all members are and feel respected, have a sense of belonging, and can participate and achieve their potential. While diversity is essential, it is not sufficient. A community can be both diverse and non-inclusive at the same time; thus, a sustained practice of creating inclusive environments is necessary for success.

### **Demographics**

Eighty-four percent of respondents were from the U.S. Other countries of origin included Canada, Korea, Colombia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the Caribbean. Among those who provided racial or ethnic identity responses, 64% were white/Caucasian, 23% Black/African American,

6% African National/African-Caribbean, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Native American/Indigenous, 1% Hispanic or Latinx, and 1% Middle Eastern.<sup>12</sup> The primary language of most respondents was English (95%). Secondary languages included German, Spanish, French, Korean, Cantonese, Arabic, Danish, Igbo, Italian, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Russian. Among those who provided gender and sexual identity, 50% identified as men, 49% as women, 90% as heterosexual, and 7% as LGBTQIA+.

All but one respondent identified as Christian and twenty-one Christian denominations were represented.<sup>13</sup> Respondent ages ranged from 29 to 74, with forty percent below age 50 and sixty percent age 50 or older. Eighty-one percent of respondents had earned their degree for teaching homiletics, and 19% were students in a terminal degree program. Sixty-three percent were either full, associate, or assistant professors; 26% were either lecturers, adjunct, or visiting professors; 6% were retired. The remaining 5% positions included dean, president, independent scholar, seminary administrator, and church bureaucrat.

On social and political issues, 70% identified as progressive or liberal, 19% as moderate, 7% conservative, and 4% something else

### **Characteristics of Seminaries Where AoH Members Teach**

Of the 44 respondents who indicated that they were “settled” in a single institution,<sup>14</sup> 57% were in free-standing or otherwise independent institutions, and 43% taught in institutions embedded within larger universities. Twelve were represented among those who indicated that their institution had a denominational affiliation.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding diversity at their institution, 89% of all respondents said that gender diversity is a high or medium priority for their institution. However, only 27% of female respondents said that gender diversity and representation were high priorities for their institution, compared with 50% of their male colleagues. One-third reported high or medium, and two-thirds reported low priority for LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Eight in ten respondents said they served in historically white institutions while 17% served historically Black institutions. When asked about the racial and ethnic diversity of their schools, 64% of all respondents chose very or somewhat diverse, while 33% indicated not very or not at all.

More than half of respondents reported having at least a few students for whom English is their second language. One third indicated that many or most of their students have a primary language other than English.

### **Importance of DEI in Teaching and Factors of DEI Formation**

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<sup>12</sup> Respondents could choose more than one race; thus, totals exceed 100%. Three percent reported their race or ethnicity as “something else.”

<sup>13</sup> Denominations included (listed in descending order according to the number of respondents): Baptists, Progressive/National Baptist, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Presbyterians, Christian Church - Disciples of Christ, United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, Lutheran – ELCA, United Church of Christ, Reformed, Episcopal, AME Zion, and CCFM Pentecostal, Church of God, Church of the Brethren, Evangelical Covenant, Mennonite, and Non-denominational.

<sup>14</sup> We defined “settled” as neither a student nor a visiting or adjunct instructor.

<sup>15</sup> Denominations of institutions included: Presbyterian (U.S. and Canada), Baptist (American, Southern), Interdenominational, Christian Church – Disciples of Christ, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, United Church of Christ (US and Canada), Episcopal, Church of the Brethren, Lutheran - ELCA, and Reformed.

Seventy percent of respondents indicated that diversity, equity, and inclusion was a high priority for them in their teaching, 26% moderate priority, and 4% little or no priority. Eight in ten females said that DEI was a high priority, compared with six in ten males. The demographic group indicating DEI as the highest priority was females of color (92%).

What helped to prepare AoH members to center DEI in teaching and scholarship? Given four choices and asked the degree to which they were factors on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much), primary texts by scholars of color or international scholars was rated highest (3.04). Second was guest lecturers or preachers from diverse presenters (2.88). Third was instruction from diverse faculty (2.81), followed by DEI training (anti-racism, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, etc.) at 2.06.<sup>16</sup>

### **Tracking Changes in Attitudes About DEI Before and After 2019**

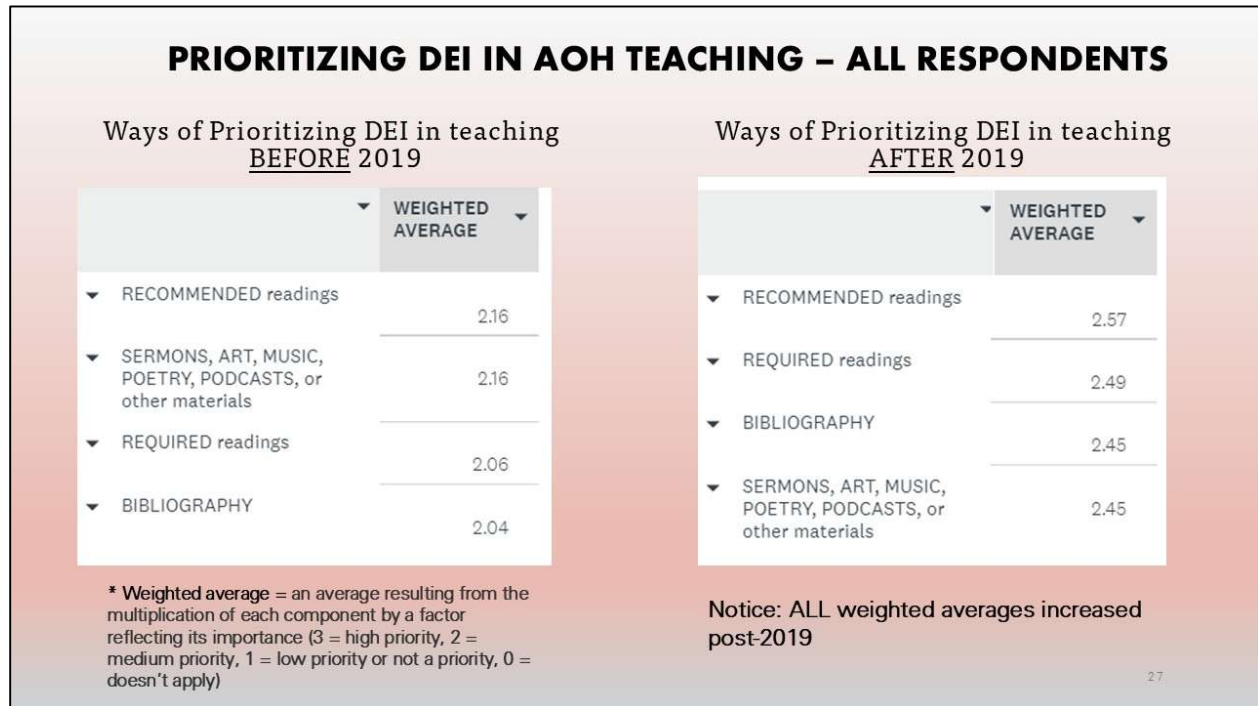
To measure how the effort to unmask homiletical whiteness may have influenced its members, we compared the responses of the 43 members who attended the 2019 meeting and/or town halls in 2020 with the 38 who did not. Eighty-six percent of those who attended the 2019 meeting and/or town halls in 2020 said that DEI in teaching is a high priority compared with 55% of those who did not attend. Were attendees already predisposed to centering DEI, or was there a correlation between attendance and increased attention to DEI? To explore this, we asked one set of questions regarding pedagogy and another about scholarship.

Sixty-seven respondents indicated they had taught at least one homiletics course in the previous four years. The questions for this group were designed to assess the ways that prioritizing DEI in teaching changed for them after 2019. Then we contrasted the responses of those who attended the 2019-2020 meeting and town halls with those who did not. Table 1 compares the ways that members prioritized DEI in their teaching before and after 2019 in four ways: recommended readings; required readings; sermons, art, music, poetry, podcasts, or other materials; and bibliography. The tables show the weighted average of high priority (3), medium priority (2), and low priority or not a priority (1), with 0 for does not apply.

*Table 1. Prioritizing DEI in AOH Teaching, 2022 Survey – All Respondents*

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<sup>16</sup> In open comments, other ways that were listed included institutional ethos, curriculum (including specific courses), other students, cultural and societal influences (civil rights movement, feminist movement, etc.), specific professors, personal study and research, and reading lists for comprehensive exams.

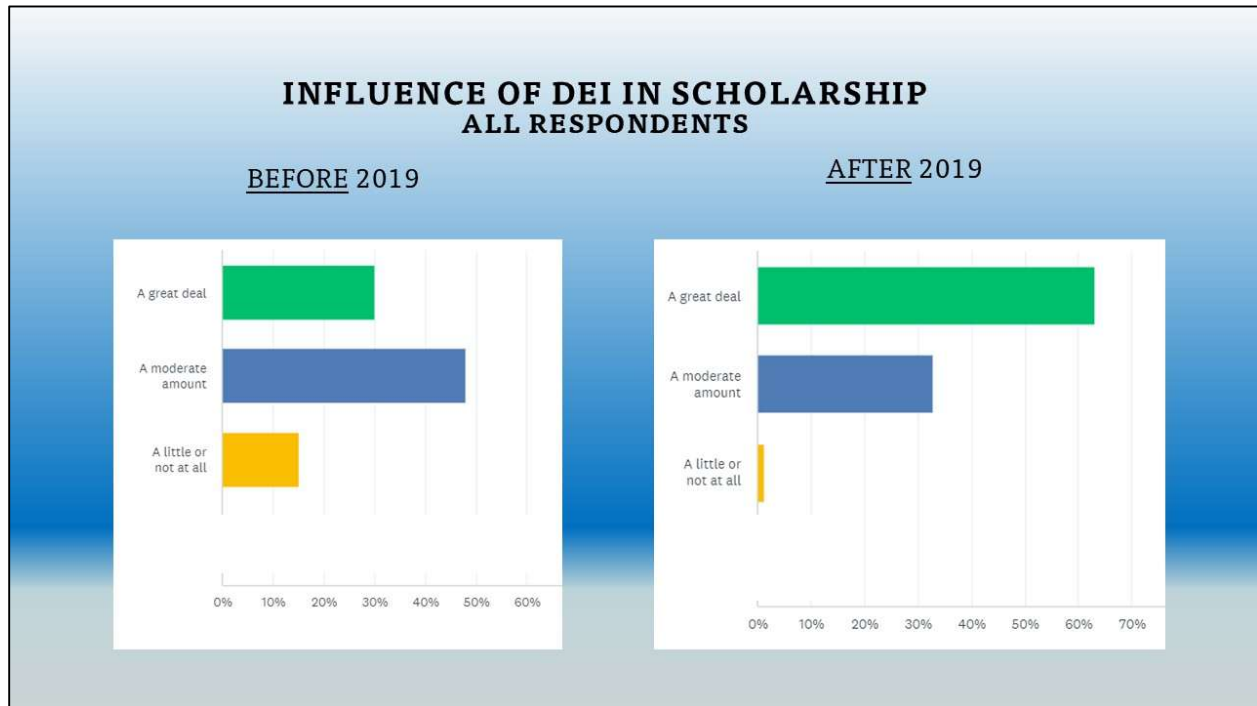


Note that all weighted averages increased post-2019. However, when controlling for those who attended the 2019-2020 meetings, some nuances were revealed. The average of weights for DEI in teaching for *non-attendees* before 2019 was 2.02 and increased to 2.23 after 2019. In contrast, the average for *attendees* before 2019 was 2.39, .37 higher than non-attendees. Thus, attendees were already prioritizing DEI to a higher degree than non-attendees prior to 2019. For attendees prioritizing DEI after 2019, the average was 2.80, .57 higher than non-attendees.

Thus, while attention to DEI in teaching increased for *all members* regardless of whether they attended the 2019-2020 meetings, for those who did attend, the increase in average weights was .41 compared with those who did not attend, which was .21. Thus, it appears that the efforts to promote DEI in the Academy of Homiletics have made the most difference for *those for whom these values were already important*. We found this pattern regarding scholarship as well. For example, we asked a series of questions about respondents' engagement with DEI in their research.<sup>17</sup> Table 2 shows that for all respondents, the influence of DEI on their scholarly work grew noticeably after 2019.

*Table 2. Influence of DEI in AOH Scholarship, all respondents, 2022.*

<sup>17</sup> 68 respondents said they engaged in scholarship before and after 2019.



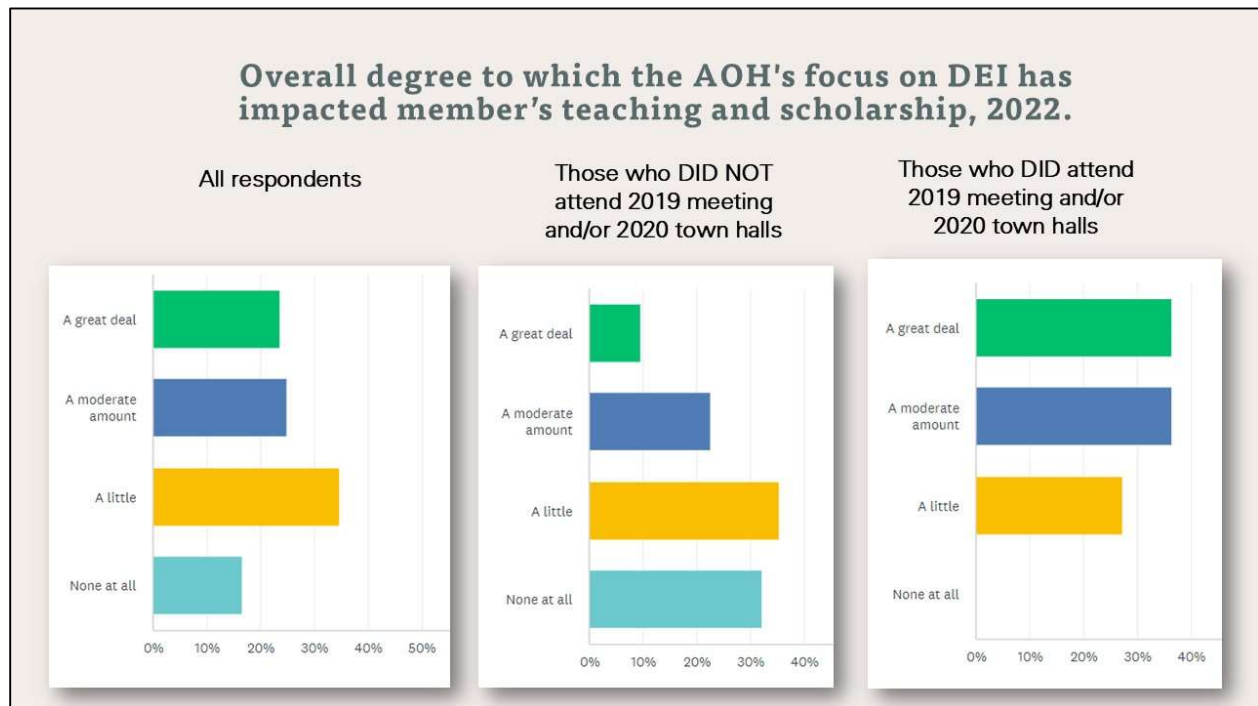
However, there was a 16% increase for those who did not attend either the 2019 or 2020 meetings compared with a 19% increase for attendees. Further, 100% of attendees said that DEI influenced their scholarship either a great deal or a moderate amount after 2019. Thus, as with teaching and DEI, attendees showed greater attention to DEI in their scholarship than those who did not.

There was also a difference between attendees and non-attendees in the *frequency* with which they centered DEI in their scholarship since 2019. Respondents were given a list of possible ways to include DEI in their scholarship and asked to indicate how often they used them. For all respondents, citing works by scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars was rated highest, followed by the instructor clearly identifying their social and demographic identities and intersectional identities. Third was collaborating on projects with scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars. Last was inviting scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars to present at conferences, webinars, keynotes, or workshops. However, when controlling for attendance at the 2019-20 meetings, the weighted average for non-attendees was 2.05, while the average for attendees was 2.63. Again, this indicates that those who attended the 2019-20 meetings appeared to place more importance on DEI than those who did not attend.

### **Implications of DEI for AoH Members' Teaching and Scholarship**

Table 3 shows a comparison between all respondents, 2019-20 meeting attendees, and non-attendees regarding the degree to which the AoH's focus on DEI has impacted their teaching and scholarship. For all respondents, 24% indicated a great deal, 26% a moderate amount, 34% a little, and 17% none at all.

*Table 3. Degree To Which AoH's Focus on DEI Impacted Members' Teaching and Scholarship, 2022.*



When controlling for attendance at the 2019 meeting and/or 2020 town halls, there are marked differences. Of those who did not attend, only one in three said there was a great deal or moderate impact, while 32% indicated none. In contrast, seven in ten attendees indicated that the DEI focus had a great deal or moderate impact, while none checked “none at all.” Again, it appears that the efforts toward DEI in the Academy of Homiletics have made the most difference to those for whom this work is important.

Yet, as one respondent commented, “Programming is not enough. Though there have been significant strides in representation and the job placement of candidates with respect to DEI, the nature of the guild still feels as if we are talking about DEI without digging into the substance of what DEI entails for transforming our guild.”

This aspect of “digging in” to the substance of DEI for transforming the AoH was explored in a question asking for respondents to indicate how helpful specific workshops and resources would be for further equipping their work in DEI. Creating an annotated bibliography was ranked highest, followed by a workshop on tools and best practices for pedagogy. Other options included a repository of model syllabi; workshops on navigating institutional racism, prejudice, bias, and resistance; a workshop on best practices with international and/or ESL students; and accountability groups for peer-to-peer support. The research team found it interesting that a workshop on best practices with ESL students ranked second to last, considering that more than half of respondents said they teach at least a few or some students who have a primary language other than English. This may indicate that AoH members remain unaware of the impacts of Anglocentric pedagogy on international and ESL students.

## **Part Two: Analysis of AOH Members' Syllabi to Assess DEI in Pedagogy**

While respondents' self-reported attitudes and practices provide an important glimpse into the effects of centering DEI with members of the Academy of Homiletics, the team analyzed pedagogical artifacts in the form of syllabi to compare with the survey. Would the analysis of the syllabi show less engagement with DEI than what was self-reported in the syllabi? We collected

and analyzed members' syllabi to assess the implementation of DEI-focused research and pedagogical practices and compared these artifacts with self-reported attitudes.

## Methods

In the fall of 2022, the research team requested members of the Academy of Homiletics to submit their syllabi from 2016-2018 (pre-intervention) and 2020-2022 (during intervention) to be analyzed for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the courses. The request for syllabi was announced to AoH members via email from the Executive Committee on behalf of the grant co-directors in 2022. Three types of syllabi were solicited: introductory preaching courses, elective or advanced-level or D.Min. preaching courses, and Ph.D. courses. Syllabi were anonymized by a third party to ensure confidentiality and coded for gender, race, ethnicity, and professional status of the instructor.

The sample pool was 204 members of the AOH; 52 members submitted syllabi. Syllabi from 2016-18 numbered 79; 2019-22 numbered 97. Three were discarded due to incomplete data. A total of 179 syllabi were collected and analyzed for the following components:

1. Required and recommended texts, bibliographies, and other sources that include scholars from historically marginalized communities and perspectives or speak to issues of DEI.
2. Keywords and other language in the syllabi regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as stated commitments to a culture of DEI in the classroom and institution.
3. Assignments and non-textual resources that intentionally incorporate DEI.

## Demographics

Half of the instructors were full professors, 24% assistant professors, 16% associate professors, 7% adjunct or contingent, and 2% visiting professors. Eighty-seven percent of instructors were full-time, and 12% were part-time. Of those who indicated their gender and sexual orientation, 28 were female, 23 male, and 1 trans male; 74% heterosexual, 7% homosexual, 5% bisexual or flexible. Thirty-four were white, 11 Black, 4 Asian, 1 Hispanic or Latine, 1 multi-racial or multi-ethnic, and 1 Native American. Among those who indicated their country of origin, 87% of the instructors were from the U.S.; 10% were from outside of the U.S.

## Analyzing Course Components Centering DEI in AoH Syllabi

Syllabi were grouped according to instructor to track course components pre- and post-intervention and then divided between four coders who each received 30-50 syllabi. Using a simple word search, each coder noted the number of DEI keywords.<sup>18</sup> Then they analyzed the syllabi guided by the following questions:

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<sup>18</sup> Keywords included: ableism, disability, accessibility, affinity, African American, ageism, anti-racism, Asian American, bias, BIPOC, Black, Black women, Womanist, bodies, embodiment, brave space, classism, colonialism, de-colonial, post-colonialism, colorism, context-specific, context-determined, culture, cultural competency, intercultural, culturally distinct, discrimination, diversity, English as a second language, equality, equity, ethnic, ethnicity, Eurocentric, female, feminist, gender, global, Global South, heterosexism, heteronormative, Hispanic, Latine/a/o/x, inclusion, inclusive language, expansive language, Indigenous, Native American (and more specific references to country, nation, tribe, etc.), intersections, intersectionality, justice, injustice, LGBTQIA+ (or variations), gay, lesbian, minority, minoritized, historically minoritized, multicultural, multi-ethnic, neurodiversity, Pacific Islander, patriarchy, privilege, pronouns, race, racialized, racism, sexual orientation, sexuality, stereotypes, white, whiteness, white nationalism (or white Christian nationalism), white supremacy, white savagery, and xenophobia.

1. Do the required and recommended course readings include authors from historically marginalized communities or from beyond the U.S. and address topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
2. Do the non-textual and/or artistic resources (videos, audio clips, podcasts, visual arts, music/hymnody, poetry, etc.) originate from historically marginalized communities or perspectives, address DEI perspectives/topics, or originate from beyond the U.S.?
3. Do additional bibliographies/resource lists include materials, including non-textual and/or artistic resources, originating from historically marginalized communities or perspectives, that address DEI perspectives/topics, or originate from beyond the U.S.?
4. Does the language of the syllabus indicate the professor's personal commitments to DEI and express a commitment to a classroom culture of honoring DEI?

### **DEI Keywords**

The keyword found most frequently in all syllabi (avg. 84%) was “context-specific or context-determined,” followed by “culture” (avg. 74.5%). Other frequently found keywords were “inclusive language/expansive language” (avg. 67%), “ableism, disability” (avg. 63.5%), “diversity” (avg. 55.5%), and “justice/injustice” (avg. 47.5%). Several terms saw a marked increase in percentage points from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention periods, including “Black” (+19), “inclusive/expansive language” (+17), “justice/injustice” (+19), race (+15), “African American” (+15), and “sexual orientation/sexuality” (+14). Of the fourteen terms that were mentioned the most, all but two (“bodies/embodiment” [-4] and “female/feminist” [-3]) increased in frequency in the 2019-22 group.<sup>19</sup>

We noted that while a keyword may not show up in a syllabus, an instructor may use DEI words in their course content verbally or in online forums. Nevertheless, the syllabus is the student's first encounter with the course and is an artifact that reflects the instructor's intentions for the course. Therefore, it is worth examining the use of keywords. When controlled for race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, 75% of scholars of color used the top five keywords, compared with 68% of white instructors. 90% of LGBTQIA instructors used the top keywords, compared with 68% of heterosexual and cisgender respondents.

### **DEI in Assigned or Recommended Texts, Readings, Media, Course Assignments, and Syllabus Language**

Required texts, assigned readings (PDFs, book excerpts), recommended texts, and bibliographies were examined for the gender, race, culture, and country or origin of the author as well as for content that addressed some aspects of DEI. Course assignments and general language in the syllabi were also assessed.

In required texts of the 2019-22 syllabi, there was an increase in percentage points in female authors (+4), Black or African American (+11), and those outside the U.S. (+2), compared with 2016-18 syllabi. There was also a +4 increase in the number of required readings that addressed some aspect of DEI. Eighty-three percent of syllabi included such required texts, and the most frequently addressed topics in 2019-22 were justice (41%), Black or African

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<sup>19</sup> The research team noted that keywords might indicate trends in teaching and in culture as much as individual commitment to certain topics. For example, the term “BIPOC” (an acronym for Black, Indigenous, People of Color) was among the least frequently used terms and may reflect the fact that the acronym has generally fallen out of favor. At the same time, the term “neurodiversity” was also among the least frequently used terms, but may reflect the fact that while awareness of neurological diversity is on the rise, it is still in the emergent phase.

American (29%), race/racism (28%), womanist/Black women (28%), context (22%), and culture (19%). We noted that compared with the 2016-18 syllabi, the post-intervention syllabi showed more evidence of attention to intersectionality and distinctions within previously monolithic topics. For example, womanist/Black women increased by 23 percentage points, while Black/African American decreased by 18.

By race, 69% of instructors of color chose texts written by scholars of color compared with 44% of whites. Controlling for gender and sexual orientation showed that 41% of females chose texts written by female authors compared with 34% of males. Six in ten LGBTQIA instructors chose texts written by diverse scholars compared with five in ten of hetero/cisgender instructors. Also, 94% of LGBTQIA instructors chose DEI topics compared with 79% of hetero/cisgender instructors.<sup>20</sup>

Combining across years, 24% of instructors used primary texts by authors of color and 64% used non-textual or artistic resources from people of color. Does this gap indicate exploitation or extraction of online sermons and other free resources by preachers or color instead of royalty-producing primary texts? Alternatively, are homileticians featuring preachers of color as exemplars? As a coder noted, “Seeing a person who looks like me in a preaching video is so important. Representation matters. Images are so powerful. It is one thing to read a text by an author of color; it is another to see a preacher of color in action.”

Sixty-six assignments were analyzed.<sup>21</sup> For 2016-18, 30% incorporated DEI or referenced authors or preachers with minority identities, compared with 43% in 2019-22. Language in syllabi was examined for indications of a commitment to a culture of DEI in the classroom and/or the institution. This included the use of pronouns for the professor and the instruction for students to share their pronouns; inclusive and expansive language for the Divine and humans; non-discrimination statements; and personal statements of intersections, perspectives, and social locations. Syllabi DEI language increased from 33% in 2016-18 to 47% in 2019-22.

### **“Grading” Syllabi and Comparing to Member Survey**

Coders assigned a “grade” of A, B, C, or D for each syllabus by completing a tally sheet assigning points for the number of instances of DEI.<sup>22</sup> These grades were then compared for differences between pre- and post-intervention.

Table 4 shows that the number of syllabi with grades of A or B increased from 25% in 2016-18 to 34% in 2019-22.

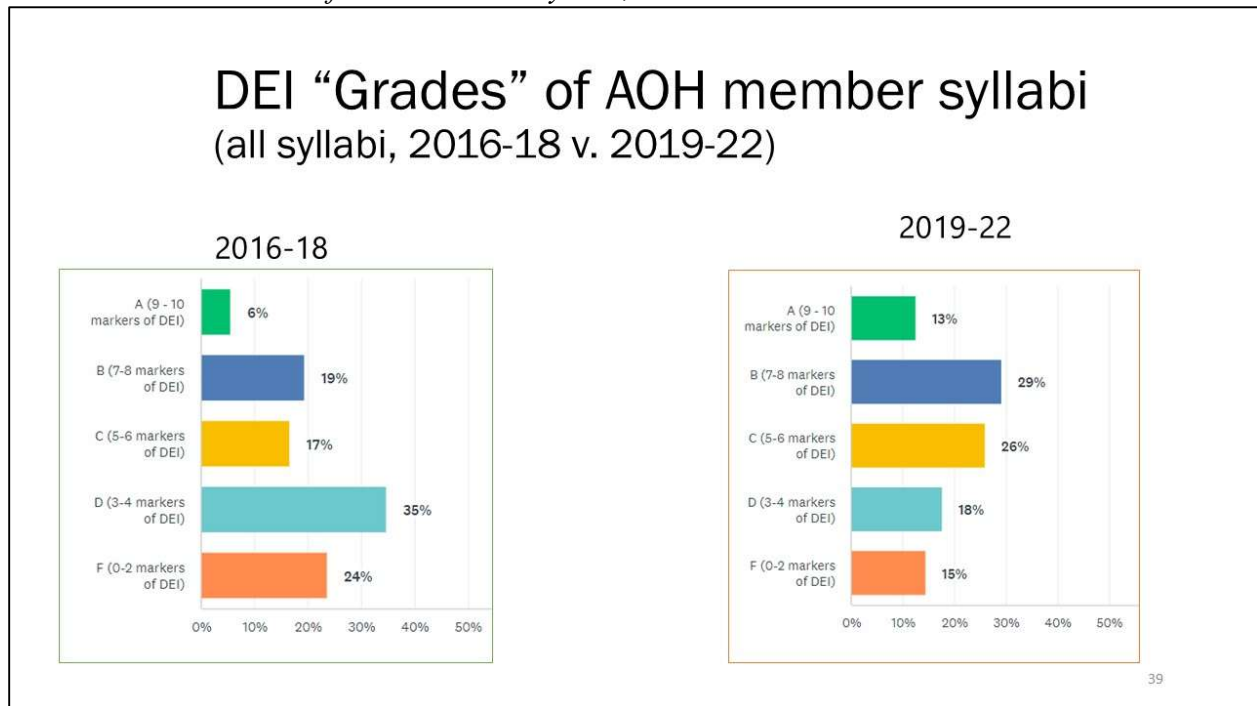
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<sup>20</sup> The same pattern held for DEI in assigned PDFs and excerpts, recommended texts, non-textual resources (sermons, videos, etc.), and bibliographies. For these course components, there were increases in Black/African American and female authors/creators as well as an increase in addressing some aspect of DEI. Focusing on bibliographies showed that 50 percent of female instructors had sources centering DEI compared with 26 percent of males. LGBTQIA instructors had a higher rate (50%) compared to hetero/cisgender (40%). In terms of race, white instructors had slightly more diversity in their bibliographies compared to instructors of color (41% v. 38%).

<sup>21</sup> Assignments included: reflection papers, class discussion, write/record sermon, exegesis paper, online discussion board, academic paper, design liturgy/worship service, analyze a sermon, book review, create annotated bibliography, oral reflection, qualitative interviews, class presentation, written reflection on readings, videos, recordings, and attend and analyze worship service.

<sup>22</sup> Coders assigned points for the number of DEI keywords (1-10 = 0; 11-20 = 1; 21 or more = 2), course resources with authors of color and/or outside of the U.S. and/or address a DEI topic (one or more required and assigned texts = 1; two or recommended texts = 1; two or more non-text sources = 1; bibliography with 11-25% = 1, 26% or more = 2); instances in syllabi with specific commitment to a culture of DEI in the classroom or institution (1-2 = 1, 3-5 = 2); and assignments that engage DEI (1 = 1; 2 or 3 = 2).

Table 4. DEI “Grades” of AOH Member Syllabi, 2016-18 v. 2019-22.



Coders noticed several improvements in the 2019-22 syllabi compared with those the instructors submitted for 2016-18. For example, one coder said there were “enormous leaps forward from the previous syllabus. The instructor attends to what it is like to live and preach from particular bodies as the course attends to performance.” Another commented about “significant attention given to DEI” in terms of classroom culture and including chapters and articles from a vast diversity of voices.” A third coder noted that a professor “focused on Black women preaching and included a diverse range of non-text materials. The instructor provided detailed rationale and examples of inclusive language practices.” However, across years, the number of As and Bs for white instructors increased by 6% while those of minoritized instructors increased by 37%.

How did findings from the syllabi analysis compare with the member survey? The survey demonstrated an increase of 16.8% in prioritizing DEI when factoring in self-reported actions regarding required readings, recommended readings, non-textual/artistic resources, and bibliographies. Syllabi showed a 26.2% increase when examining those same course components. In other words, analysis of the syllabi confirmed what the members reported about their increased commitment to DEI.

However, as the data showed, while attention to DEI increased in syllabi in 2019-22 compared with 2016-18, there were variations by gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Overall, males appear to be doing less regarding DEI than their female colleagues. Whites appear to be doing less compared with their colleagues of minoritized groups. And heterosexual/cisgender individuals appear to be doing less compared with their LGBTQIA colleagues.

In addition, increases in DEI have focused primarily on Black and African American issues, while the interests of other minoritized groups were underrepresented in AOH members’ syllabi. As one coder noted, “The syllabus shows that the instructor made deliberate efforts to address racism by incorporating various materials drawn from different racial identity group in

the U.S. However, the required book section reveals a preference for only discussing Black and white issues which can reinforce a binary perspective on racism.” In addition, international scholars and their concerns were underrepresented across the board.

### **Caveats to Grades of Syllabi**

Coders pointed out that some syllabi received higher grades because of the number of DEI keywords, but did not necessarily incorporate DEI themes into assignments or move beyond token nods to DEI. At the same time, some syllabi received lower grades for DEI because it was difficult to assess the nuances that might have contributed to DEI awareness and engagement in the course. Coders also noted that other cultural and societal factors (i.e., murder of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter movement, Covid anti-Asian bias, border crisis, etc.) may have influenced the increase of DEI in the 2019-22 syllabi.

### **Discussion**

This project’s primary objective was to conduct a “DEI audit” of the Academy of Homiletics to highlight the efforts of its members to unmask and deconstruct white homiletics and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the same time, we acknowledged the limitations inherent in this work as well as the complexities involved in deconstructing and reconstructing the discipline of homiletics that expands beyond the binaries of race. The aim of this work is to promote dialogue and humility in exploring the pedagogy and scholarship of homileticians. By moving beyond narrow and exclusive understandings of homiletics, we might begin to embrace a broad, open, and inclusive orientation toward the teaching and research around preaching.

This work is essential given that, as Schneider and Bjork-James contend, “religion plays a role in either perpetuating, obscuring, or mobilizing against increasing racism and racial inequality. It is crucial, therefore, to bring conversations about the co-imbrications of race and religion within our current juncture to the fore, particularly given the fact that conservative white Christians maintain considerable influence over national politics in the United States.”<sup>23</sup> The work is also urgent, given the rapidity with which the current presidential administration and its supporters are dismantling DEI initiatives,<sup>24</sup> attacking higher education and academic freedom,<sup>25</sup> and restricting international students from attending U.S. universities.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, this study raises questions that we hope will lead to further inquiries. For example, how does Christian preaching – and the theological formation of Christian preachers – continue to reinforce the racial hierarchies that undergird American society? In what ways do white homileticians and preachers deflect attention away from the reality of racial hierarchies?

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<sup>23</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 176.

<sup>24</sup> Michele S. Manceaux, L. Maverick Flowers, Michael Kuczynski, “DEI Executive Orders and Related Litigation,” *The National Law Review*, Feb. 20, 2025, <https://natlawreview.com/article/dei-executive-orders-and-related-litigation>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

<sup>25</sup> Liam Knox and Johanna Alonso, “Trump’s 100-Day War on Higher Ed,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/04/30/how-trumps-first-100-days-transformed-higher-ed>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Lexi Lonas Cochran, “Trump tightens reins on foreign students in multifront immigration crackdown on universities,” *The Hill*, July 29, 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5424114-trump-immigration-crackdown-international-students-columbia-harvard-university-college/>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

Conversely, how might preaching deconstruct these racial hierarchies and contribute to an expansive and inclusive proclamation?<sup>27</sup>

Further, do the well-intentioned efforts of DEI inadvertently reinscribe and center whiteness and the voices of white scholars while eliding fundamental and crucial questions of emancipation, repentance, reparations, and restoration? The research team noted that the increased focus on African American homiletics, while demonstrating a necessary improvement, could have a simultaneous effect of minimizing attention paid toward homiletics from other marginalized groups. Kenyatta Gilbert, one of the senior advisors, described the need for attending to non-white and non-Black social identities:

The human community has not done enough work examining racial hierarchy and how racialized groups adopt different strategies when addressing matters that pertain to group preservation. Deconstructing what this means in terms of global visibility and diversity is hard to do. However, based on experience, many minoritized groups aspire to assimilate into what is deemed respectable to whites based on hierarchical norms and success criteria established by white persons. Equally true is that whites are generalized in assessment studies as if there are no real cultural differences in what is perceived to be monolithic.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, an ongoing challenge with this work is the assumptions of white supremacy that are made invisible to preachers and their sermon listeners, even within minoritized communities. Homileticians must also ask what practices, policies, and pedagogies can dismantle the structures that continue to “coexist with everyday systems of racialized social inequality.”<sup>29</sup> In what ways can the research and teaching of preaching resist the temptation to “shield white subjects from recognizing the ways institutionalized racism continues to structure the society around them”?<sup>30</sup> Also, how might “white theologians, in particular, [including white homileticians] learn how to confess and redress white power in their intellectual work”?<sup>31</sup>

## Limitations

The syllabi analysis was impacted by low inter-rater reliability in that each syllabus was reviewed by only one coder.<sup>32</sup> We also note that the rise of Learning Management Systems (LMS) has created two streams of artifacts for courses where something might be present in the LMS but not in the syllabus, and vice versa. In addition, there was insufficient representation of

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<sup>27</sup> During the discussions following the presentations of this research at the annual meetings, other questions surfaced, such as how to determine what is “enough” when it comes to DEI. In other words, what constitutes a sufficient number of texts, materials, and assignments in addressing DEI beyond tokenism? Further, is it possible to establish a threshold by which to gauge sufficient emphasis on DEI? Also, given that some seminary students are required to take only one course in preaching, how can instructors incorporate DEI into the course as effectively as possible within time constraints?

<sup>28</sup> Quote from Kenyatta Gilbert as part of the presentation, “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics,” Grant Project Report, Academy of Homiletics, December 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 188.

<sup>30</sup> Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 188.

<sup>31</sup> James Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

<sup>32</sup> More funding would have allowed for multiple coders to examine each syllabus and compare results for consistency.

Hispanic and Latine homileticians in this project, so we recommend that specific outreach should be undertaken to engage these scholars in future research.

There were also challenges in interpreting the data and accounting for the shifts in engagement with DEI. For example, were more diverse materials made available, which, in turn, gave instructors more options?<sup>33</sup> Did institutions hire more diverse faculty or make efforts to increase the diversity of their student bodies? Further, to what degree were the changes influenced by a maturation effect (individuals making changes over time) as well as a period effect of societal and cultural factors?

## Recommendations

Given the fact that whites in the U.S. and abroad continue to uphold racial hierarchy and oppression through Christian preaching and the discipline of homiletics, there is much work to be done. This analysis of attitudes, pedagogical practices, and scholarship around diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Academy of Homiletics is part of an initial effort in identifying, resisting, and dismantling homiletical whiteness. We agree with Jennings that “theological education carries the resources necessary to reframe Western education beyond the distortion” of whiteness.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, our hope is that this project makes a useful contribution that will lead to homiletical research, teaching, and practice that envisions and inspires alternate social imaginations. Ultimately, this work should be utilized in the ongoing struggle to manifest preaching that is rooted in justice by offering insights into the limits and possibilities of homiletics that embraces the fullness of human community in all its expressions.

The data from this project indicates that continued focus on DEI through annual meeting themes, town halls, and workshops could be effective in continuing to deconstruct whiteness. To that end, the co-directors of this grant chose themes for the 2024 and 2025 Annual Meetings when they served as presidents in those years that built on the work of previous presidents and this research project. Leah Schade chose the theme “Preaching Builds Bridges” in 2024 to build connections with and among historically underrepresented groups that have received minimal attention within the guild. She moderated three online panel discussions covering the topics of “Building Bridges within the Multilingual Homiletics Classroom,” “Building Homiletical Bridges Alongside Those with Disabilities,” and “Building Homiletical Bridges in a Climate-Changed World.” During the annual meeting, the plenaries continued the focus on understudied themes, including building bridges with the LGBTQIA+ community, Indigenous and tribal communities, and within non-traditional spaces and emerging contexts. The meeting was held online in the spirit of building bridges of access and equity for international members, those who have disabilities, and those who do not have institutional support for the cost of travel and lodging.

For the 2025 annual meeting, Rich Voelz chose the theme “Preaching and Place,” stating: In the biblical witness, place serves a variety of functions: naming God’s presence and activity, defining God’s presence and judgment, marking socio-cultural and religious difference, accounting for the formation and maintenance of identity, charting the

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<sup>33</sup> During discussion about the presentation of this data at the 2023 Annual Meeting, a question was asked as to whether publishers should invite more scholars of color to write basic preaching texts rather than books from a particular standpoint. Or is it better to move away from textbooks altogether in favor of shorter articles, videos, podcasts, and other platforms that can present a more diverse array of voices?

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 5.

faithfulness and faithlessness of God's people, mapping God's present and future promises, and much more. Throughout history, place has been a way that identity, conflict, community, and interactions with the Holy have been mediated.<sup>35</sup>

The meeting was planned to focus on issues of contextuality, globalization, coloniality, migration, ecological crisis, war, the changing nature of sacred spaces and spaces from which preaching happens, digitality, and place-based pedagogy to "continue our collective commitment to seeking justice in our scholarship."

As the AoH charts its path for continued deconstruction of white hegemony, the research team offers recommendations for its members to incorporate DEI into their teaching and scholarship:

- For syllabi, create assignments encouraging student engagement with DEI beyond "checking boxes."
- Include photos of the authors in the syllabus to show the humanity and diversity of scholars the students will encounter.
- Place statements about DEI near the beginning of the syllabus rather than at the end, and include the professor's personal demographics and intersectionalities.
- When recommending commentaries to be consulted for exegesis in preaching, include a diversity of biblical scholars representing perspective-explicit interpretations.
- Offer options for students with different learning styles and for those whose primary language is different than English.
- Use required texts by authors from a wide range of historically marginalized groups.
- Focus more attention on international scholars to avoid Americanism and Eurocentrism.

The team also makes the following recommendations for the guild to undertake as an organization:

- Create a crowd-sourced annotated bibliography of texts, authors, and resources that reflect various aspects of DEI.
- Create a repository of assignments that embed DEI.
- Create a repository of model syllabi engaging DEI.
- Establish a threshold for the standard of DEI in syllabi and pedagogy, differentiating between tokenism and genuine, authentic engagement.

These are just a few ways that members of the Academy of Homiletics and its members can "shift centers of knowledge, show anti-racism [and de-coloniality] at work, exhibit historical consciousness, foster agency and consider intersectionality, and enact a publicly accountable classroom," as Voelz suggests.<sup>36</sup> These will help move this project beyond "merely an analytical enterprise" and instead "enact alternative futures for both pedagogy and whatever discipline or practice might be under consideration" in homiletics.<sup>37</sup>

Phase Two of this project will include another member survey to continue tracking attitudes and practices around pedagogy and DEI within the field of homiletics. Researchers also plan to conduct ethnographic research by interviewing AoH members guided by questions such as: what factors have led them to shape their pedagogy so that it centers DEI in their classrooms? At the same time, what are the barriers or challenges to doing this work?

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Voelz, email communication to AoH members, February 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Voelz, "Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletical Pedagogy," 149-50.

<sup>37</sup> Voelz, "Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletical Pedagogy," 150.

Overall, we suggest that the Academy of Homiletics might undertake “reconstruction homiletics,” an adaptation of the term “reconstruction theology” coined by J.N. Kanyua Mugambi in his proposal for post-liberation theology in postcolonial Africa.<sup>38</sup> This would entail shifting the conversation around homiletics away from a mere “no” to whiteness and toward a “yes” to reconstruction that embodies the fullness of humanity in all its multiplicity. At the very least, “it needs to refuse to be drawn into the abstract forms that have occupied whiteness and thus Western theology.”<sup>39</sup>

At its best, when homileticians of all races, colors, genders, abilities, nationalities, cultures, and sexual orientations can hear their own and each other’s voices, they can engage in a conversation that creates a better-built homiletical convergence for preaching, teaching, and scholarship.

### For further Reading

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**Contested Commitments: A Study of Homiletics Professors' Experiences with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

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**Abstract:** *Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are prominent topics of conversation in higher education, including seminaries and theological schools. The Academy of Homiletics DEI study, funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, surveyed 81 professors, exploring the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating DEI into their teaching of homiletics, the art of preaching. This phenomenological study, conducted in 2022, provides a mixed-methods analysis offering insight into the current state of DEI implementation in theological education, capturing a snapshot of the academic climate before the anticipated surge in opposition to DEI initiatives following the 2024 U.S. presidential election. The findings also provide a baseline to compare subsequent surveys as political and societal opposition to DEI initiatives intensifies across North America.*

**Background and Introduction**

Education within seminaries and theological schools is increasingly shaped by conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>1</sup> Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in higher education include actively engaging with diversity in curriculum and communities to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of interactions within systems.<sup>2</sup> DEI initiatives in education encompass a multifaceted approach that necessitates critically examining language and pedagogical strategies to foster justice and equity within higher education.<sup>3</sup> Integrating DEI principles into course content and learning activities can

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<sup>1</sup> Geleana Drew Alston and Catherine A. Hansman, "Embracing Diversity and Inclusive Mentoring Practices for Leadership Development," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2020 (September): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20400>.

<sup>2</sup> Milton A. Fuentes, David G. Zelaya, and Joshua W. Madsen, "Rethinking the Course Syllabus: Considerations for Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion," *Teaching of Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2020): 69–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628320959979>.

<sup>3</sup> Liz Browne, "What Is Educational Leadership?" in *Routledge eBooks* (Informa, 2020), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429197154-2>.

reinforce or challenge existing norms and thus shape the classroom environment and student experiences,<sup>4</sup> particularly in homiletic pedagogy.

The broader academic discourse emphasizes the development of effective strategies for DEI integration across various disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Factors such as the institution's mission, values, resources, and individual faculty members' commitment, knowledge, and skills contribute to the variability in DEI implementation across institutions and disciplines.<sup>6</sup> Homiletics professors who integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their courses may encounter a complicated landscape of support and possible backlash. Some professors may be enthusiastic advocates for DEI, while others may be hesitant or resistant due to concerns about academic freedom, theological interpretations, or perceived political agendas.<sup>7</sup>

With the election of Donald Trump in the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the political climate surrounding DEI initiatives became increasingly hostile, creating uncertainty and fear among educators and administrators and potentially impacting the quality of education and research.<sup>8</sup> The Trump administration's rhetoric about limiting DEI in universities and efforts to make policy shifts have potentially undermined diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within institutions of higher learning.<sup>9</sup> Several states have recently proposed or enacted legislation restricting DEI initiatives in public universities, citing concerns over reverse discrimination and ideological conformity.<sup>10</sup> These shifts required universities to re-evaluate campus DEI strategies.<sup>11</sup> Further, governmental scrutiny may lead professors to re-evaluate their teaching and research activities.<sup>12</sup>

The impact of DEI initiatives in higher education is complex, with consequences that extend beyond legal and policy changes, including palpable shifts in institutional priorities. This political polarization can manifest in several ways within higher education and theological seminaries.<sup>13</sup> As faculty and administrators face pressure to avoid politically sensitive or biased

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<sup>4</sup> Michelle D. Evans and Hillary J. Knepper, "Building Inclusive PA Classrooms: The Diversity Inclusion Model," *Teaching Public Administration* 39, no. 1 (2020): 84–102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739420937762>.

<sup>5</sup> Kaleigh Summer Soda, "Leadership and Its Impact on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: A Literature Review and Analysis," *Open Access Library Journal* 10, no. 9 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1109980>; Catherine A. Hansman and Chance W. Lewis, eds., *Handbook of Research on Educational Leadership for Equity and Diversity* (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203076934>.

<sup>6</sup> Evans and Knepper, "Building Inclusive PA Classrooms."

<sup>7</sup> Joyce Victor, Ashley Gangaware, and Jacob Siek, "Strategies for Teaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Principles of Nursing," *Nurse Educator* 49, no. 2 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1097/nne.0000000000001495>.

<sup>8</sup> Veronica G. Martinez and Carlita B. Favero, "A Discussion of Diversity and Inclusivity at the Institutional Level: The Need for a Strategic Plan," *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education* 16, no. 3 (2018): <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30254540>.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Parson and Laila McCloud, "Exploring the Use of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of HESA Introductory Syllabi," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2203101>.

<sup>10</sup> Judith L. Hepner, "Sustainability Challenges and Opportunities in Luxury Fashion: A Response to Policy Deregulation in the United States," *Journal of Sustainable Marketing*, (2025): <https://doi.org/10.51300/jsm-2025-139>.

<sup>11</sup> Mussie Tessema, Traci Hulback, Jennifer Jones, Ryan Santos-Leslie, Kisha Ninham, Amy Sterbin, and Nathan Swanson, "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: History, Climate, Benefits, Challenges, and Creative Strategies," *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies* 11, no. 4 (2023): 780-794, doi: 10.4236/jhrss. 2023.114044.

<sup>12</sup> Martinez and Favero, "A Discussion of Diversity and Inclusivity at the Institutional Level."

<sup>13</sup> For example, in Summer 2025, Baylor University received backlash from donors and alums about receiving grant funding to research the experiences of women and LGBTQ people in congregations. The university president made a public statement to rescind the grant funding, citing the University's Statement on Human

topics, standard course design may feel contentious when selecting curriculum material, readings, research, and guest speakers. Students might not share certain opinions if class discussions become tense due to divisive topics. Further, the expression of political views may impact faculty hires, promotions, and support from the administration.<sup>14</sup>

Faculty experience many obstacles in DEI implementation, such as a lack of resources, training, and institutional support. The backlash to DEI efforts in the classroom may include encountering resistance from students who perceive DEI initiatives as imposing specific ideologies, undermining academic freedom, or diluting the focus on traditional homiletical skills and knowledge. Furthermore, leadership, faculty, and students from more advantaged backgrounds may perceive no benefit to DEI integration and therefore may resist it.<sup>15</sup> Faculty are told they must carefully balance integrating DEI principles with preserving intellectual rigor and academic integrity.<sup>16</sup> Faculty members often engage in ongoing negotiation between the desire to address the needs of a diverse student population, deliver a superior educational experience, and uphold values related to professional and public service, all within the constraints of limited time.<sup>17</sup>

For theological schools seeking to cultivate inclusive homiletics courses and equip students with skills to integrate DEI into their preaching and ministry, understanding the supports and challenges professors face in the classroom is essential. The experiences of 81 Academy of Homiletics (AoH) professors who integrated diversity, equity, and inclusion in their teaching were examined in a 2022 study, providing insights into the support and resistance encountered in their classrooms.<sup>18</sup> The data analysis provided an overview of the opportunities and obstacles homiletics professors experienced employing inclusive pedagogy. The study's findings will influence future studies about homiletical professors and the integration of DEI. Subsequent surveys will provide a longitudinal perspective on the evolving landscape of higher education amidst an ever-changing sociopolitical climate.

The Academy of Homiletics was founded in 1965 as an academic guild for those who teach, research, and practice the art and skills of preaching. Homiletics, the study of preparing, composing, and delivering sermons, involves scripture, theology, context, and rhetoric for public proclamation. At the time of this article, the Academy of Homiletics had more than two hundred members in the U.S., Canada, and several other countries. Membership in the Academy of Homiletics is open to professors and doctoral graduate students of homiletics, independent scholars, and retirees.

## Methods

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Sexuality, although the same foundation had funded Baylor's similar research for years.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/baylor-university-return-643000-lgbtq-inclusion-grant-rcna217848>.

<sup>14</sup> As an example, a viral video of a Texas A&M University English professor's lecture on gender identity led to her termination, as well as the removal of the department head, dean, and eventually the president in the fall of 2025. <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/09/19/texas-a-m-welsh-firing-professor-gender-mccoul/>

<sup>15</sup> Aarti Iyer, "Understanding Advantaged Groups' Opposition to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Policies: The Role of Perceived Threat," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 16, no. 5 (2022): <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12666>.

<sup>16</sup> John Saler, "The NIH Sacrifices Academic Rigor for DEI," *Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, March 12, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/the-nih-sacrifices-scientific-rigor-for-dei-f828a6c7>, accessed July 15, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Evans and Knepper, "Building Inclusive PA Classrooms: The Diversity Inclusion Model."

<sup>18</sup> Victor, et al, "Strategies for Teaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Principles of Nursing."

In 2022, the Academy of Homiletics (AoH) received a grant for a project entitled “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics” from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The project included a survey designed to capture a wide range of information related to the experiences of AoH members teaching homiletics classes. The anonymous survey included questions about experienced or observed systemic racism in their teaching institutions, barriers encountered to teaching and DEI, and sources of support regarding DEI incorporation.<sup>19</sup> The survey contained a blend of question types, including multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions, to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data.<sup>20</sup> This comprehensive approach to data collection ensured that the study could provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of homiletics professors regarding DEI.

This article references survey data about demographics and reported systemic racism, barriers, negativity, positivity, and support related to DEI in their preaching courses. The Likert scale questions had an open-ended (no-limit response length) option to elaborate on their experiences and express more nuanced perspectives. The additional qualitative data obtained through ‘other’ text boxes accompanying the Likert questions provided further understanding of respondents' experiences.

The optional open-ended questions examined for this article are as follows:

- Share observations or experiences regarding systemic racism at your institution. (Please specify).
- Are there other barriers you have faced? (Please specify).
- Have you experienced other negative responses? (Please specify).
- Are there other sources of support and encouragement? (Please specify).
- Have you had other positive experiences while addressing DEI in your institution? (Please specify).

## Demographics

Respondents in this study included 81 adults (49% female, 50% male, 1% no answer) with a mean age of 54 years. Two hundred thirty-four individuals received the survey, and 81 responded, giving a response rate of 34% (the target response rate was 40%). Sixty-four percent of the sample identified as white, 23% as Black/African American, 6% as African National/African Caribbean, 5% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% as Native American/Indigenous, 1% as Hispanic/Latine, and 1% as Middle Eastern. Two percent did not identify with a listed race. Approximately 90% identified as straight or heterosexual, with 7% of respondents identifying as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Three percent did not identify with a listed sexual orientation. Respondents' reported political affiliations showed that 70% identified as progressive or liberal or very progressive or liberal, 19% as moderate, and 7% as conservative or very conservative. Recruited respondents were members of the Academy of Homiletics. Inclusion criteria included members who were seminary or theological school professors, Ph.D. students, independent scholars, or retirees.

## Analysis

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<sup>19</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (The New Press, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Aynsley H. M. Scheffert, Amanda Wilson Harper, and Gaynor I. Yancey, “Coping Behavior Changes in Christian Congregations in the United States: A National Survey,” *Social Work and Christianity* 50, no. 3 (2023): 218–38, <https://doi.org/10.34043/swc.v50i3.340>.

The survey included an open-ended ‘optional’ text box at the end of five questions about systemic racism and barriers and support for DEI integration to allow respondents to provide answers not explored by predefined categories. The qualitative data from these four questions were analyzed using thematic analysis. While limited, the qualitative data from this study gives meaning and illuminates firsthand experiences with quantitative data and additional perspectives. Quotes identified supported emergent themes, providing further information about respondents’ experiences with DEI incorporation. The authors employed Excel to manage and organize the data.

## **Findings**

This study aimed to determine the support and pushback homiletics professors receive when incorporating DEI-related content into their teaching. The hypothesis was that the lived experiences of these professors would include positive and negative feedback, but that the negative feedback would be significant when received. As the literature suggests, DEI conversations are highly polarized, and even minority opinions in institutions can make their voices heard and affect outcomes. Similar to Schade’s research assessing the hesitancy of pastors to preach about justice issues, one could suppose homiletic professors may also experience hesitancy in how they teach diversity, equity, and inclusion in preaching classes.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the expectation was that while many professors would likely receive support, those who did not would receive significantly negative responses.

## **Homiletics professors reported experiences of systemic racism in theological education**

It is worth noting that when asked the degree to which they experienced or observed systemic racism at their institution, 7.55% report “a great deal,” 33.96% “a moderate amount,” and 37.74% report “a little.” In all, eight in ten respondents reported some degree of systemic racism at the institution where they teach. When invited to share one or two observations or experiences regarding systemic racism at their institution, the responses appeared to coalesce within three general categories: 1) administration and faculty, 2) classrooms and teaching practices, and 3) institutional heritage, milieu, and operations. Examining these categories and sample responses is worthwhile to understand better the institutions within which homiletics professors are enacting their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Administration and faculty**

Some of the most blatant examples of direct racism were observed in meetings of faculty or administration. One respondent wrote that they “frequently hear chairs, deans, and administrators of this university refer to my colleagues of color as ‘diversity hires’ behind closed doors—which is often code for ‘diverse, but less qualified.’” This respondent also noted that “microaggressions abound.” Another noted that on search committees they “sometimes hear the barely veiled assumption that if a candidate researches/teaches in the traditions of a specific non-white constituency (e.g., Asian-American theology or Black preaching), their work ‘might not be relevant’ for the rest of the school; this concern NEVER comes up for researcher/teachers who focus on white European traditions and thinkers.”

Other respondents reported insufficient attention and preparation for expanding their faculty’s diversity. As one noted, “Invitations are given to people of color to interview, but the

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<sup>21</sup> Leah D. Schade, *Preaching and Social Issues: Tools and Tactics for Empowering Your Prophetic Voice* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024).

committee and institution do not prepare themselves for these interviews or consider how institutional patterns of behavior may affect people of color during the interview process and as they are considering joining our institution and geographical setting.”

Faculty of color also experience systemic racism through their institution’s general lack of support. As one respondent shared, “While my program is focused on African American preaching, I have not always felt that the program was fully accepted in the life of the school. An example was a conference sponsored by our program, which was left to fundraise for itself instead of having full support of the institution.”

### **Classrooms and teaching practices**

A primary site of institutional racism in seminaries is the classroom and faculty teaching practices. An example would be a curriculum that centers on white European scholars. One respondent observed, “Many courses are still taught with a white canon.” Racist actions were also observed regarding individual professors. For example, one noted, “Some adjunct professors cross the line; students complain, and the dean deals with it.” Another observed, “Some older colleagues will not diversify their syllabi because they are unfamiliar with the work of non-white, non-male scholars. When pressed to become familiar with non-white, non-male scholarship, they generally fall back on excuses.”

This refusal to attend to DEI was reported by several respondents about colleagues in their institutions. For instance, one commented that “Despite several semesters of Latinx students suggesting in the evaluations of a course to expand the authors students read so that it reflects the experience of other racial, ethnic, and national minoritized people in the USA, the professor continued to teach the course the same.” Another noted that some professors often ignore Hispanic students in class.

However, AoH members also reported experiencing or observing racism from white students. For instance, one respondent wrote, “A white female student from the USA feels that her small group leader is discriminating against her for being the only white person in the group. The small group leader is a Black male from the USA who self-identifies as queer and uses ‘they’ pronouns. The student complains directly to the president, bypassing the process that requires her to present her complaint to the professor of the teaching team first.”

Other respondents reported less direct forms of systemic racism that manifest as general insensitivity, obliviousness, or lack of awareness. For example, one observed that “colleagues are generally unaware or inconsiderate of students from African American traditions/backgrounds in their courses.” Another noted that their colleagues are “unaware of racial reconciliation needs or issues. [They are] assuming inclusion without making it a real priority.”

Another example had to do with disconnects regarding language. One respondent shared, “The institution announces a Spanish master’s degree program. When students enroll, the institution requires them to take English classes, even though many do not speak, write, or understand English. The institution offers simultaneous interpretation to students who speak only Spanish. In the classroom, there are students whose first language is neither Spanish nor English who are not receiving the opportunity of simultaneous translation.”

### **Institutional heritage, milieu, and operations**

For some respondents, it was the institutional heritage of the school or its general milieu and operations that communicated systemic racism. For example, one noted that “the buildings and traditions proclaim that this is a white (male) institution.” Another observed that “pictures

hanging on the walls are 95% white people.” For yet another respondent, the worship service reified white Eurocentrism: “Our chapel worship comes almost exclusively from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, with an occasional hymn from *All Creation Sings*. The commitment to denominational distinctiveness significantly impedes inclusivity.”

For others, it is how the institution conducts its day-to-day business that exudes an air of white hegemony. “Administrative systems operate according to white male customs,” wrote one respondent, “which means deeply embedded expectations for things like communication style, origination, etc. People from different cultures who cannot match those styles are seen as less competent.” Another noted that the embeddedness of the institution within a racist community bled into the institution’s environment: “This institution is located in West Texas, so racism is a palpable aspect of the surrounding social context.”

Others observed the unfair and unequal treatment of students outside of the classroom. As one reported, “A white male student from the USA is allowed to take seconds during the meal after worship without any comments from the servers. A Black female student from Ghana is scolded for trying to take seconds during the same community meal.” In another instance, an undocumented student was refused their degree even after completing all requirements. Still another noted that they observed racism “in the ways the [Covid-19] pandemic impacted students of different racial backgrounds and the limits of the institution to accommodate those circumstances.”

Finally, systemic racism is also evident in the homogenous demographic makeup of the student body, faculty, and staff of some institutions. As one pointed out, “Whereas we have done much programming to counter racism, we have a fairly white faculty, staff, and administration and do not draw much diversity in our student body.” Another wrote that their student body is ninety percent white, and “the lack of diversity speaks volumes.” Another noted, “While the faculty is diverse, the staff is completely white, which creates a disconnect.” A third observed that “there are not many minority faculty members.” Even efforts to diversify faculty can fall short. As one noted, “We work hard to *hire* faculty of color; we fail at *retaining* them.”

These experiences of systemic racism illustrate the overall atmosphere, practices, and either direct or indirect hostility to DEI within the institutions in which homiletics professors teach.

### **Issues drive the amount of pushback**

Numeric trends from the quantitative data provided context for the insights extracted from the qualitative analysis. While most respondents reported minimal barriers, a significant number of respondents (nearly 20%) experienced moderate barriers, including: lack of interest among students (26.15%), lack of support from the institution (21.45%), lack of support among colleagues (18.46%), lack of resources (16.92%), and opposition among students (12.31%). However, the qualitative open-ended data provided insight into the quantitative survey data analysis, revealing that pushback tends to be determined by the discussed issue. One participant explained that the most pushback in their denomination is around LGBTQ+ issues and women’s ordination. Another participant noted that although they feel the need to address DEI components both in their syllabus and the classroom, a lack of knowledge makes this task difficult. Yet another wrote that the time and political climate have had the most impact, saying they got the most pushback on DEI-related material after the 2020 presidential election.

### **Responses, repercussions, backlash, and support**

When asked what negative responses the professors received from addressing DEI-related issues in the classroom, the most frequent responses were angry words, letters, student emails, student complaints to administration (department head, dean, etc.), and some students refusing to speak to the professor. While a relatively small sample received negative feedback in this manner, qualitative data provided additional insight. Two responses noted that students take passive approaches to combating DEI inclusion, including written responses that only the professor reads or providing negative feedback in course evaluations. Some noted that what one professor called “the extreme right-wing” often pushes back, noting the polarities in the American political system. One indicated that negative feedback may come from “one student out of dozens.”

When asked what repercussions professors faced for using DEI-related content, most respondents (90.77%) reported receiving none of the options in the question. However, as with other questions, those who received backlash gave insight into anti-DEI sentiment. Less than 5% (4.62%) of faculty reported that their administration asked them to stop DEI-related content. At the same time, one participant indicated they were denied tenure or promotion due to it, and one reported they voluntarily left their appointment. Eight respondents (12.31%) reported that they experienced other repercussions, including receiving subtle comments from colleagues demeaning their work and warnings from deans and other officials. One respondent wrote that their tenure review letter included a warning to tone down DEI-related topics. These concerns highlight the importance of fostering open dialogue and providing resources and support to faculty members committed to integrating DEI principles into their teaching.

Thus far, we have examined the backlash and negative responses to faculty integration of DEI, but where do homiletics professors receive support in addressing DEI? Just under half (49.2%) reported receiving significant support from their teaching colleagues and administrators, including deans and department chairs. Meanwhile, 44.52% noted they received considerable support from their Academy of Homiletics peers. Other sources of support respondents reported were denominational bodies (56%), students (50.77%), administrators (24.62%), and public acclamation or support on social media (7.69%).

The qualitative data also shows a desire to address DEI issues; however, many report a lack of knowledge or training available. One white, heterosexual female at a historically white seminary fears inadequacy in addressing DEI issues, stating, “I have anxiety about not addressing issues of race competently; I am hesitant sometimes simply because I do not want to misstep and do inadvertent harm.” Unavailable resources exacerbate the challenges professors face when integrating DEI into their curriculum. Thus, institutions should prioritize increasing the available training and support, especially because faculty can feel unequipped to teach DEI topics.<sup>22</sup> The findings further suggest the need for collaboration among professors, students, and leadership, developing a mutual understanding of the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in theological education settings.

## Implications

The experiences of AoH members offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of DEI implementation in theological education. The integrated findings for professors’ experiences with DEI illuminated that most respondents experience strong support

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<sup>22</sup> Nicole A. Hollins, Cody Morris, and Anita Li, “Integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Readings within Coursework: Suggestions for Instructors Teaching Behavior Analysis,” *Behavior Analysis in Practice* 16, no. 2 (2023): 629–37, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-023-00781-5>.

from colleagues, administrators, denominational bodies, or their peers in the AoH. The number and overall percentage of those who received negative feedback were minimal; however, when there was pushback, it came in a range of subtle, indirect, blatant, and severe forms.

The most extreme experiences included denial of tenure, risk of not being granted tenure, or admonishment from the dean or other supervisors, with one respondent reporting that they left academia because of DEI pushback. These examples of systemic and institutional reprisals are in line with our findings that a significant majority of respondents report systemic racism at their institution.

While this study shows that many faculty support integrating DEI into their course content, others reported that they do not feel equipped to navigate such topics in the classroom. This discomfort is consistent with the literature, with barriers to DEI including faculty members feeling unprepared or overwhelmed when broaching complex issues in class. Nevertheless, homileticians and academics must not become complacent in their efforts. Instead, support and mentorship are needed. By creating a safe space for discussion and facilitating open dialogue, instructors empower students to explore diverse perspectives, challenge assumptions, and develop a greater understanding of social justice issues. To address this challenge, institutions can invest in faculty development programs that offer training and resources on inclusive teaching strategies, culturally responsive pedagogy, and methods for facilitating difficult conversations in the classroom. By including all stakeholders, the institution shows that it prioritizes students' needs and supports their success.<sup>23</sup>

It is also essential for institutions to acknowledge that DEI is not a one-size-fits-all approach and that strategies must be tailored to each specific need and context.<sup>24</sup> By doing so, these institutions can ensure that their faculty are supported in their DEI efforts and that their students are well-equipped to lead with compassion, integrity, and a deep commitment to justice in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.<sup>25</sup> The reality of an ever-changing political and societal landscape requires theological institutions to remain resolved to enact and evaluate their DEI commitments. Professors need support integrating DEI principles, moving beyond simple policy mandates to encompass professional development opportunities, curriculum design assistance, and sustained mentorship programs.<sup>26</sup> These efforts ensure that DEI is not merely a consideration but that professors feel supported as they incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their preaching courses.<sup>27</sup>

Incorporating diverse and inclusive perspectives in a course involves intentionally seeking opportunities to learn from those who give voice to underrepresented perspectives.<sup>28</sup> In theology, this can consist of inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and insights or assigning readings from scholars representing marginalized

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<sup>23</sup> J. Sunds, S. Rohrbach, and A. Drais-Parrillo, "What Do Students Perceive from the Syllabus? The Importance of Syllabi to Communicate Belonging and Promote Engagement," *International Journal on Studies in Education* 5, no. 4 (2023): 568, <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonse.174>.

<sup>24</sup> Victor, et al, "Strategies for Teaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Principles of Nursing."

<sup>25</sup> Nadia Ali Muhammad Ali Charania and Rushika Patel, "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Education: Strategies and Processes to Support Inclusive Teaching," *Journal of Professional Nursing* 42 (2022): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2022.05.013>; Martinez and Favero; William T. L. Cox, "Developing Scientifically Validated Bias and Diversity Trainings That Work: Empowering Agents of Change to Reduce Bias, Create Inclusion, and Promote Equity," *Management Decision* 61, no. 4 (2022): 1038–56, <https://doi.org/10.1108/md-06-2021-0839>.

<sup>26</sup> Victor, et al, "Strategies for Teaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Principles of Nursing."

<sup>27</sup> Evans and Knepper, "Building Inclusive PA Classrooms."

<sup>28</sup> Chamany, et al.

communities. Continuous evaluation of existing DEI initiatives will be essential, accompanied by adaptability and innovation based on feedback and emerging best practices. Strategies to increase exposure to DEI in classrooms include opportunities for students to assess their values and biases, encourage open dialogue, and weave diverse voices and other perspectives into the curriculum.<sup>29</sup> These strategies could help neutralize the misconception that DEI is political or partisan and, in turn, support clergy as they teach the importance of DEI in a congregational setting.

Additional research after the impact of the 2024 election and subsequent presidency could help identify and further assess the lived experiences of professors engaging in DEI integration in their courses and how their commitments shift or become contested.

### Strengths and Limitations

Combining quantitative and qualitative data provided a deeper and more comprehensive understanding than either data acquisition alone. The cross-validation of multiple methods strengthened the researcher's conclusions, providing context and explanation for the quantitative results. Researchers sought to increase the diversity of this sample; however, the lack of racial diversity among the respondents is one limitation. However, the sample is representative of the membership of the Academy of Homiletics.

Further, the AoH study finished before the 2024 election, and even in the first nine months of the current administration, the higher education landscape regarding DEI has changed drastically. On January 23, 2025, the current presidential administration passed executive orders limiting DEI, including using DEI terms in universities, even threatening to withdraw federal money from institutions that do not comply.<sup>30</sup> The researchers anticipate that a shifting political environment will influence future iterations of this survey. The ongoing political dynamics will likely shape the experiences of homiletics professors integrating DEI for years to come by potentially impacting how faculty perceive and implement DEI principles, thus altering their pedagogical approaches to teaching and curriculum development.

In fact, the speed at which the administration has enacted policies and practices hostile to diversity, equity, and inclusion in academia and the field of science may pose a challenge for assessment in future studies.<sup>31</sup> Studying the effects of the administration's destabilization of longstanding norms, practices, and trust in science and education during this period of confusion and chaos may be nearly impossible. It is only after the upheaval has run its course and the dust has settled that we can truly evaluate the damage and discern what is needed for recovery and renewal in higher education and theological studies.

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<sup>29</sup> Victor, et al, "Strategies for Teaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Principles of Nursing."

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Takes Action to Eliminate DEI," news release, January 23, 2025, <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-takes-action-eliminate-dei>, accessed Sept. 30, 2025.

<sup>31</sup> See: Juliana Kim, "Over 50 universities are under investigation as part of Trump's anti-DEI crackdown," NPR, Louisville, March 14, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/14/g-s1-53831/dei-universities-education-department-investigation>, accessed Sept. 30, 2025; Patrick Jack, "Trump's anti-DEI agenda 'already having grave impact,'" <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/trumps-anti-dei-agenda-already-having-grave-impact>, Aug. 4, 2025, accessed Sept. 30, 2025; Jeffrey Mervis, "NSF Held Captive: Trump directives have undermined a 75-year history of independence and threaten agency's vaunted track record for excellence," *Science*, Sept. 19, 2025, <https://www.science.org/content/article/under-trump-nsf-faces-worst-crisis-its-75-year-history>, accessed Sept. 30, 2025.

## Conclusion

Incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into theological and homiletical studies curricula introduces the possibility of contested commitments for professors navigating the intersection of academic rigor, theological tradition, and current social justice imperatives. The study's focus on homiletics classes is particularly relevant, as preaching plays a central role in shaping religious discourse and influencing congregational attitudes.<sup>32</sup> Teaching DEI in coursework influences how students will preach and minister in congregations. Understanding the contested commitments of homiletic professors is crucial for theological schools seeking to cultivate inclusive learning environments and equip theological students with the skills to integrate DEI in their preaching and ministry.

The AoH members' experiences reveal the tensions between traditional white, Eurocentric theological frameworks and contemporary DEI values, highlighting the need for innovative pedagogical approaches that bridge these divides. Contested commitments to teaching DEI accurately match a politically divided world, which can create a politically divided classroom or church. Homiletics professors have the critical task of preparing the next generation of preachers to find their voice and proclaim prophetic messages that are often ignored or received with hostility.

Cultivating inclusive learning environments requires a collaborative and participatory approach that extends beyond top-down leadership.<sup>33</sup> This could begin with support for professors integrating classroom dialogue around complex topics that preachers may encounter in their congregation and pulpit, including diversity, equity, and inclusion. Professors need education or training in integrating DEI principles to feel confident in pedagogical implementation. The study established a baseline for experiences of integrating DEI into preaching courses. Future research is needed, particularly as political and societal opposition to DEI initiatives intensifies across North America following the 2024 election. As the political divide increases and intensifies, commitment to creating more support networks to champion DEI efforts in teaching and preaching will be more needed than ever.

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<sup>32</sup> John Willis Ward, Amanda Wilson Harper, and Leah D. Schade, "Preaching on LGBTQ+ Topics and Threats of Violence: An Exploration of Associations," *Pastoral Psychology* 74, no. 2 (2025): 199–218, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-025-01209-3>.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin D. Gilliam et al., "Embedded Inclusive Excellence at a Southern Metropolitan Public University," *Metropolitan Universities* 33, no. 2 (2022): 32–49, <https://doi.org/10.18060/25530>.

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## Expanding Homiletic Pedagogy Beyond Colorblindness

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**Abstract:** *Homiletic pedagogy in North America has recently sought to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), yet such initiatives remain entangled in colorblind frameworks that sustain Whiteness as the unmarked norm. While efforts to dismantle Whiteness have amplified Black preaching traditions, the pervasive adoption of race-neutral approaches often reinforces a narrow Black-White binary, continuing to marginalize other racialized voices, including those of Asian, Indigenous, Latine, and Middle Eastern communities. Drawing on colorblindness as a structuring vision rather than a personal attitude, this paper analyzes the 2022 and 2023 syllabus analysis reports from the Academy of Homiletics DEI Survey to reveal how faculty demographics, curricular frameworks, and evaluative practices maintain Whiteness within preaching education. Tracing how even sincere DEI initiatives may default to additive gestures and limited racial frameworks, the paper proposes theological and practical strategies for moving beyond colorblind neutrality, including naming colorblindness explicitly, reframing evaluation, and centering intersectional and global scholarship. In an era of intensified opposition to DEI, this paper reclaims homiletic pedagogy as a site for social responsibility and theological reimagination, arguing that moving beyond colorblind frameworks is essential for forming preachers who can address the layered injustices shaping congregations and the world.*

### The Myth of Neutrality in Homiletic Pedagogy

Preaching is never a neutral act. It is shaped by context, community, and the commitments of those who proclaim, and it can both reveal and conceal structures of power.<sup>1</sup> Yet in many pulpits and preaching classrooms, the practice of proclamation continues under the myth of neutrality, shaped by assumptions of universality and impartiality.<sup>2</sup> These assumptions obscure how preaching and theological education are entangled with histories of racial exclusion and cultural dominance, particularly within North American contexts. When homiletics fails to see these realities, it risks perpetuating structures that marginalize voices and experiences outside dominant frameworks.

The history of Black preaching traditions also highlights the limitations of claiming neutrality in preaching. Although Black preaching “first came into its most visible expression in the post-Civil War period,”<sup>3</sup> these traditions were long excluded from White theological discourse and only began to receive systematic engagement within homiletic pedagogy in the

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<sup>1</sup> Kim-Cragg notes, “Preaching language is never neutral. It discloses and masks power,” and argues that “seeking neutrality and objectivity masks the white Eurocentric hegemonic normativity at work.” HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (Lexington Books, 2021), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Travis observes that “modern assumptions about the universality of thought and perspective have led to a belief that the preacher could speak confidently for others, that one voice from the pulpit could address the needs and perspectives of everyone, everywhere. Preachers addressing a contemporary postcolonial context must contend with multiple perspectives and recognize they cannot speak for all.” Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space*, Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series (Cascade Books, 2014), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Cleophus James LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, PDF (Westminster John Knox, 2000), 42.

late twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> In recent decades, many seminaries and homiletics scholars have taken meaningful steps toward integrating antiracist perspectives and practices into preaching education, reflected in a growing awareness of the need to address the interconnections between dominant preaching practices and White colonial systems of race.<sup>5</sup> This expanding awareness within the field has challenged assumptions of neutrality and has prompted deeper reflection on the histories and power dynamics that shape preaching formation.

Despite these advances, persistent challenges remain. Many classrooms and curricula across disciplines, including theological education, continue to operate within colorblind frameworks that claim to transcend race while ignoring how systemic racism and Whiteness are embedded in their structures and assumptions.<sup>6</sup> In preaching education, this can manifest as race-neutral syllabi and claims of universality that fail to engage the lived experiences of racialized communities or to address the inequities present within preaching contexts. These challenges are further intensified in the current climate of political and societal backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives across North America. Higher education, including theological institutions, is not exempt from these pressures. In many universities and religious institutes, efforts to promote diversity are being restricted or dismantled,<sup>7</sup> further marginalizing voices that have historically been excluded from preaching classrooms and pulpits. While significant strides have been made in the past few decades towards dismantling Whiteness within homiletic pedagogy, particularly through the amplification of Black preaching traditions, these efforts often remain situated within a Black-White binary. This necessary yet narrow focus can inadvertently overshadow the complex realities of racialization experienced by other communities, including Asian, Indigenous, Latine, Middle Eastern, and other racialized groups, whose perspectives continue to be peripheral in many preaching classrooms and in society at large.

If forming leaders committed to justice and global consciousness is part of the mission of preaching education, then it must move beyond colorblind frameworks. This article takes up this challenge by examining how colorblindness persists within homiletic pedagogy even as the field articulates commitments to diversity, equity, and anti-racism. Drawing on findings from the 2022 and 2023 syllabus analysis reports from the *Academy of Homiletics Survey: Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* (collectively referred to here as the AoH DEI

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<sup>4</sup> “It was not until the work of Henry H. Mitchell in the latter part of the twentieth century that the academic field of homiletics paid much attention to black preaching,” Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*, PDF (Abingdon Press, 2016), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics* (Lexington Books, 2022), 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> “Colorblindness...constitutes a core orientation and presumption in most academic disciplines, shaping research methodologies and channeling resources in a way that marginalizes and sometimes entirely precludes critical work on race-related topics.” Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw et al., eds., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (University of California Press, 2019), xiv.

<sup>7</sup> See Brandon Van Dyck, “DEI in Retreat?,” *Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute* (blog), May 18, 2025, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2025/05/97936/>. See also U.S. Department of Education, “U.S. Department of Education Takes Action to Eliminate DEI,” January 23, 2025, <http://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-takes-action-eliminate-dei>; Insight Into Academia, “Higher Ed in Turmoil: DEI Rollbacks and Federal Scrutiny Intensify,” March 28, 2025, <https://insightintoacademia.com/higher-ed-in-turmoil-dei-rollbacks-and-federal-scrutiny-intensify/>; and Collin Binkley, “DEI Rollbacks Hit Campus Support Systems for Students of Color,” *The Associated Press News*, April 22, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/dei-diversity-equity-inclusion-college-bbe09c081d8a47fcb5616c8fa3b23cee>.

Reports),<sup>8</sup> these studies analyze how faculty representation, syllabi construction, and course content continue to reflect exclusionary structures beneath surface-level commitments to diversity. The analysis in this article argues for a deliberate expansion of homiletic curricula by incorporating global and justice-oriented perspectives that move beyond prevailing Western and Black-White paradigms. To advance this conversation, I will first define and contextualize colorblindness within homiletic pedagogy, grounding the discussion in critical race theory and homiletic scholarship. I will then interpret the Reports' syllabi data in light of colorblind perspectives to demonstrate how structural barriers continue to shape preaching education. Finally, I will propose practical pathways for expanding homiletic pedagogy toward globally conscious, justice-centered practices that equip preachers to engage the complexities of the communities they serve.

### Colorblindness: A Structural Barrier in Homiletic Pedagogy

Colorblindness, in its literal sense, is a condition with many variations. Medically termed color vision deficiency (CVD),<sup>9</sup> it includes red-green colorblindness (the most common), blue-yellow colorblindness, the rare total colorblindness (monochromacy or achromatopsia), in which individuals perceive only shades of gray and variations in light intensity, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Each type involves specific physiological limitations in the cones of the eye, affecting the capacity to differentiate wavelengths of light.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, colorblindness as a racial ideology claims to “not see color,” but what it actually fails to perceive are different types of structures, histories, and lived experiences that define racial realities within a society. Unlike the physiological deficiency in cone function, which irreversibly limits the range of visible color and is an aspect of human biological diversity, racial colorblindness is a chosen and changeable stance that constrains the moral and epistemological vision necessary to perceive systemic racism.<sup>12</sup> It produces a truncated perception of social reality, one that, in North America, tends to hover narrowly around a White-centered or Black-White binary,<sup>13</sup> which risks erasing the complexity of racialization

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<sup>8</sup> Links to the survey data and their presentations can be found in the introductory essay for the issue, “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics.” The two reports are also available on the “AOH & DEI” webpage of the Academy of Homiletics and are titled *2023 Presentation: “Syllabus Analysis Report”* (PDF) and *2022 Presentation: “Assessing DEI in the AOH, 2022”* (PDF of PPT presentation), respectively. In both documents, the full title of the syllabus analysis reports appears as *Academy of Homiletics Survey: Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*. Academy of Homiletics, “AOH & DEI,” accessed July 11, 2025, <https://www.homiletics.org/aoi-dei/>.

<sup>9</sup> National Eye Institute, “Color Blindness,” December 10, 2024, <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/color-blindness>.

<sup>10</sup> National Eye Institute, “Types of Color Vision Deficiency,” August 7, 2023, <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/color-blindness/types-color-vision-deficiency>.

<sup>11</sup> For example, those with deuteranomaly have reduced sensitivity to green light, while those with protanopia cannot perceive red light accurately, resulting in a narrowed perception of the world's full color spectrum. Shiva Ram Male et al., “Color Vision Devices for Color Vision Deficiency Patients: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Health Science Reports* 5, no. 5 (2022): e842, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hsr2.842>.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion on systemic racism, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 6th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 4–36.

<sup>13</sup> “...in its largely domestic focus on the history of U.S. constitutional law and Black-White race relations, the field of critical race studies has not adequately explored new demographic trends among Asian Americans and other immigrants of color...They are generally absent from analyses of race and racism.” David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Duke University Press, 2019), 6.

experienced by Indigenous, Asian, Latine, and other racialized communities. Such a narrowing, ironically, is itself a form of colorblindness—a refusal or inability to perceive the full spectrum of racial realities under the guise of neutrality.

In theological education, colorblindness, at first glance, may appear benign or even virtuous by promising that the preaching classroom can transcend racial divides to focus solely on proclaiming a universal good news to the world. It is frequently misunderstood as a personal belief or an institutional policy that fairness requires treating everyone exactly the same by ignoring racial differences.<sup>14</sup> However, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva warns, colorblindness functions as “racism without racists,” meaning that it operates through frames that deny the significance of race while maintaining systemic racial hierarchies.<sup>15</sup> The result is a theological and homiletical pedagogy that claims impartiality but subtly preserves the dominance of Whiteness in how preaching is taught and evaluated. Willie James Jennings underscores that theological education in North America “exists within the long history of colonial convening.”<sup>16</sup> It has established practices of “speaking to and for the rest of the world” and has imagined the entire world as its student.<sup>17</sup> Through imperial languages and rituals of evaluation, it has exported its frameworks globally.<sup>18</sup> This embedded colonial imagination aligns with what Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and her colleagues describe as “colorblind frameworks” that dictate what counts as legitimate knowledge across disciplines and determine whose scholarship and perspectives are centered and whose are marginalized.<sup>19</sup> Barbara Tomlinson further notes that disciplines formed during eras of conquest and colonization remain “saturated with racist presumptions and assumptions,” implanting hierarchies such as “rich over poor, white over nonwhite” into the so-called “objective” scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Within this broader ecosystem, homiletics is not exempt from these dynamics.

Recent homiletic scholarship has begun to confront these frameworks directly.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Carolyn Helsel insists that “*all* faith leaders” must address racism openly from the pulpit and argues that silence will not dismantle racism within congregations or society.<sup>22</sup> Rather, sermons that address racism can “attend to the suffering of one another,”<sup>23</sup> fostering communities committed to justice and healing. Similarly, in *Unmasking White Preaching*, Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer expose how the silence around Whiteness in preaching has

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<sup>14</sup> For example, France legally prohibits the collection of official race-related data, aiming to promote a colorblind ideal where all citizens are treated equally as French. But this has created challenges in addressing discrimination, as the lack of racial data makes it difficult to enforce antidiscrimination laws or measure the progress of citizens of color. David B. Oppenheimer, “Why France Needs to Collect Data on Racial Identity—In a French Way,” *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 31, no. 2 (2008), and Angelique Chrisafis, “French Plan to Break Taboo on Ethnic Data Causes Uproar,” *Guardian*, March 23, 2009, quoted in Jean O’Malley Halley, Amy Eshleman, and Ramya Mahadevan Vijaya, *Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race*, PDF (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 77.

<sup>15</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 1–4.

<sup>16</sup> Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, Theological Education Between the Times (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 125.

<sup>17</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 125–6.

<sup>18</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 126.

<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw et al., eds., *Seeing Race Again*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Tomlinson, “Powerblind Intersectionality: Feminist Revanchism and Inclusion as a One-Way Street,” in *Seeing Race Again*, ed. Crenshaw et al., 176.

<sup>21</sup> For a list of monographs in recent years by scholars constructing explicitly racially informed homiletics, see Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching*, 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn B. Helsel, *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders* (Chalice Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Helsel, *Preaching about Racism*, 2.

rendered it “ubiquitous to the point that it is normalized as ‘preaching’ (without an adjective),”<sup>24</sup> which then becomes the unmarked standard against which all other forms of preaching are measured.<sup>25</sup> They contend that dismantling this dominance requires explicitly naming Whiteness within preaching education and constraining its influence within the classroom and pulpit.<sup>26</sup> However, despite these critical interventions, homiletic pedagogy often lacks a sustained examination of how colorblind frameworks continue to uphold Whiteness as the normative standard within preaching. As Richard Voelz indicates, preaching pedagogy “functions as a technology of Whiteness by shaping the habits and values of those who preach.”<sup>27</sup> This dynamic is visible in the demographic makeup of faculty, which remains predominantly White, and in reading lists that center Euro-American voices as well as treat other perspectives as *supplemental* rather than foundational. In this way, homiletics “reproduces the colorblind framework” that narrows its moral imagination and its capacity to engage the diverse, racialized realities present in congregations.<sup>28</sup>

While scholars have proposed alternative theories of racial formation to reflect the complex multiracial realities of North America,<sup>29</sup> the reliance on a Black-White binary remains persistent within theological and homiletic discourse. As Courtney T. Goto observes, many in theological education continue to frame race primarily in Black-White terms, a pattern that ignores the experiences of people who are neither Black nor White and restricts the theological imagination needed to engage diverse realities.<sup>30</sup> Although this binary can inspire solidarity and empathy around the injustices faced by Black communities, it also has significant undersides, including the tendency to obscure the complexity and diversity of racial experiences both across communities and within African American communities themselves.<sup>31</sup> By treating racialized people as monolithic, such colorblindness risks flattening the intersections of race with class, gender, sexuality, and cultural differences, thereby misrepresenting the lived realities of racism and restricting the theological imagination of theological classrooms.<sup>32</sup> In homiletical scholarship, while significant efforts have been made by centering Black preaching traditions in recent decades,<sup>33</sup> a persistent reliance on a Black-White framework can inadvertently erase the

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<sup>24</sup> Here, “without an adjective” means that preaching shaped by Whiteness is treated as the neutral, default standard requiring no qualifier, while racially and culturally specific forms (e.g., Black preaching, Asian American preaching) are labeled with adjectives, marking them as particular or other. Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Richard W. Voelz, “Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletic Pedagogy: A Reflection on Teaching ‘Proclaiming Justice in the Church and Public Square,’” in *Unmasking White Preaching*, edited by Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Crenshaw et al., eds., *Seeing Race Again*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Claire Jean Kim, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), who theorizes *racial triangulation* to explain how Asian Americans are positioned relationally in a racial hierarchy structured by Whiteness and Blackness. See also Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, who discusses the “Latin Americanization of race” and the emergence of a *tri-racial system* in the U.S.; George Yancey, *Who Is White?: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), who argues that structural and identity-based assimilation patterns contribute to a Black/nonblack divide in the United States; and Courtney T. Goto, “Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations: A Next Step in Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 112, no. 1 (2017): 40–43.

<sup>30</sup> Goto, “Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations,” 33–35.

<sup>31</sup> Goto, “Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations,” 39.

<sup>32</sup> Goto, “Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations,” 39.

<sup>33</sup> See n.4.

distinct racialization and grief experienced by Indigenous, Asian, Latine, and other racial communities. Such dynamics mirror what occurs within homiletics: a pedagogy that claims neutrality yet misses critical “colors” on the spectrum of racialized experiences. This represents a pedagogy functioning like colorblindness, insisting that its limited perception is “neutral” while missing other critical colors on the spectrum of racialized experiences. If homiletics seeks to equip preachers for ministries of justice in diverse and global contexts, it must first acknowledge and challenge these limitations in its own vision, to embrace a wider, more nuanced vision of race and racism in its pedagogy and practice.

In the following section, I will analyze data from the AoH DEI Reports to demonstrate how colorblind frameworks function as structural barriers within homiletic education, even amid institutional commitments to diversity and anti-racism. This analysis will reveal how the field’s reliance on assumed neutrality and the prevailing Western and Black-White paradigms narrow the moral and theological imagination of preaching classrooms. By identifying both the progress made and the limitations that persist, this examination underscores the need for homiletic pedagogy to move beyond these constrained frameworks toward a more expansive and justice-oriented engagement with race and racialization.

### **Analyzing the 2022-2023 AoH DEI Syllabus Reports Through the Lens of Colorblindness**

Since 2019, the Academy of Homiletics (AoH) has undertaken a multi-year effort to assess how DEI commitments reshape homiletic pedagogy and scholarship,<sup>34</sup> supported by a Wabash Center grant in 2022.<sup>35</sup> Building upon the DEI Survey, the AoH DEI Reports provide a concrete window into how rhetorical commitments to DEI either translate into syllabi or fail to do so. These syllabi are the first pedagogical artifacts students encounter. Using a structured coding system, the project examined 179 syllabi (79 from 2016–18 and 97 from 2019–22) submitted by AOH members,<sup>36</sup> evaluating DEI keywords, diversity in course texts, explicit classroom DEI language, and the inclusion of non-textual materials reflecting diverse perspectives. As a member of the research team analyzing these findings, I approach the Reports through the lens of colorblindness developed in the previous section to examine how Whiteness remains structurally embedded within faculty and institutional representation, syllabi and curricular content, and a Black-White binary-focused framework, even amid genuine DEI advancements. This analysis highlights the need for a deliberate expansion of homiletic pedagogy beyond prevailing Western and Black-White paradigms so that preaching education may move beyond these constraints, pursue justice more fully, and better prepare preachers for ministries within diverse and global contexts.

### *Substantial Advances in DEI Attention*

Despite the persistence of structural Whiteness within homiletic pedagogy, the Reports reveal measurable progress in how members prioritize DEI within homiletic pedagogy since 2019. Weighted averages for DEI prioritization in teaching increased from 2.02 pre-2019 to 2.23

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<sup>34</sup> As noted in n.8, the two reports from this project are available on the “AOH & DEI” webpage of the Academy of Homiletics.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that both the AoH and the Wabash Center are situated in the United States, leading to most survey participants being U.S.-based scholars. While this context helps explain the U.S.-centered nature of the responses, it does not excuse the narrow focus on primarily American perspectives, with little attention to Canada or contexts beyond North America.

<sup>36</sup> Leah D. Schade and Richard W. Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey: Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” December 2023, 8.

post-2019 among non-attendees (a rise of 0.21), and from 2.39 to 2.80 among attendees of DEI-focused meetings and town halls (a rise of 0.41), indicating a stronger correlation between participation in DEI-focused events and pedagogical shifts.<sup>37</sup> This trend demonstrates that more homiletics instructors now prioritize DEI within their courses, with those who engaged actively in AoH DEI initiatives reflecting a deeper commitment. Likewise, the 2023 Report notes a 26.2% average increase in syllabi that address DEI through required, assigned, and recommended readings, non-textual resources, and bibliographies, outpacing the 16.8% increase reported in survey responses.<sup>38</sup> These data suggest a genuine, though incremental, widening of what is named and valued within course materials and learning objectives.

Through the lens of colorblindness, these improvements signal meaningful progress in unsettling the silent normativity of Whiteness within homiletic pedagogy. The rise in DEI prioritization in teaching indicates that communal commitments and deliberate engagements are shifting pedagogical attention beyond implicit Whiteness as the unmarked norm. These developments show a gradual shift in homiletic pedagogy toward recognizing race and systemic injustice, challenging the assumption that preaching education can remain neutral or universal without addressing the particularities of racialized realities. The deliberate inclusion of authors of color, justice-centered frameworks, and DEI-focused assignments reflects a conscious effort by many homiletics instructors to name racial and systemic inequities. This recalibration of homiletic spaces demonstrates a growing attentiveness to diverse embodied experiences. Though still in progress, these advancements reveal that homiletic pedagogy can move beyond silent complicity with Whiteness and orient itself toward a more justice-focused horizon when communities pursue DEI commitments with clear intention and accountability. Yet these signs of progress must be held alongside an honest assessment of persistent challenges.

### *Persistent Limitations Under Colorblindness*

Although the Reports reveal measurable improvements in DEI prioritization, a closer analysis through the lens of colorblindness uncovers how Whiteness remains structurally embedded within syllabi, faculty representation, and curricular frameworks in preaching education.

### *Faculty Demographics: A White Norm Remains*

Faculty demographics within AoH institutions continue to reflect Whiteness as the normative center of theological authority in preaching education, quietly reinforcing systemic racism beneath the language of DEI. According to the 2022 Report, 83% of the institutions where AoH members teach are historically White,<sup>39</sup> in which 95% of faculty use English as their primary language.<sup>40</sup> This institutional homogeneity signals which voices are assumed authoritative within preaching classrooms, rendering racial representation as secondary to “expertise” defined by Whiteness. The 2023 Syllabi Report further confirms this pattern: 67% of instructors identified as White, with only 23% identifying as Black or African, 7% as Asian, and just 1% each as Hispanic/Latine, Multiracial, or Native Hawaiian, while no respondents

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<sup>37</sup> Leah D. Schade and Richard W. Voelz, “2022 Academy of Homiletics Survey: Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” December 2022, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 34.

<sup>39</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2022 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 21.

<sup>40</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2022 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 9.

identified as Native American, Middle Eastern, or Indigenous.<sup>41</sup> This stark racial imbalance persists even as many institutions profess DEI commitments, which illustrates how colorblind frameworks function by centering White theological authority as well as treating racial diversity as optional. This pattern demonstrates how Whiteness continues to structure who is seen as credible to teach and shape the preaching classroom. DEI commitments, in this context, operate as rhetoric that preserves the systemic racial status quo in homiletic pedagogy.

Furthermore, perceptions of racism within these institutions differ along racial lines. Over 50% of White respondents reported observing or experiencing only “a little” systemic racism within their institutions, while around 48% of racialized respondents reported experiencing “a moderate amount.”<sup>42</sup> This gap reveals how White faculty, shielded by institutional and societal Whiteness, often do not perceive the presence of racism that profoundly structures their institutions, reinforcing colorblind narratives that minimize racial inequity as an occasional interpersonal issue rather than a systemic reality.

### *Curricula and Syllabi: Euro-American Frameworks Dominate*

Curricular frameworks in homiletic education continue to uphold Euro-American perspectives as the unquestioned ground of theological knowledge, marginalizing other voices even under the banner of DEI. The 2023 Report shows that 83% of syllabi included at least one DEI-related keyword, and DEI-related readings rose by 26.2% post-2019.<sup>43</sup> However, required texts remained predominantly authored by White scholars (53%), with Black/African American authors at 33%, Asian authors at 7%, Latine authors at 4%, and none from Native American scholars.<sup>44</sup>

Although non-textual DEI resources, such as videos of preachers of color, appeared in 36% of syllabi (up from 18%), instructors frequently relied on these non-textual resources for diversity in the classroom without assigning readings or engaging theological scholarship from authors of color. Primary texts by authors of color appeared in only 24% of syllabi, and when present, 64% of these engagements remained confined to non-textual materials.<sup>45</sup>

These figures reveal a structural pattern in which syllabi gesture toward diversity through selective, surface-level inclusions by preserving Euro-American frameworks as the normative core of theological knowledge. During my review of syllabi, I encountered many courses that claimed to teach preaching contextually for diverse and particular faith communities but consistently assigned Euro-American authors, case studies, and sermon examples reflecting the instructors’ own social locations, regardless of the racial diversity present in their classrooms. Racialized authors and perspectives rarely appeared, and when included, they were treated as supplementary or illustrative rather than as authoritative theological voices. This signals a form of curricular tokenism that keeps Whiteness at the center. Such selective inclusion under the guise of DEI reveals how colorblind frameworks operate within preaching education: diversity is permitted only if it leaves intact the Euro-American paradigms that define theological credibility. By treating diversity as an *add-on* rather than a call for structural transformation, colorblindness enables institutions to claim progress while protecting the epistemological assumptions that

<sup>41</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 12.

<sup>42</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2022 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 22.

<sup>43</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 23, 34.

<sup>44</sup> The report uses “Native American” in its categorization, but I recognize that “Indigenous” may be the preferred terminology in other contexts. Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 22.

<sup>45</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 30–31.

continue to privilege Whiteness within homiletic pedagogy. One obvious example appears in syllabi that confined DEI elements to institutional statements tucked in appendices or policy sections,<sup>46</sup> framing DEI as a procedural obligation or checkbox rather than a theological mandate integral to shaping the classroom and pulpit. This practice maintains Euro-American paradigms as normative, and thus, risks preserving systemic inequities under the appearance of incremental DEI progress. Without reimagining theological authority beyond Whiteness and recognizing global and racially diverse scholarship as integral rather than peripheral, DEI initiatives remain hollow gestures and create the illusion of inclusivity without dismantling the deeper structures that determine who and what holds value in preaching education.

*Racial Focus Narrowed: The Black-White Binary as a Default Lens*

Efforts to advance DEI within homiletic pedagogy have produced significant gains, particularly in addressing anti-Black racism. However, these gains often remain situated within a Black-White binary that constrains the racial imagination necessary for deeper structural transformation. The 2023 Report shows that keywords such as “Black” (included in 50% of syllabi, +19%), “African American” (44%, +15%), and “justice/injustice” (57%, +19%) saw notable increases post-2019,<sup>47</sup> reflecting a genuine and commendable commitment to confronting anti-Black racism within preaching classrooms. This work is critical and necessary, particularly in dismantling the silence around anti-Blackness that has historically shaped homiletics.

However, the same report shows that keywords such as “Asian/Asian American” (20%), “Hispanic/Latine” (14%), “Indigenous/Native American” (8%), and “colonialism/decolonial/postcolonialism” (13%) remain underrepresented, which appear in less than a quarter of syllabi despite ongoing DEI initiatives.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, key terms such as “anti-racism” (12%), “White/Whiteness” (19%), “intersections/intersectionality” (10%), “Eurocentric” (1%), “Global South” (1%), “Pacific Islander” (0%) and “English as a second language” (3%) receive minimal attention, even though many preaching classrooms include students who bring these realities into their learning contexts. These patterns suggest a tendency to equate racial justice work with addressing anti-Black racism while leaving other forms of racialization, migration, and colonial histories unaddressed. They also indicate a lack of attention to the intersectional nature of oppression across racial, cultural, gendered, economic, and other interconnected lines within homiletic curricula. In my review of syllabi, for example, I observed courses on justice preaching that effectively incorporated prominent African American sermons but did not include any non-Black-and-White materials that address issues such as Indigenous sovereignty, Asian diasporic Christian experiences, and Latine migrant justice. This approach risks framing racial justice as complete once the Black-White binary is engaged and limits the pedagogical depth needed to address the complex realities of race within global and multicultural congregations, thereby reducing race to a singular narrative.

The analysis of the AoH DEI Reports through the lens of colorblindness reveals both the progress made and the structural limitations that continue to shape homiletic pedagogy. While institutions and faculty have increased their attention to DEI, these efforts usually remain confined within additive measures that leave Whiteness unchallenged as the epistemological norm. The marginalization of other racialized and global perspectives within syllabi and faculty

<sup>46</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 39.

<sup>47</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 17.

<sup>48</sup> Schade and Voelz, “2023 Academy of Homiletics Survey,” 18.

demographics, the dominance of Euro-American frameworks, and the persistent Black-White binary demonstrate how colorblind structures adapt to include selective diversity while resisting deeper transformation. This analysis has shown that to prepare preachers for ministries rooted in justice within increasingly diverse and global contexts, homiletic education must move beyond surface-level gestures of inclusion and confront the structures that define whose knowledge and experiences are centered in the classroom and the pulpit in order to expand homiletic frameworks beyond colorblindness.

### **Expanding Frameworks Beyond Colorblindness in Homiletic Pedagogy**

To move homiletic pedagogy beyond colorblind frameworks, I outline four practical, theologically grounded strategies that reimagine preaching education as a site of structural transformation. These strategies seek to shift classrooms from additive diversity gestures toward deep, justice-centered practices that engage systemic injustices and prepare preachers to lead faithfully within diverse and global contexts.

#### *Naming Colorblindness Explicitly in Homiletic Pedagogical Spaces*

“Awareness of and sensitivity to the profound and distinct impact of race on preaching is necessary,” Andrew Wymer rightly asserts.<sup>49</sup> Naming these realities gives language to the unspeakable and exposes the white elephants in the room, making the invisible visible. Thus, a critical step toward dismantling colorblind frameworks is explicitly naming them within preaching education. The Reports reveal how DEI commitments often remain superficial when colorblind ideologies frame race as irrelevant to theological discourse. Faculty can disrupt this dynamic by acknowledging, in both syllabi and classroom conversations, how Whiteness has historically and ideologically shaped the field of homiletics. This includes naming how Euro-American frameworks have been treated as universal and recognizing the historical and systemic marginalization of other voices in theological education.

Concretely, syllabi can include a short section that addresses the reality of colorblindness within theological education and its impact on preaching. For example, a section on “Frameworks and Positionality” can briefly explain how colorblind ideologies have shaped homiletics and invite students to reflect on how Whiteness has influenced their church experiences and their own theological formation. In addition, faculty may include reflective assignments asking students to identify racial assumptions within sermons, preaching models, and theological sources they have studied, considering who is centered and who is overlooked. Naming colorblindness also calls instructors to share their social locations honestly, acknowledging how their positionality shapes the perspectives and texts highlighted in class. This transparency does not undermine the instructor's authority; rather, it models critical self-examination as an essential quality for faithfully preaching within diverse contexts.

#### *Global and Racially Diverse Scholarship as Foundational, Not Supplementary*

Beyond naming colorblindness, homiletic pedagogy must integrate global and racially diverse scholarship as central to theological formation rather than as occasional supplements. The Reports reveal that while syllabi have increased DEI-related content post-2019, required texts remain predominantly Euro-American, and racially diverse authors often appear only as

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<sup>49</sup> Andrew Wymer, “Betraying White Preaching: Homiletical Domination, Racial Treason, and the Pursuit of Abolition,” in *Unmasking White Preaching*, edited by Valle-Ruiz and Wymer, 173.

supplementary voices. This pattern perpetuates colorblind frameworks by framing diversity as an add-on rather than a core criterion for theological credibility.

To shift this paradigm, faculty can redesign syllabi so that global and racially diverse perspectives form the backbone of the course, shaping core frameworks and evaluative criteria. When teaching sermon construction, for example, faculty can assign foundational texts by African, Asian, Latine, and Indigenous homiletics alongside Euro-American authors, woven throughout the course rather than confined to a single “diversity week.” Recognizing that homiletic resources from these communities may be limited due to systemic exclusion, instructors can broaden their syllabi by incorporating theological, biblical, liturgical, ethical, and contextual justice scholarship from marginalized voices. These resources equip students to think critically about racial, cultural, and global complexities in preaching, even when direct homiletic texts are scarce, allowing classrooms to engage deeply with justice-oriented formation beyond traditional homiletic canons. Assignments may invite students to engage non-Western theological scholarship in sermon preparation to critically analyze how these voices challenge and enrich their preaching practices. Faculty might collaborate with theologians, pastors, and scholars from diverse global contexts through guest lectures or partnerships to expose students to varied homiletical practices and theological approaches.

All these practices cultivate a classroom where multiple perspectives are recognized as theological authorities. Such integration challenges the colorblind assumption that preaching practices and theological knowledge are culturally neutral. By centering diverse voices as indispensable to the formation of preachers, homiletic pedagogy moves toward justice, preparing students to serve faithfully within a global and racially complex world.

### *Reframing Evaluation for Justice-Oriented Pedagogy*

Although many syllabi include DEI statements, the Reports reveal that evaluative practices in homiletics frequently remain tied to Euro-American homiletical norms. Courses may speak of justice verbally but continue to assess sermons primarily on forms, delivery style, and biblical interpretation shaped by Western frameworks and English rhetorical norms, while sidelining critical engagement with systemic injustices and racialized realities. Moving beyond colorblindness requires faculty to rethink how preaching and theological reflections are evaluated to ensure that assessments consider racial, cultural, and contextual complexities. Syllabi, for instance, can include rubrics that explicitly evaluate how well students address systemic injustices, racial dynamics, and the social locations of both preacher and congregation in their sermons. Evaluation criteria can ask: “Does this sermon engage historical and present realities of racial inequity? Does it draw from diverse theological perspectives beyond Euro-American frameworks? Does it demonstrate contextual awareness shaped by the preacher’s and congregation’s racial and cultural locations?” Faculty can also facilitate feedback loops where students receive input not only on Western rhetorical technique but also on their engagement with justice concerns across various cultural and contextual preaching methods. Instructors may invite guest evaluators from racially diverse communities or partner with congregations that reflect a variety of racial and cultural contexts, ensuring that feedback extends beyond the instructor’s positionality. By aligning evaluative practices with justice commitments, homiletic pedagogy can move beyond colorblind neutrality and prepare preachers to engage the complexities of race and justice with theological depth and contextual integrity.

### *Disrupting the Black-White Binary Through Intersectional Analysis*

The previous analysis of the AoH DEI Reports demonstrates that DEI efforts within homiletic pedagogy, while commendable, frequently default to a Black-White binary that narrows the racial imagination required for addressing systemic injustice within preaching education. This tendency equates racial justice work with addressing anti-Black racism alone while leaving other racialized, gendered, and global injustices underexplored, thereby reinforcing colorblind frameworks under the guise of racial engagement.

This dynamic reflects a colorblind adaptation: race is discussed discursively but confined within a binary lens that leaves other racialized and intersectional realities unexamined, while Whiteness remains unchallenged as the epistemological center of homiletics. As Crenshaw's work on intersectionality reminds us, structures of oppression are interconnected,<sup>50</sup> yet theological and educational frameworks do not always reflect this complexity. Western pedagogical models, shaped by colonial "either/or" logics rather than "both/and" frameworks, have historically legitimized Euro-American dominance and trained students to overlook the layered social subordination that intersectionality exposes.<sup>51</sup> Within homiletic education, this means that while anti-Black racism must remain central, addressing systemic injustice faithfully requires disrupting single-axis analysis. An intersectional approach invites deeper examination of how race interlocks with gender, class, migration, disability, and colonial histories, all of which shape the lived realities of congregations and the contexts into which sermons are preached.

Practically, faculty can operationalize intersectional analysis within homiletics by designing assignments that require students to analyze case studies where racial injustice intersects with other systems of oppression, such as anti-Asian violence fueled by gendered stereotypes and geopolitical tensions, Indigenous land struggles tied to ecological and intergenerational justice concerns, or the racialized dynamics of interfaith solidarity in addressing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism within local communities. Classroom discussions might explore questions like: How does colonial history continue to shape the racial and economic landscape of preaching contexts? How do gender, ability, age, race, and religion intersect within congregational dynamics? How do immigration policies reflect and reinforce racial hierarchies, and how should preaching respond to these interconnected injustices? Faculty can also encourage students to engage in sermons and theological reflections that address the compounded realities of racial injustice intersecting with poverty, gender-based violence, ableism, and environmental degradation, to expand students' imagination of what faithful, justice-oriented preaching entails.

By disrupting the Black-White binary through intersectional analysis, homiletic pedagogy resists the colorblind reduction of racial justice to a single-axis concern and cultivates a robust, multidimensional framework for preaching. This approach equips preachers to address the layered realities within their congregations while challenging the epistemological structures that uphold Whiteness as the normative center. In doing so, homiletics fosters preaching practices rooted in solidarity, contextual awareness, and global justice, forming preachers who can engage the complex injustices that shape the communities they serve with theological depth and pastoral integrity.

### Clarity Beyond Colorblindness: Reimagining Homiletic Pedagogy for Justice

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<sup>50</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," ed. Karen J. Maschke, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1997), 23–51.

<sup>51</sup> Tomlinson, "Powerblind Intersectionality," in *Seeing Race Again*, ed. Crenshaw et al., 176.

This paper has traced how colorblind frameworks, like an unexamined lens, distort the vibrant complexities of race and justice within homiletic pedagogy, leaving Whiteness unchallenged as the silent standard in faculty composition, curricular content, and the racial frameworks that guide preaching education. Even amid sincere DEI efforts, the default to additive gestures, the persistent Black-White binary, and the Euro-American epistemological center reveal how colorblindness functions not merely as an individual attitude but as a structuring vision that limits what is seen—and therefore what is possible—within preaching education. Yet the act of naming colorblindness is an act of theological hope. Naming it reveals its contours, allowing homiletic pedagogy to exchange the grayscale of neutrality for the full spectrum of justice-centered formation. By explicitly identifying colorblind assumptions, reframing evaluation toward justice, centering global and racially diverse voices as foundational, and disrupting narrow racial binaries through intersectional analysis, preaching education can cultivate leaders who see and engage the layered injustices shaping their congregations and the world.

To move toward deeper clarity, homiletic pedagogy must refuse to treat race as an optional module and justice as an elective concern. Preaching classrooms are called to become laboratories of prophetic imagination, where future preachers learn to interrogate systems of oppression, stand in solidarity with marginalized communities, and discern theological responses that illuminate paths toward liberation. While this paper has drawn on metaphors of vision, such as seeing, clarity, and light, it is essential to acknowledge that justice does not depend on physical sight. Rather, it demands an expansive, theological perception: a posture of attentiveness that is cultivated through critical reflection, communal accountability, and moral imagination.

This shift from colorblindness to clarity is not simply rhetorical or methodological; it is a pastoral and theological imperative in an era of DEI retrenchment. By learning to “see anew” through deeper perception rooted in solidarity and justice, preaching educators can equip future preachers to shed the false safety of colorblind neutrality and step into the bright light of justice, proclaiming liberation not only through their words, but also through the very structures of their classrooms, their sermons, and their lives.

## Introducing Homiletics with DEI Commitments: Challenges, Opportunities, and Options

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**Abstract:** *This article reflects on the introductory preaching course as a site of possibility for practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In the two segments of the 2022-23 Academy of Homiletics study that surveyed teaching attitudes and practices of its members, researchers observed some shifts toward more diverse representation of authors in the course readings (required, recommended, and additional bibliographic citations) from the first period to the second period, which varied by social location of the syllabus authors. Also of note in the syllabi are example sermons and course assignments that seek to address DEI concerns. The central question of this article addresses how the introductory preaching course serves as the primary gateway to students' interaction with the field of homiletics and the challenges, opportunities, and options for diverse representation, equity, and inclusion, especially as it relates to the construction of the course syllabus. The article draws on examples from the anonymized syllabi submitted for the study and engages current studies in pedagogy and in theological education, particularly those which emphasize anti-colonialism and anti-racism, and offers recommendations for adding or enhancing commitments and practices for DEI.*

### Introduction

In the 2022 study of DEI practices among members of the Academy of Homiletics (AoH), our research team focused on syllabi as representative artifacts in which DEI commitments are exercised. The call for syllabus submissions encouraged AoH members to offer four total syllabi from two different time periods: from 2016-2018 and 2019-2022, after the 2019 AoH annual meeting's theme of "Unmasking Homiletical Whiteness." In contrast to the 2022 member survey, which sought to understand self-reported attitudes, practices, and intentions, syllabus submission provided our research team the opportunity to understand the pedagogical realities on the ground across the guild. Syllabi were anonymized by a third party and coded by the research team, yielding tangible evidence of how AoH members demonstrate those commitments in pedagogical practice. AoH members might think and feel differently about DEI, but the research team wanted to know how members translated those values into practical commitments in their courses.

This article focuses on the introductory courses submitted for analysis. I first name some of the larger purposes of the introductory homiletics syllabus. Then I trace trends and examples in the data sample, focusing on various common elements that organize syllabi. I then describe pitfalls and possibilities for the introductory preaching syllabus using examples and trends we find in our data sample and in conversation with scholarship about DEI and pedagogy across other academic disciplines. Our research team's findings and preliminary presentations have thus far refrained from prescribing practices and dispositions in favor of relaying the data we received and offering initial interpretive analysis. However, now that we are some steps removed from the initial collection and analysis, parts of this article will offer recommendations and options for those who want to take further steps in building a DEI-attentive introductory homiletics course.

### The Introductory Homiletics Syllabus and DEI

While our call for syllabi included both introductory and elective homiletics courses, this essay focuses on the syllabus for the introductory course. At the risk of being rudimentary, the introductory course syllabus accomplishes a few important pedagogical goals. First, it provides a foundational gateway, offering most students their first exposure to homiletics as an academic discipline. Second, although technology is changing students' primary interactions with a course via learning management systems (LMS), the introductory syllabus still functions as a primary artifact of the course. For many institutions of theological education, only one preaching course is required for graduation or completion of the course of study. Students who retain the syllabus have access to the singular homiletics course long after their study is complete. As such, this artifact is a record of their foundational study, both in content and method. Second, syllabi are artifacts that are often submitted to accrediting bodies as evidence of compliance with accreditation standards. As such, it is an institutionally significant document. This is less important from the student perspective, of course, but it does signal how the introductory syllabus integrates into the larger enterprise of teaching and learning, especially as it relates to curricular learning goals. Third, the introductory syllabus participates in what Laura Parson and Laila McCloud call a "genre of communication," meaning that there are stylistic conventions and shared expectations for this kind of document.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that the introductory syllabus would constitute a subgenre of sorts, with elective courses assuming prior knowledge provided in an introductory course. In the introductory syllabus (as with all syllabi), students detect the tone the instructor wishes to set for the course, as well as the course's expectations, parameters, and possibilities. This is often especially so as an introductory course. As a corollary to participation in a distinct genre, the syllabus represents the architecture of learning, informing students what, where, how, and why learning will happen in the course. An additional corollary, and one of particular concern for DEI-focused work, is that the syllabus functions as an expression of an instructor's power and knowledge and of their own self-representation.

The introductory homiletics course presents challenges and opportunities when considering how DEI commitments are woven into the syllabus. In the introductory course, instructors might feel keenly aware that they are establishing the boundaries and contours of homiletical knowledge and practice. Instructors are presenting "the field" to students in ways that draw lines and exercise certain commitments, whether those commitments are judged to be strictly disciplinary or are intentionally framed by aspects of culture and social location. Those who seek to incorporate DEI commitments into the syllabus go about this introduction to the field with a sense of ethical responsibility, knowing that homiletics as an academic discipline and preaching as an ecclesial practice are deeply shaped by a community representing diverse identity markers.

Thus, the introductory syllabus becomes a dynamic site communicating each instructor's commitments. It also frames how students perceive their own identities and expectations in relation to the course, including where their challenges and possibilities for learning, practicing, belonging, and flourishing might lie. These perceptions and expectations extend across the students' relationships to course material, to the discipline (and in this case, the practice), to other learners, to the instructor, to their sermon listeners, to the church, and to the academic institution.

From the instructor's perspective, the introductory syllabus also becomes a site of contention because of its inherent limitations. In constructing and evaluating the introductory

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Parson and Laila I. and McCloud, "Exploring the Use of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of HESA Introductory Syllabi," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, May 2023 (n.d.): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2023.2203101>.

syllabus that attends to DEI concerns, major questions emerge: How do we help students from various social locations feel seen, known, and included in the syllabus? How do we help students experience the rich diversity of the discipline as well as the vibrant tapestry of proclamatory practices, including the various perspectives of culture, place, social location, and theology? How do we raise up minoritized voices (even when they are the instructor's own voice), experiences, practices, and examples while avoiding what might be perceived as tokenizing or exoticizing other voices? How do readings, assignments, class resources, evaluation/assessment, policies, and the language of the syllabus promote an environment in which DEI is practiced and experienced by the learning community? What needs to be documented in the syllabus as a matter of importance, recognizing that the syllabus is not the entirety of the course? And how do we do all this in a limited number of weeks, in in-person, online, and hybrid classrooms, depending on our institutional calendars and course formats? This list of questions is suggestive, rather than comprehensive. And these questions do not imply that the DEI-committed introductory syllabus is a burden. Rather, this list of questions simply suggests that for many, the introductory preaching course is a site of first encounter with homiletics as a discipline and, in a limited period, instructors who choose to construct the course with DEI commitments will invariably sense the limitations as well as the impact that their choices will have on the learning community.

### **Trends and Examples in Various Elements of Introductory Syllabi**

In its 2023 special presentation to the AoH, the research team presented statistical data around race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other dynamics of social location as they related to our syllabus analysis. In addition, our research team of doctoral students assigned "grades" to each of the syllabi collected based on the appearance of authors of color and beyond the U.S. present in various course elements, DEI commitments evidenced in assignments and other syllabus elements. The team's analysis especially focused on a list of keywords that signal attention to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and other DEI-related topics or perspectives. In this section, I want to note some general trends and examples among our data sample that emerge in some basic elements of the introductory syllabus in view – places we might expect to find DEI attentiveness to be on display. Since this article focuses on introductory courses, it will be helpful to know that of the 179 syllabi submitted, 84 can be identified as introductory homiletics syllabi, discernible either by the course title or course description. Thirty-nine are in the 2016-2018 set, while 45 are in the 2019-2022 set. Below, I analyze three categories of items that are included in the introductory syllabi samples: required reading lists, frames for the learning community, and assignments and class resources.

#### *Required Reading Lists*

Course reading lists offer an initial and important place for analyzing DEI-attentiveness. As a reminder, the research team analyzed course reading resources to determine if they included authors of color and/or outside the U.S. and/or addressed a DEI topic. This included required and assigned texts, recommended texts, bibliographies, and non-text sources. The research team did not separate introductory courses from elective courses in its data analysis, but of the 179 syllabi analyzed, it found that 79% of required texts in the early period addressed some aspect of DEI, while 83% of required texts in the later period addressed some aspect of DEI. Recommended

texts were 67% and 86% respectively, and bibliographies were 18% and 39%, respectively. Obviously, each category shows growth in these simple terms.<sup>2</sup>

One of the ways that we know to include introductory syllabi in this overall growth is that, with only two exceptions, no introductory syllabus used just one introductory textbook for the course.<sup>3</sup> Every syllabus's required reading list identified multiple texts for students to purchase (or identified the text as available in physical or electronic form in the school's library), though the majority prioritized one or two texts in the course modules' required reading. Two syllabi (one each from different instructors) gave students a choice among multiple possibilities, depending on their interest or, in the case of one, supplied texts written in Spanish for Spanish language learners. Five required no textbooks, with various readings by different authors distributed via course reading packets or in online modules.<sup>4</sup> Three required various books, but none would qualify as an introductory textbook. It is also worth mentioning that in many cases, two of the "Elements of Preaching"<sup>5</sup> series were often found as required texts: Teresa Fry Brown's *Voicing the Sermon* and O. Wesley Allen, Jr.'s *Determining the Form*.<sup>6</sup> Other books in this series appeared, but not in the number of instances that these two titles did. In only one syllabus did titles from this series comprise the entirety of the required reading list.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of specific texts, *The Witness of Preaching*, written by Thomas Long (white male), was the dominant choice (27 total) but decreased slightly over the periods from 15 to 12. This is an important marker of DEI-attentiveness, as five other texts written by authors from historically marginalized social locations grew in this time period. Luke Powery and Sally Brown's (African American male and white female) co-written *Ways of the Word* is the next most used text, and appears 18 times, with 7 in the early period and 11 in the later period. Jared Alcántara's *The Practices of Preaching* (Latine male) was published in 2019 (a Spanish language version was published in 2022, but no Spanish versions were cited), and thus appears only in the later period, but does so 8 times. Gennifer Brooks' *Good News Preaching* (Afro Caribbean female) also shows a slight increase from 5 in the early period to 6 in the later. Justo González and Pablo Jiménez's *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Latine males) grew from 2 uses in the early period to 4 in the later period. This is especially significant since it was published in 2005, well before the time periods under consideration. These indicators reflect a trend among AoH members to incorporate texts from historically marginalized and underrepresented perspectives at the level of comprehensive introductory textbooks.

But the increase in texts does not tell the complete story, nor does it suggest that these trends are altogether a positive development. Two developments are worth noting. First, several

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<sup>2</sup> Because each contributor also shared their gender, racial or ethnic identity, and sexual identity, the research team was able to be even more granular in its analysis of each syllabus. That data is available in Leah Schade's article in this issue.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that I am singling out books intended as introductory textbooks. Other books may have been included as required texts, but they clearly addressed special topics rather than a wide-ranging, more comprehensive introductory text. The two exceptions were a course that used Troeger and Tisdale's *A Sermon Workbook* and a course that required a book outside the field of homiletics: Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*.

<sup>4</sup> Of these, only one offered a DEI-attentive rationale. Another noted that students would receive copies of a textbook in development.

<sup>5</sup> This series is comprised of 8 volumes written by various scholars and, taken together, aspire to function in the manner of a single introductory textbook.

<sup>6</sup> Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body, and Animation in Proclamation* (Fortress Press, 2008); O. Wesley Allen Jr., *Determining the Form* (Fortress Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that Ronald J. Allen's *Patterns of Preaching* appeared in several syllabi, but because of its focus on sermon form rather than a comprehensive introduction, I do not include it as an introductory textbook.

syllabi required two or more introductory textbooks. For instance, some require Long's *Witness of Preaching* as well as *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* or *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* both by Frank Thomas (African American male), with some requiring a third introductory textbook such as Paul Scott Wilson's (white male) *Four Pages of Preaching*, González and Jiménez's *Púlpito*, or Alcántara's *The Practices of Preaching*.

Logistically speaking, we might wonder how students could be expected to attend to this volume of reading across the semester. Second, and related, just because multiple texts are required does not mean they receive the same attention over the course of a semester. For instance, at least one syllabus that required *Witness of Preaching* and *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* spread out the former across the semester, while Thomas's text was placed into one week of the course. All this is to say that discernible diversity in the required reading list may obscure a hidden pedagogical and homiletical segregation within the course.

I have yet to explore how these required readings are distributed among different demographic groups, and I have not detailed recommended readings or bibliographies, which the research team also analyzed and incorporated into its report at the wider level. But focusing on the introductory texts and their use even at this level is significant. These texts establish a guiding voice for students and center particular expectations, theological dispositions, cultural assumptions, and homiletical practices. When students are pressed for time, they may prioritize reading the course's main textbook or the one that is listed first if there are multiple readings assigned for a day. Required texts are also significant because students are *purchasing* these texts, indicating the financial impacts of DEI-attentiveness for authors. In addition to these trends, how the frames of the learning community shape and are shaped by DEI are worth exploring.

### *Frames for the Learning Community*

Another place through which DEI-attentiveness might appear in the syllabus is what we might call "frames for the learning community." By this, I mean the ways that syllabi name the kind of dispositions, behaviors, and relationships that instructors hope will be operative throughout the semester. Instructors might include a "diversity statement" (variously named), name their identities/social location, establish learning goals, provide a statement on disabilities and accommodations, and/or a statement on inclusive and expansive language. The latter two (accessibility/disabilities and inclusive/expansive language) are often included under sections of the syllabus labeled as "policies" as required by an institution's syllabus template and often with institutionally-supplied language, while others seem not to be required to do so. As such, it is difficult to assess whether these frames are created at the initiative of the instructor. Regardless, they do communicate either the institution's and/or the instructor's commitments to DEI.<sup>8</sup>

Diversity statements in some form or another occurred in only 20 of the 89 syllabi, accounting for 10 different instructors (remembering that as many as 4 syllabi per instructor were submitted). One such statement operates under the heading of "Cultural Agility," appealing to Scripture in a preliminary sentence and following with, "The Belhar Confession teaches that 'unity is...both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.' It is both a 'binding force' and 'a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought.' The kingdom's unity within its lavish diversity testifies to God's creativity and reconciling power. As <redacted> joins in this witness, its faculty aims intentionally to include diverse voices in the classroom through lectures and

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<sup>8</sup> Statements on disabilities and accommodations occurred in 71 of the 89 sample syllabi. 51 of the 89 syllabi included statements on inclusive language.

assignments such as required texts, reference works, reading lists, media, interviews, and case studies.” Whether this statement is part of an institutionally-supplied syllabus template or instructor-written, it suggests a wide array of pedagogical methods through which “cultural agility” might be practiced and gives a theological (biblical and confessional) rationale for its practice.

In another syllabus, a different instructor follows an institutionally-supplied diversity statement with their own:

While always seeking ways to further increase diversity in resources, speakers, and examples, the instructor has sought to offer materials in this course that give voice to a diversity of authors, theologians, viewpoints, and experiences. The instructor recognizes her own social locations as an American, white, cisgender female. The instructor intends that diverse voices (including gender diversity, racial/ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and international diversity, among others) are represented in the readings, resources, guest speakers, and through the contributions of student members of the course. The instructor always seeks to uplift and honor a rich variety of voices and experiences towards the pursuit of equity.

Compared to the “Cultural Agility” statement, this is noticeably less theological in nature, but it is more specific in terms of the kinds of diversity the learning environment engages. Additionally, this section of the syllabus is followed by a statement on “White Supremacy, Preaching, and This Course.” Notably, the 2018 version of the course did not include the same statement, which suggests that the professor increased their attentiveness to DEI over the span of this research period.

Other statements in various syllabi included the following headings: “Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion,” “Culture of Respect,” “Acceptance of Diversity,” “Commitment of Maintaining Expansive Space,” and “Course Engagement with Diversity.” In a slightly different manner, 4 syllabi representing 3 different instructors identified the instructors’ pronouns, social location, and/or other identifiers such as their names and how they wished to be addressed. While these practices of self-identification are not explicitly statements about DEI, they do seek to create an atmosphere in which the learning community sees the identification of gender, social location, and naming as exercises of hospitality and community, and as instances in which stereotypes, naivete, culture, and power might intersect.

Finally, eight of the syllabi exhibited attention to diversity as it relates to culture in their learning goals. Most of these are somewhat softly stated, but one specifically states “cross-cultural competence” as a learning outcome, noting that students who succeed in the course will be able to

*Exhibit cross-cultural competence* by preaching sermons that demonstrate listening for a voice different from one’s own, finding one’s own voice, and learning how to engage those voices that reflect a difference from one’s own. By doing these things, students will become more aware of the ways that they preach, which are shaped by their respective social/ecclesial locations as well as differences. To exhibit cross-cultural competence, a student will understand and articulate his or her own social as well as ecclesial location; recognize and honor the social as well as ecclesial locations of others; discern as well as respect the values held and expressed by self and others from different cultural, biblical,

theological, hermeneutical and global perspectives; begin to understand systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc.; and adopt and employ anti-racism practices.

Such a statement is unambiguous about the nature of preaching as an exercise of one's culture, experience, and power. Further, it clearly acknowledges that the classroom is a space in which "systems of oppression" are understood in their homiletical manifestations while strategies of resistance are formulated, practiced, and refined.

These common elements are places where some instructors seek to explicitly name their commitments around DEI, even if they do not use DEI-centered language. What we can observe among these introductory syllabi is a variety of ways that some instructors are offering frames for the learning community about how the course will operate regarding DEI commitments.

### *Assignments and Class Resources*

While a great deal could be said about the wide variety of course assignments and resources found in these syllabi, I want to focus on one aspect of DEI-attentiveness with respect to assignments: English as a second language (ESL). In our research team's member survey of self-reported attitudes and practices toward DEI, we included questions about the student composition of AoH members' classrooms. In doing so, the research team discovered that more than 50% of responding members have at least "a few" students for whom English is a second language. One third of responding AoH members reported that "many" or "most" of their students are ESL. While it is hard to know or even estimate the number of students this represents across the representative institutions, the research team did identify this as a significant data point among the AoH membership. I noted above that only one syllabus provided the possibility of required texts in a language other than English (these were in Spanish). But in terms of assignments, only 3 syllabi of the 89 make provisions for ESL students. One of these three identifies institutional provision for additional time on assignments. The other two provide opportunities for ESL students to preach their sermons for the respective courses in their native languages, such as one that stated, "If English is your second language, you are welcome to record the sermon delivery in your first language as long as you turn in a manuscript in English for classmates and professor to follow along." There is a clear disparity between the reported reality in many classrooms and the ways in which some, "many," or "most" introductory homiletics students might experience additional challenges to their full inclusion in classrooms.

Concerning class resources, I want to focus on sermons made available to students within the syllabus. While not all introductory courses provide sample sermons in the syllabus, the ones that do are included in at least three different ways. For some syllabi, sermons are included in the same manner as generic bibliographic lists or suggested readings. Some sermons are included individually as foci for a particular course module for discussion, reflection, or as part of an assignment. Others function as a hybrid of the first two. For an instance of a hybrid example, one syllabus from 2017 provided a list of 32 sermons from 27 different preachers, and as part of the required work for the semester, students selected 12 sermons for which they were to write "Sermon Responses" according to the following instructions:

Preachers learn as much by listening to sermons as they do talking about homiletical theory. For each class session indicated, read/watch/listen to the assigned sermon(s), and reflect carefully on what each sermon is doing and saying—and how. Then write a

paragraph or so (250-500 words) in which you critically engage the questions for the class day (see the course schedule). There are 14 possible sermon responses.

To add more detail, this assignment is correlated to fulfilling “course objective #2,” which is stated earlier in the syllabus as “Facility with biblical and cultural interpretation for preaching in God’s changing world.” There are two important observations to make here, by which I want to note the complexity of constructing a DEI-attentive syllabus. First, I include the course objective because it suggests that the variety of sermons students will engage in these responses will help with “facility with biblical and cultural interpretation.” At the same time, a DEI-attentive commitment is not explicitly framed, either in theological or institutional terms (as above with diversity statements). A more specific rationale on why this kind of facility is important, and making a case for the significance of the diverse kinds of preaching students will encounter, is not explicitly stated. Related, none of the preachers in the list are identified by their social location, and while the 27 preachers come from a variety of social locations, diversity among the list is not clear from the names alone, especially considering that in an introductory course, this will be many students’ first exposure to many of the preachers. Second, I want to note that responses, while brief, are prescribed to be submitted in *written* form. In terms of how students demonstrate their learning and engagement with this semester-long assignment, student response modes are limited. DEI-attentiveness in the syllabus through the lens of Universal Design for Learning would suggest a more inclusive range of possibilities for how students might respond to the sample sermons.<sup>9</sup>

I point to this specific example not to offer critique, but, again, to note complexity. This instance of course resources and assignments laudably presents a diverse roster of preachers for students to encounter throughout the semester. At the same time, there is an opportunity for further clarification as to how and why DEI-attentiveness is at work here.

There are more categories and trends worthy of attention (grading policies or related sermon evaluation), and more examples could be included. The goal, however, is not to be exhaustive.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it to single out exemplary or unsatisfactory practices or trends in our guild. Instead, these general observations function as openings to generate collective thinking about the kinds of syllabus elements to which we should grant our deepest DEI-attentiveness in the introductory homiletics course.

### **Pitfalls and Possibilities**

Having analyzed just a few trends and examples in the collected syllabi, it is important to recognize some broad ways that DEI-focused efforts might go awry and what might constitute success. I have already alluded to some of these pitfalls and possibilities in the analysis above. Before I continue, however, I want to provide some qualification to the word “success” as it relates to DEI-attentiveness in the introductory syllabus. Success for instructors is a relative term. Each instructor comes from different institutional contexts with different constraints and expectations, different students (with their own expectations and needs), and teaches from different social locations and experiences. Although our research team attached “grades” to the submitted syllabi, this functioned somewhat as an artificial construct. There is no way to

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<sup>9</sup> “The UDL Guidelines,” accessed June 18, 2025, <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

<sup>10</sup> By way of reminder, this data belongs to the AoH, not to the research team. Those who are interested in exploring the data samples further are welcome to contact Leah Schade or me.

construct a universal standard for the DEI-attentive syllabus. Each instructor starts from a different place and will have different goals.<sup>11</sup>

In describing the ways that DEI-attentive syllabi in higher education and student affairs (HESA) might fail to accomplish its intentions, Parson and McCloud, citing Derrick Bell, describe how “diversity discourses in higher education often center ‘the self-interest of Whites rather than the racial injustices suffered by Blacks,’ reinforce the outsider status of non-White and man-identifying individuals, and render structural and systemic causes of oppression invisible.”<sup>12</sup> This means that the syllabus cannot simply tout efforts toward “diversity” (and here we might also add “equity” and “inclusion”) as a meaningful signifier.<sup>13</sup> In categorizing these misfires, Parson and McCloud suggest five possibilities (which may work separately or in tandem) for the ways in which diversity language might fail:

1. Competitive advantage, suggesting that engaging diversity offers students a benefit in the workforce or economy.
2. Institutional excellence. By this, Parson and McCloud assert that diversity provides “evidence of institutional excellence where minoritized students are commodities to be fought over because of the benefits to majority students that students from minoritized identities bring to the educational process of ‘all’ students.”
3. Inclusion, wherein the use of language around inclusion obscures the causes of systemic and structural inequalities that necessitate strategic efforts toward inclusion.
4. Globalization. According to the authors, globalization language entails a push for “a unified whole that omits or ignores differences and histories.” In a sense, the value of diversity flattens the unique cultural histories, traits, and gifts that students bring to the classroom as it “creates global citizens with skills that are competent across cultures.”
5. Non-performative. Diversity functions as a non-performative when it is used as a positive “without indicating what the word or associated actions mean.” We might think of this as using buzzwords related to DEI without explaining them or indicating how they impact the course. In essence, they are for show.<sup>14</sup>

Applying these possible pitfalls to the introductory homiletics syllabi, a competitive advantage of DEI might signal that students can effectively preach to a culturally diverse world or congregation, thus benefiting their church and their own career. Or for those who identify as white, male, cisgender, and/or heterosexual, instructors should avoid using DEI language in such a way that it centers their own self-interests or reinforces an insider status. A diverse reading list or sample sermon list that goes unexplained might run the risk of globalization that flattens homiletics into a mere amalgamation of “diversity.” Instructors should also take care to avoid language that names DEI without spelling out how this manifests in the course, which turns toward the non-performative. Parson and McCloud suggest that learning communities would benefit if instructors took the time to define what they mean in syllabi, operate with transparency

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<sup>11</sup> Having more textured conversations with instructors on these matters is part of the next phase of the research team’s agenda.

<sup>12</sup> Parson and McCloud, “Exploring the Use of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity,” 5.

<sup>13</sup> Wing Yi Wong’s article “Expanding Homiletic Pedagogy Beyond Colorblindness” in this issue helpfully explores issues that are related to what Parson and McCloud articulate here.

<sup>14</sup> Parson and McCloud, “Exploring the Use of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity,” 5.

about systemic and structural inequalities, and trace how DEI-attentive values and efforts in the course work toward justice (and invite students to do the same).

On the flip side, there are some significant possibilities for practices that clarify and bolster the DEI-attentive syllabus. As a matter of first importance, it is critical for instructors to be honest about their social and demographic location regarding matters of DEI in the introductory syllabus. While it is tempting to keep things the same for years on end, there is a risk to one's pedagogical integrity by continuing disciplinary and pedagogical allegiances without deeply discerning how they relate to DEI-attentiveness. Even instructors who have made strides in their syllabi over the years can mistakenly think that they have "arrived" and become lax in the diligence needed for DEI work. Fuentes, Zelaya, and Madsen encourage educators to develop and continually refine their cultural competence and how that integrates with their pedagogy. They call this "developing an EDI mindset in syllabus development."<sup>15</sup>

In considering syllabi in psychology, Fuentes, Zelaya, and Madsen offer a helpful corrective to the possibility of thinking that designing the DEI-attentive syllabus will look the same for all instructors when they say, "Given the fact that faculty are a heterogeneous group and in various stages of their cultural consciousness, we advise educators to adopt the considerations that are most aligned with their level of proficiency."<sup>16</sup> Some instructors might be uncomfortable with what a DEI-attentive syllabus might mean in their institution or what it might reveal about their level of cultural consciousness and competence. Recognizing that each instructor's attention to matters of DEI in syllabus development comes from different situations and different starting points can help place this work in perspective and work from there.

Another set of possibilities centers on what I will simply call "clarifying commitments," drawing on the work of Courtney Buggs. In reflecting on Womanist pedagogy and teaching preaching, Buggs describes two characteristics of exemplary Black women teachers filtered through the work of Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant.<sup>17</sup> While these characteristics are rooted in Womanist values, they have salience across social locations and identities. The first is "political clarity," which Buggs describes as "awareness that education occurs in the context of competing social priorities and systems."<sup>18</sup> For example, an instructor might begin the syllabus (re)design process by taking an inventory of the priorities and systems that shape their own ways of knowing, being, doing, and belonging, as well as those that are shaping the current socio-cultural context, the history and current context of the institution, and the students who will be in the course (inasmuch as this is possible). Since "sexism, classism, and heterosexism, for example, are frequent visitors in the preaching classroom," instructors do well to explore these and other "isms" that persist as a manner of pedagogical honesty and integrity.<sup>19</sup> Instructors might also find ways to name these in the syllabus itself, perhaps in an instructor's statement of identity. For example, instructors might briefly state how they have been shaped or affected by various priorities and systems and/or how they seek to expose them and root them out in pedagogical methods focused on introducing homiletics.

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<sup>15</sup> Milton A. Fuentes et al., "Rethinking the Course Syllabus: Considerations for Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion," *Teaching of Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628320959979>.

<sup>16</sup> Fuentes et al., "Rethinking the Course Syllabus," 4.

<sup>17</sup> Courtney Buggs, "Womanist Pedagogy and Teaching Preaching: Black Women Preachers as Sources for Pedagogical Reflection," *Sermon Studies* 8, no. 1 (2025): 58–66.

<sup>18</sup> Buggs, "Womanist Pedagogy and Teaching Preaching," 60.

<sup>19</sup> Buggs, "Womanist Pedagogy and Teaching Preaching," 61.

Similarly, instructors might construct the various components of the syllabus with a statement that explains the intention or emphasis of the course, as in: “While there are many ways to introduce the field of homiletics and the practice of preaching, since Black and other women of color have and are experiencing multiple, intersecting forms of oppression, this version of the syllabus emphasizes the voices, experiences, knowledge, and practices of Black and other women of color from across the globe.”

The second practice of clarifying commitments is what Buggs, through Beauboeuf-Lafontant, calls “an ethic of risk.” This entails “engaging with ‘oppressive realities...in spite of an educator’s recognition that social injustice is deep-seated and not easily dismantled.’”<sup>20</sup> I read this in two ways. Primarily, Buggs wants readers to see how Womanist pedagogy embraces a willingness to confront “deeply held beliefs about the Divine, the world, scripture, and humankind,” pushing the learning community to wrestle with matters of utmost significance, often beyond what is comfortable.<sup>21</sup> There will be resistance in and beyond the learning community to this wrestling, but this aspect of Womanist pedagogy leads to deeper wisdom and collective liberation.

But there is a secondary aspect to the ethic of risk that offers a critical acknowledgment that the work will be both incomplete, fragmentary, or partial (“not easily dismantled”) and that risk entails the possibility of failure. These risks are important and worthy of naming in the introductory syllabus. Remembering that syllabi help set the tone for courses, and that the introductory syllabus builds a foundation for future engagement, an “ethic of risk” might be invoked through a statement like this:

In this course, we will wrestle with our deeply held beliefs that manifest in preaching. We will ask hard but generous questions of ourselves and our colleagues in order to grow as preachers and as those who confront social injustices. Because this work is difficult, fragile, and faces resistance from a number of places (chiefly, ourselves!), there might be moments in which we feel that our work has not lived up to our collective hopes or even that we might have failed. In these moments, we will endeavor to operate with honesty, integrity, and grace, and then engage in the work of repair and renew our efforts.

These clarifying commitments might help instructors foster a learning community that proceeds with honesty, integrity, and depth, allowing students and instructors alike to step into DEI commitments while avoiding the pitfalls named above. Also, noting these commitments in a syllabus should offer credit, citation, and acknowledgment of Womanist wisdom.

### **Options for (Re)Designing the Introductory Homiletics Syllabus**

There are some smaller, more discrete practices for implementing DEI-attentiveness in homiletics syllabi that are also worth highlighting. Again, these are not comprehensive, but I offer them as important possibilities for the introductory syllabus.

#### *1. Start small.*

While a complete overhaul of the introductory syllabus might be warranted for some instructors, even small changes in syllabi can have a big impact. As James Lang describes, there is power in “small teaching, an approach that seeks to spark positive change in higher education through small but powerful modifications to our course

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<sup>20</sup> Buggs, “Womanist Pedagogy and Teaching Preaching,” 61.

<sup>21</sup> Buggs, “Womanist Pedagogy and Teaching Preaching,” 61.

design and teaching practices. Small teaching as a fully developed strategy draws from the deep well of research on learning and higher education to create a deliberate, structured, and incremental approach to changing our courses for the better.”<sup>22</sup> This is not a half-hearted or gradualist approach but an intentional one to maximize positive changes in courses without being overwhelmed by massive changes that outpace an instructor’s own learning curve, drain energy, and diminish effectiveness.

Given the data of this study, we might characterize what AOH members did during this period as making “small teaching” adjustments in response to the 2019 annual meeting theme and related initiatives. In the next iteration of the research team’s study, we might hope for even more progress, given the areas of growth we have identified among multiple constituent groups.

2. *Construct the syllabus with a DEI-centered approach.*

Fuentes, Zelaya, and Madsen suggest that “given the relevance and influence of culture and related diversity factors on behavior, faculty could explore their influence and impact from the outset and continuously consider their relevance. These efforts promote a ‘diversity-centered’ approach to syllabus development.”<sup>23</sup> The authors contrast this with a “siloeed” approach, in which instructors attend to matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion in a way that is isolated from the rest of the course.

The classic example of a siloeed approach would be instructors dedicating a class session of the introductory course to “Black preaching.” Instead, instructors can assess how the syllabus might center historically minoritized groups or create a lively intercultural conversation through various course components throughout the semester. I personally do this in a very tangible way as I develop the course reading list. As I construct the syllabus, I often stack physical copies of books, articles, and essays on top of one another or spread them out on the floor, asking myself, “Who is in the room this semester? Who is missing? How are these voices talking to one another? Who is or has been louder, and why? Can my students see themselves among these authors? Who do students need to hear from?” Weaving DEI-attentive concerns throughout different aspects of the syllabus, such as the student learning objectives, objectives for a particular course module, a diversity statement, and an instructor’s self-identification, also contributes to an approach that avoids silos.

3. *Decolonize the introductory syllabus*

There is a much larger discussion to be had about decolonization, so offering it as a subpoint in this article might raise concerns that I am minimizing the gravity of colonial legacies or the need for decolonizing practices in our syllabi. I am also mindful of the possibilities of decolonization becoming an all-too-easy non-performative or collapsing DEI-attentiveness with decolonization. None of these is my intention.<sup>24</sup>

Rather, my point is to recognize that decolonization has important distinctions from DEI and that DEI is not the ultimate goal for many. Decolonization has a specific focus on the power of minoritized, subjugated groups and dismantling dominant,

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<sup>22</sup> James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (Jossey-Bass Inc Pub, 2016), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Fuentes et al., “Rethinking the Course Syllabus,” 5.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller exploration of anti- and decolonial pedagogies, I would suggest starting with Christine J. Hong’s *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* (Lexington Books, 2021).

supremacist ways of thinking, being, doing, and belonging. DEI has more to do with representation and has been the operative language for this research project, a language widely shared in contemporary culture.

One way we can see decolonizing the syllabus at work is in the course reading list that centers historically underrepresented and marginalized perspectives rather than using them as supplements. One of the observations of the research team was that texts required for purchase were often authored by white scholars, but sample sermons for courses were from scholars of color. Assigning course texts for purchase has a real, tangible effect for minoritized scholars whose preaching traditions and communities have been historically marginalized from what counts as legitimate scholarship. While this is a small step, it is an example of decolonizing efforts that consider the boundaries of what constitutes scholarship and the financial impacts of course reading lists.

4. *Reassess and explain policies and practices*

Policies and practices are often added to syllabi in an unreflective manner as “boilerplate” language often required by institutions. This is apparent among most of the inclusive language statements in the sample syllabi. As noted above, only a handful of the syllabi in our sample included diversity statements. It stands to reason that adding such statements is an important step for instructors who do not currently use them. For those who have institutionally required language around diversity or inclusive language in their syllabi, instructors might consider addenda that flesh out how the instructor aims to practice those DEI concerns in the course and why they are significant for the introductory preaching course.

5. *Reconsider methods of evaluation, grading, and assessment*

I have yet to talk about evaluation, grading, and assessment of students, especially their sermons. Moving toward practices of evaluation, grading, and assessment that admit bias and move toward inclusion and equity are vital. A few of the syllabi utilized pass/fail grading in assignments and/or for the course, with explanations about the difficulty of evaluating and grading sermons. Elsewhere, I have written about the practice of “ungrading,” which in part eliminates or de-emphasizes letter or numerical grades as a theo-ethical, anti-colonial practice.<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Helsel has written about her experience of communally generated rubrics for student sermons, which promote conversation about the varieties of what might make for “good” preaching. Such rubrics also promote student agency, voice, inclusion, and more equitable power-sharing in the classroom.<sup>26</sup> Suffice it to say, as instructors consider DEI and anti- or decolonial practices in their syllabi, a critical appraisal of evaluation and grading systems may reveal the ways in which assessment ranks and sorts students, thereby perpetuating colonial logics, biases, and inequities. Alternative forms of assessment may generate more equitable, meaningful, and effective means of providing feedback to preaching students.

6. *Learn about and implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL)*

Assignments are a way students demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and growth. However, we know that students learn, engage, and respond in the classroom in a variety of ways. Universal Design for Learning recognizes the diversity of learning in our

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<sup>25</sup> Richard William Voelz, “After the Graded Sermon: ‘Ungrading’ as Theo-Ethical Practice for Homiletics,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 27, no. 4 (2024): 123–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12680>.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Browning Helsel, “Evaluating Sermons: The Function of Grades in Teaching Preaching,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20, no. 3 (2017): 204–15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12389>.

classrooms and seeks to meet it through multiple modes of engagement to “foster equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for every individual.”<sup>27</sup> UDL recognizes that learning and engagement come not just via an innate, acontextual sense of “multiple intelligences,” but are also culturally constructed and affected by (dis)abilities. UDL seeks to observe how teaching and learning practices can move beyond bias or cultural limits and open possibilities for all learners. With UDL in mind, an introductory syllabus might encourage students to choose from a range of types of responses beyond reading and writing, such as recording audio or video, composing visual art or music, dance, or convening a conversation. The point here is that DEI-attentiveness and UDL can walk hand-in-hand.

7. *Offer options for students with diverse language backgrounds*

Even simply focusing on student sermons, we can think about student sermons and non-native English speakers. As noted above, a very small number of introductory syllabi in the data sample (3) allow for the possibility of non-native English speakers to preach their sermons in their first language. Since preaching is highly contextual, it makes sense to encourage students to preach in their first language, despite any perceived “losses” for the learning community. In my experience, there can be a robust conversation among the learning community about what native English-speaking students observe in their colleagues’ sermons when they attend to a sermon in a language not their own (supplemented by a translated manuscript or immediate translation through a service such as Google Translate). Matters of embodiment, including gesture, vocal dynamics, and clerical attire — what HyeRan Kim-Cragg calls “the language of the body” — can become key aspects of intercultural learning and help students claim those dynamics as their own without being subject to Western homiletical standards. This is not at the expense, however, of attending to robust conversations about epistemology, culture, power, and the exegetical and theological insights that arise when encountering sermons in various spoken/written languages — what Kim-Cragg calls “the language of the mind.”<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion: Introducing Homiletics with a Renewed Commitment

Recognizing the plurality of experiences in communities, homiletics has benefitted immensely from the ideas of “dialogue” and “conversation,” as well as the robust imagery of the “roundtable.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, despite pedagogy being of significant interest to this guild, I am not sure that introductory syllabi benefit from a dialogical, conversational, or roundtable approach. Instead, at least in my experience, the syllabus is largely treated as the discrete work of individuals. The vast differences across the sample syllabi seem to largely confirm that mindset. In an era in

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<sup>27</sup> “The UDL Guidelines.”

<sup>28</sup> HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (Lexington Books, 2021), 89. I also want to note: I am not suggesting that by attending to embodiment in sermons from those of various language backgrounds, we celebrate or fetishize markers of embodiment that might belong to a particular culture, obscuring the rich exegetical and theological insights that preachers bring in their first languages. While matters of embodiment might stand out more easily when listening in a language we do not share with the preacher, teachers should bring Kim-Cragg’s more holistic language sensibility to those gathered for the sermon.

<sup>29</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership & Preaching Meet* (Abingdon Press, 1995); O. Wesley Allen, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Abingdon Press, 2015).

which instructors reconsider the ways their introductory syllabi have relational effects, I would suggest that instructors form conversational circles with a range of partners about our introductory syllabi. These conversations across the guild, within members' institutions, with working preachers, and others could sharpen DEI-attentiveness within syllabi, enabling honest conversations about what is and is not present in our syllabi, celebrating instances of success and naming struggle, and identifying that which is worthy of adapting and adopting from others. Even more, such conversational circles could foster a greater sense of mutuality, collective responsibility, and DEI-attentiveness in the guild at large and in interpersonal relationships. Granted, as Kenyatta Gilbert cautions, since scholars from minoritized backgrounds have often borne the labor of DEI, it would be imperative to clarify that such groups are not intended to serve as a sounding board for scholars from more privileged social locations.<sup>30</sup> Rather, each instructor would enter the conversational circle with awareness of and honesty about their own possibilities, limitations, and boundaries.

These observations have only begun to scratch the surface of DEI-attentiveness as it relates to introductory preaching courses. Our research team's preliminary reports centered on analysis and interpretation of the data without much by way of prescriptive recommendations. However, in the spirit of robust accountability and action, this article has focused on the introductory homiletics course because of its critical importance as an entryway to students' engagement with the discipline, as well as the foundation it builds for future engagement with DEI in preaching. In tracking trends and examples among the introductory courses in the data sample, my aim has been to observe the ways that introductory courses in the sample have engaged in DEI-attentiveness and then to offer some preliminary frameworks for pedagogical dispositions and practices, both for the collective homiletics guild and for individual instructors. In concluding this first phase of our team's research with the realities of pedagogical realities and some beginning possibilities, we hope that our next phase of data collection and analysis will expand the guild's collective imagination for the DEI-attentive introductory syllabus.

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<sup>30</sup> See in this issue, "Interview with Kenyatta Gilbert and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Senior Advisors for 'Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics.'"

## **Interview with Kenyatta Gilbert and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Senior Advisors for “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics”**

*In 2022, the Academy of Homiletics (AoH) received a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to undertake a project entitled “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Academy of Homiletics.” The project included a survey of guild members and analysis of submitted syllabi to assess how homileticians have integrated DEI into their pedagogy and scholarship since 2019 when the organization undertook the effort to “unmask homiletical whiteness.”*

*Senior homileticians Kenyatta Gilbert and HyeRan Kim-Cragg served as accountability consultants for the project. Gilbert is the Dean and Professor of Homiletics at Howard University School of Divinity. He has been a member of the AoH since 2000, where he has served as recording secretary, vice president, and president of the Black Caucus. He also serves on the editorial board for the journal Homiletic.*

*Kim-Cragg is the Principal and the Timothy Memorial Church Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto. She has been a member of AoH for fifteen years and has served on the Executive Committee since 2021. She also serves on the editorial board for the journal Homiletic.*

*In April 2025, project co-directors Leah Schade and Richard Voelz sat down with Gilbert and Kim-Cragg to reflect on their roles and the outcome of the research. In light of global movements of authoritarianism, white Christian nationalism in the U.S., challenges to theological education in progressive institutions, and the backlash against DEI, the conversation highlights the importance of continued research both within the AoH as well as other scholarly guilds.*

### **Interview**

**Voelz:** Tell us about your role in this project and how this work has aligned with your values and commitments as a homiletician and as a leader in theological education.

**Kim-Cragg:** I would say our roles were as advisors to both of you. You consulted with us on the grant proposal to Wabash, so we were part of this from the beginning. We were your sounding boards, listening deeply and attentively to the plans, ideas, goals, and the overall process. We were happy to support your leadership roles, especially when you were hiring four Ph.D. students from diverse backgrounds and guiding them through their work of analyzing the syllabi data. That was labor intensive work! After the data collection was completed, Kenyatta and I read the initial findings of the member survey and syllabi analysis. We had a conversation with both of you that shaped the panel sessions we presented at the 2022 and 2023 annual meetings.

Putting on my principal hat as the head of one of the largest mainline theological schools in Canada, I find that having a sounding board is essential in my role as a leader. When you have a robust idea, asking people to be your sounding board is a grounding exercise in leadership. So, we were glad to mentor you in that.

I also want to emphasize that the implementation of the project was equally important. Having the idea is brilliant, but if you are not executing it well, it will be a futile exercise. And then, implementing something from a project like this, especially policies at structural levels, is critical because it shapes the ethos of the institution. In the case of the Academy of Homiletics, it's about the people, the individual and collective bodies who are invested in this professional

organization. This goes back to the very nature of EDI<sup>1</sup> work. It's not ad hoc but embedded in and throughout what we do. What we've done at this initial stage has been a tremendous effort, and I was very honored to be a part of that.

**Schade:** I just want to follow up on that to say it was so helpful for Rich and me to know that we had senior homileticians who have lived through what it's like to experience the Academy going through this process. There were certain perspectives that we didn't have by virtue of our demographic locations. So, to be able to check with you and to count on your honesty and forthrightness was essential.

**Gilbert:** This study emerged on the heels of the Academy beginning this work of deconstructing homiletical whiteness, which I was glad to see. I'd worked with Sally Brown very closely in her leadership as president of the guild in 2019. Up to that point, it was all too common for minoritized scholars to take the lead on this work out of a defensive posture against whiteness. So, seeing non-minoritized scholars express genuine concern about the direction of the Academy was important to me. Both of you contributed to Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer's edited book, *Unmasking White Preaching*,<sup>2</sup> so situating your study to focus on pedagogy, specifically on how preaching is taught, is helping the Academy do more self-critical work.

It was also a big step for our members to submit their syllabi for analysis. There's a lot of vulnerability in that. This would not have happened had you all not been the kind of persons that you are, and I applaud that. At the time, there was a level of sensitivity that I had because I did not know you two as well. So, I had some questions, such as, why should a Black scholar respond to this request and engage in this work, if this is not a particular issue that is derived from the concern of a person who's minoritized? And what does it mean for white scholars to do the probing? What might be the motivation behind it? After having participated as an advisor with HyeRan, I now see that not only were you wanting a sounding board, but you were doing it out of genuine concern about how we transform an academy whose work, by and large, is Eurocentric and often unquestioned.

So, I felt it was very important that you would invite an African American male and an Asian Canadian woman to be a part of it. I saw your thoughtfulness and the respect you had toward your senior colleagues. So that gave me the impetus to say yes to your request and serve in this role.

**Schade:** Can I just add, David Jacobson had online town halls about DEI when he was president in 2020. Kenyatta, he asked you and me to convene one of the small groups about "teaching praxis for solidarity." You and I met ahead of time and thought about how we would structure this gathering and the kinds of questions we were going to ask. Then we recorded what the group discussed and our recommendations for the Academy going forward. But we knew we needed some metrics to help us understand where we are now and how things are changing. Rich reached out to me and said, "Hey, if you want to do this, I'm with you on it." So, there's been this trajectory over the last six years that has led us to this point. Now that we have this data, we've reached a milestone, but we're not finished. We're thinking about where we go from here.

**Voelz:** To build on what Leah said, it was vitally important for us not to allow this work to fall at the feet of minoritized scholars. That was a core value for us. And I really wanted us to do some broad work as a collective body so that we would have something to show for this effort. This

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<sup>1</sup> EDI is equity, diversity, and inclusion, another arrangement of the DEI acronym.

<sup>2</sup> Lis Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer, eds., *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics* (Lexington Books, 2022).

project is going beyond theoretical papers or individual kinds of work in people's schools. So, I think you've named well what we're up to as well as our hopes and values for the project.

**Schade:** What are your observations about the study? What did you learn from this work? What things surprised you, or what was affirmed for you?

**Kim-Cragg:** This is a beautiful symbiotic combination of research, teaching, and service. Each area matters and they should complement each other. That's what happened – it was about teaching, but recognizing that teaching can be improved with research. And research has to go through the rigors of publication and engagement with the members of the Academy. We've accomplished a lot, but it's not about glorifying the work. It was a *kairos* moment. Even though many schools were making DEI a priority, there has also been some pushback. So, all of this ripened at the time when our own Academy focused on the theme of dismantling whiteness through our annual conference, workgroup papers, and journal articles. We've come to understand that these issues are a core part of who we are and what we do as the Academy of Homiletics.

What was eye-opening for me, however, was how slow this work is. The research showed that course assignments, textbooks, and other resources people are using are still very white-dominant. Even the issue of inclusive language is confounding. I mean, the feminist movements have been going for more than fifty years. But our spiritual trailblazers in faith, like Julian of Norwich, were using feminized imagery to describe God. And yet we are still working on accepting this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So, things are still pretty bad in terms of DEI, but we are pushing hard for it at the same time. And there have been some accomplishments and improvements. I want to recognize both realities to help us clarify our work without completely despairing about the situation.

The other thing I want to talk about is the complexity of different languages in our classrooms. The survey showed that many of our students' operational language is more than English. So, I'm interested to see how this bilingual and non-Anglocentric homiletics is at play in classroom dynamics. How do you guide students to craft a sermon that is not in English? This is a huge area that we have not yet delved into as a guild, but we need to pay attention to it. This is not just the work of international students or faculty members. It's everybody's work because the overall historical landscape is still very much white Anglo-dominant. Those who benefit from this system must take this reality much more seriously.

**Gilbert:** For me, there were things that many of us already know, but it was good to have them affirmed by the data. And doing the presentations for our guild at the annual meetings was important. It was a lot of data and very comprehensive, but even given the time constraints, I felt that it was digestible. And we made space for responses and discussion in terms of the lens of access.

I was pleasantly surprised that you both were so committed to the project and that you left no stone unturned. And it was presented in a way that was aesthetically appealing and appropriate. I thought it would have been enough just to focus exclusively on race and ethnicity. But the breadth of the study was both surprising and helpful because it brought in other marginalized voices. The study expanded our conversations beyond the issue of race. One thing I wonder about is whether an ongoing discussion around the issues gets lost because of the infrequency of our guild meetings. This was a strong descriptive and empirical engagement and analysis of issues around DEI. But there are many questions being raised from this work that have stayed with me, and I hope we have more opportunities to discuss them as a guild.

**Voelz:** As you're seeing the present and future policies of the current U.S. presidential administration and their effects nationally and internationally, what do you think this will mean for the DEI work we're doing in the Academy?

**Gilbert:** I think our work is so important for preparing preachers to proclaim and lift up the priestly aspects of the work of preaching, as well as justice matters. These things are converging in serious ways. Folks who have lost their jobs will need care, and that can happen in congregational spaces. Our work is important in preparing students and learners to address these critical matters. Because I'm not so sure that the current literature adequately prepares doctoral advisors for teaching students how to help their folks engage in justice issues.

The relevance of our work could not be more timely. I got a call this morning from one of my best friends who said he's going to lose half of his company [due to job cuts from the White House administration]. It makes no sense. So, what does a preacher do and say in this moment? For us to have data that speaks to the implications of DEI, it's a *kairos* moment, as HyeRan said.

**Schade:** In some ways, looking back from where we are now, it seems like we did this research in a different country. I mean, obviously it's the same country and the latent authoritarianism was always there underneath the racism and xenophobia. But now it has full rein. But this data gives us a baseline of what it was like before Trump 2.0. And when we conduct the survey again in another two or three years, we'll have some really interesting comparative data. To have a snapshot of what it was like then and what it will be like in the future will be very important not just for our guild, but for academia more broadly. Especially regarding academic freedom and the erasure of anything other than white history, what they're doing is going against DEI and all minoritized communities – the very work we've undertaken to better our guild. This project will help to bear witness to what we've tried to do.

HyeRan, I'm wondering how you're seeing things as our neighbor to the north, having your heart and mind both in Korea and in Canada? This country has now made itself your country's enemy. What is that like for you? What are you seeing?

**Kim-Cragg:** It's unprecedented. Our countries have been close friends and that history is being thrown away. It's hard to grasp. Even people in Canada are losing jobs [due to actions of the U.S.]. The anxiety level is even worse than what we experienced during COVID in some ways. So, I think that what we're doing, even with this interview and this special *Homiletic* edition, is remarkable. I want to cherish this moment because I think the future is going to be very difficult.

In my principal's address to students, faculty, and staff at the beginning of 2025, I noted that we are starting a second quarter of the century. It's a new beginning in some ways. But I think we're going to experience a lot more change and crises over the next twenty-five years. Certainly, the ultra-right wing, populist, fascist, tyrannical political forces are going to fly very high. This is happening around the world and is going to result in many negative legacies that will last for two or three decades. So, the message is that we need to buckle up and be very resilient. We must not lose hope. Keep the torch and the flame of hope alive so that it does not go out.

It's also important to note that this is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Academy of Homiletics. We began in 1965, so this is the 60<sup>th</sup> year of our guild. As we do this work, we need to celebrate, to recollect, and to remember the contributions of our trailblazers and our ancestors. And this research project helps us to think ahead to the next sixty years as well.

**Schade:** One of the things I'm hearing from both of you is that it's about the relationships that we have built within our guild that are going to be very important in sustaining this work. I think there's going to be a lot of pressure from some of our institutions to dismantle the work of DEI.

The work we're doing is going to be targeted, so we need to have each other's backs as a guild and support each other when that pressure comes. We'll need to encourage and maybe even admonish each other at times to hold the line. At the same time, we need to be in solidarity with each other and keep doing this work, which will be so vital over the next several years.

**Voelz:** With that future in mind, let's think about next steps. When we're getting ready to do the next round of this research, what are the questions that you think we should be pursuing?

**Kim-Cragg:** I reviewed the PowerPoints that you so beautifully presented, and I think the data shows some important next steps. First, those who are benefiting from the system need to carry the load. There's no other way around it. So, how do we encourage and motivate both senior and junior members who have a little more luxury and privilege to engage in this work?

The other piece we need to pay attention to is the right-wing pushback we will receive. Obviously, these oppressive forces are nothing new. We know misogyny and racism well. But the forces of neoliberal capitalism are aligning with authoritarianism in such dangerous ways now. Therefore, intersectional analysis and the kind of interlocking approaches to homiletics are even more urgent. We'll need to continue rekindling these aspects of preaching that engage scripture while looking at these aspects of our world.

Also, we're going to be dealing with tremendous collective and individual trauma because of what is happening. Preaching and trauma was the theme that David Jacobsen chose for the 2020 meeting, and it's going to need continued attention. The trauma is intersectional. There is ecological and climate trauma, trauma from populist movements, and so many more. People are genuinely fearful, so what are the resources for preaching that we can tap into?

I think the Bible can be helpful because from Genesis to Revelation, we see that what was written was, in some ways, a response to trauma. Every book was written in the midst of exile or occupation. So, the Bible can give us resources in terms of models of resilience and provide us with warnings and wisdom for preaching. I'm glad that you'll be doing more qualitative and ethnographic research. It might be interesting to talk with people who are willing to share about their work in this regard.

**Gilbert:** I'm thinking along the lines of displacement and the gross materialism that blinds us. For example, a city like Washington, D.C., where I teach, is experiencing aggressive gentrification. At the same time, I want to highlight the importance of interpreting things at a more granular level and how these forces impact human life. So, I think that more critiquing or at least reflecting on socioeconomics and preaching might be helpful. There may also be some fruit in thinking about institutional closures that have impacted our guild and some of our colleagues.

Part of me also says that a guild as diverse as ours could speak in a meaningful way to the Evangelical Homiletics Society about diversity, equity, and inclusion. How would our data inform another guild, spur conversation, and open eyes to look at this information we've collected? How can the data we've gathered and interpreted be used more broadly?

**Voelz:** Leah and I had always hoped that this project would be a model for other guilds such as the Society of Christian Ethics, the American Academy of Religion, or the Society for Biblical Literature. For example, our data shows that LGBTQIA+ members are not feeling very safe and that their voices and concerns are not fully engaged. So that would be a point of caution if we were to consider collaboration with other guilds. But just sharing our findings with the executive boards of these guilds and with the minoritized scholars within these groups might be helpful.

**Gilbert:** Right, it would open their eyes to the reality. Not that we have cornered the market, but we have members of this guild who are also members of other guilds as well. So, this work could spark meaningful conversations in the theological academy writ large.

**Schade:** Before we wrap up, um, I just want to mention that I recently saw a graphic where it showed that the enrollment for seminaries that push a white Christian nationalist agenda is much higher than for those that are within the progressive Christian realm. So, we have our work cut out for us.

Kenyatta, you were mentioning institutional closures earlier. This means that for some of us, it is a matter of survival. As we're seeing enrollments in our progressive MDiv programs plummet while skyrocketing in those conservative seminaries, I think that maintaining the faithful remnant is very important. We must hold the line and say that this is how we understand what it means to be the beloved community of God in this moment. We're not going to obey in advance, and we're not going to bend the knee. We're following the teachings of Christ and the prophets.

**Gilbert:** Exactly. I really want to encourage you all in the work that you're doing and to continue doing it. It will be important to stay current and collect more data as the years go on. As you take the next steps, think about what other voices you want to join you in the work. My concern is for the next generation of scholars. I'm beyond the midpoint in my career now, so I think this is the time for our guild and our schools to "do the work that our souls must have," as Katie Cannon has said.

**Kim-Cragg:** It's been a real delight and honor to have this conversation. Thank you for allowing this format of a collegial conversation for this article.

**Voelz:** This has been a generative conversation. We're so grateful for the collegiality and the mentoring that you've given to us. It's been invaluable.

### List of Contributors

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Ronald J. Allen. *Preaching and Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary on Paul and the Arrogant Gentiles*. Library of Homiletics 1. T&T Clark, 2025. 272 pages. \$120.

This is the first volume in the new T&T Clark Library of Homiletics, which seeks to “[foster] interdisciplinary conversation about preaching theory and practice that should be of interest to practical theologians and many others in the humanities” (xiii). Such an audience is clearly—and rightly—in view in *Preaching and Paul's Letter to the Romans*. At the same time, pastors and others who regularly preach will also find themselves addressed in this book. Ronald Allen offers an extensive introduction situating both his approach to preaching within a taxonomy of different homiletical goals and methods, and his approach to the interpretation of Romans in the landscape of contemporary Pauline scholarship. In the main body of the book, Allen investigates the text of Paul's letter section by section, in each case discussing not only the text, but the place of the passage in the lectionary and possibilities for preaching. Although he is not explicitly addressing preachers in a North American context, much of the discussion seems particularly apt for a US context.

With regard to homiletical theory, Allen lays out two general approaches to the purposes of preaching: “proclamation” and “conversation.” The basic goal of the first approach is to communicate the message of the text to the congregation (18–20). The key question is: “Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?” (56).<sup>1</sup>

The conversational approach recognizes many sources of authority, including the experience and beliefs of the preacher and the congregation. It appeals to reason in terms of what is “logically consistent with other things the congregation believes” (22). For preachers, such an approach entails asking how the text is consistent with their own lived experience. Allen identifies with this approach. In his words, “I have a theological Geiger counter tuned to my life that I pass over the text to indicate the degree to which the text seems theologically appropriate and believable in the contemporary world” (25 n. 73). Here the goal is to use the text to invite conversations about what the congregation believes.

As for Romans itself, Allen's interpretation is in line with the work of other scholars who reads the letter as solely to and about gentile Christ-followers. According to this view, as Allen articulates it, Paul sees Christ as graciously extending the offer of Israel's covenantal relationship with God to gentiles. Gentiles need to repent and accept this offer; Jews, already in covenant with God, need do nothing, although Paul would like them to recognize Jesus.

Allen models conversational preaching based on this interpretation. In practice, this focus means that the central interpretive questions throughout the letter concern how the text does, or does not, criticize gentile arrogance and promote a positive view of Judaism for Paul's day and ours. For example, in preaching from Romans 9–11, one might invite a conversation about what the congregation believes about the Jewish community, or invite a local rabbi to speak, or sort out what the congregation believes about God's work in the world.

Some questions linger, however, at least for this reviewer. Given Allen's emphasis on evaluating texts' “theological appropriateness” based on principles of congruence with the readers' values and worldview, how might a text challenge and resist the status quo? How might the practice of simply sidelining or even rejecting problematic passages short-circuit the discoveries that often come from in-depth engagement with difficult passages? Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> Allen is quoting Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2014), 5.

while it is certainly the case that Paul criticizes gentile arrogance, does not a single-minded focus on this theme silence other major themes in the letter and miss out on further rich resources for preaching?

Such questions aside, Allen is clear about the diversity of approaches to both preaching and the interpretation of Romans, and his own location in that complex landscape. He also models a winsome humility in the interpretive task, along with transparency about his own process of reading and preaching. All preachers would do well to follow his example in these matters.

Susan Eastman, Associate Research Professor Emerita of New Testament, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC

Mark Glanville. *Improvising Church: Scripture as the Source of Harmony, Rhythm, and Soul*. IVP Academic, 2024. 224 pages. \$29.00.

*What is the church supposed to be? What is the church supposed to do? What is the nature of pastoral ministry, and why would I want to give my life to it?* These are some of the core existential questions that Mark Glanville seeks to address in his book *Improvising Church*. Noting the prevalence of these questions among clergy and laypeople in post-Christian cultural contexts, Glanville proposes the concept of improvisation as a dynamic framework for faithful ministry in incarnational communities (his preferred term for churches). Drawing from his extensive experience as a jazz musician, Glanville provides twelve “notes” to guide missionally minded leaders in developing an improvisatory ministry. Just as the twelve notes of an octave serve as the raw material from which musicians select as they craft their tunes, so these twelve principles serve as the framework for improvisatory ministry in post-Christian contexts.

Methodologically, Glanville locates this work at the intersection of missiology, Old Testament studies, and personal reflection on pastoral experience. The book has a somewhat improvisatory feel, weaving together strands of biblical theology, ministry principles, and numerous real-life stories drawn from his own and others’ experience in congregational ministry. Rather than proposing and developing a single argument or thesis, Glanville presents something closer to a series of jazz lessons that, when combined, help the reader to develop greater improvisatory fluency. This writing style may present a challenge to some readers trying to gain conceptual clarity about the core claim or claims of the book. Yet Glanville seems to have made this choice deliberately, aiming not to present an academic proposal on “what a community could potentially be” but rather “to discern and describe what God is already birthing in real, lived, incarnational communities” (5). Thus, the twelve notes presented here read somewhat like the titles of episodes in a series, unique yet interconnected. There is an attempt (unsuccessful, in my view) to group these twelve tones into three sections of four, but this does not seem necessary, as Glanville’s twelve notes form a whole that is like the musical whole formed by a chromatic scale’s twelve notes, even apart from further subdivision.

One theme that comes through clearly in this book is the essentially communal nature of ministry in 21<sup>st</sup>-century post-Christian contexts. Gone are the days when churches revered a solitary up-front leader who could perform the tasks of a ministry expert. Instead, faithful ministry in incarnational communities involves skills in collaboration, development of other leaders, cultivation of communal conversations, and prayerful discernment. Pastors still bring expertise, to be sure—especially knowledge of the Bible and of church tradition. Yet the more important qualities of leaders in incarnational communities are relationally oriented, centered around collaboration and facilitation.

Another theme that stands out in this book is the essential connection of ministry and place. Churches need to engage and invest in their local communities. While this idea is not new, unless pastors grapple with the damage done to local communities by the attractional model of church, they may fail to grasp the difference it can make to belong to a place and care for God’s creation in that place. Cultivating a deeper sense of belonging to place should also prompt predominantly White churches in North America to reckon with the colonial past—what Glanville calls “the sins of our kin.” Devoting an entire chapter to this theme, Glanville demonstrates how far ahead many Canadian churches are, compared to US churches, in doing reparative work with Indigenous neighbors.

Glanville provides only a small glimpse, in an appendix, of how this vision for ministry would shape preaching. His subsequent book, *Preaching in a New Key: Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities* (IVP Academic, 2025), develops a more substantive homiletical method. Apart from longing for more details about Glanville's homiletical method, I wonder also how viable this vision for ministry would be in cities or regions where secularism is not as advanced as it is in Glanville's location of Vancouver, British Columbia. I also wonder how viable this model is for ministers who have different personalities or different levels of rootedness in particular ecclesial traditions, which bring with them their own models and theologies of ministry. To what extent can this model be integrated with various ecclesial theologies of ordained ministry? Those questions notwithstanding, *Improvising Church* offers a thick and compelling model for pastoral ministry that seeks to meet the challenges of post-Christian culture with the tenderness of God in Christ, a healing-oriented scriptural concept that Glanville emphasizes and models well throughout this book.

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Carolyn J. Sharp. *Micah: Introduction and Commentary*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2025. 480 pages. \$64.99.

Carolyn J. Sharp's latest commentary convincingly argues that the book of Micah engages the "depth, complexity, and blazing urgency" of the present moment (124). For preachers who witness to a living God in a season of ecological and social unraveling, Sharp's analysis of Micah as a "iconic performer of refusal, ... declining the idolatries ... that distort his community's identity and dishonor God," is crucial reading (51).

Over years, Sharp has devoted her scholarship to the excavation of "emancipatory biblical interpretation ... through holistic, radical pedagogy" (56). In other words, she brings her formidable textual-critical skills into the service of students, within the academy and without, who would commit their course to a God whose heart is bound to the suffering. This holistic approach leads her to understand her scholarship as self-consciously homiletical, written with an eye toward the preacherly work of congregational formation while also giving attention to the homiletical rhythms of biblical texts themselves. She notes, with some frustration, that much Christian preaching on the prophets leaves these homiletical insights on the cutting-room floor. In contrast, her commentary on Micah insists that the book offers more than theological pronouncements. Its structure, rhetoric, genre, and performative character provide practical strategies for "resilience, resistance, reformation, [and] rejoicing" in the face of violent displacements and corrupt political leaders (123). Each biblical chapter that Sharp exegetes engages this four-fold spiral toward communal wholeness. It is a commentary oriented around practices of restoration in and after moments of profound loss.

Sharp helpfully narrates the debates around Micah's complex compositional history, even as she questions the usefulness of such "redaction-critical logics" (27). She is more interested in the structures and patterns visible in the shape of the present text, and her insights on this front are formidable. She describes the book as a piece of visual art, composed as a diptych on a hinge. Micah's portrayals of judgement and restoration echo and reframe the other, giving a complex cohesion to the whole. But Sharp also brings a performative ear to the text. She points out Micah's call-and-response character, helping the reader recognize, in the text's pastiche of scriptural references and voices, a kind of liturgical readers' theatre. Particularly in Micah's final chapter when the Daughter of Zion speaks for herself, Sharp's attention to the responsiveness of the text's characters yields rich interpretive dividends. The book may begin with a single, grief-stricken prophet, but by the text's end, the prophetic witness is expanded and shared. The community is now a participant in this prophetic work, an insight relevant to the homiletic guild's increasing interest in dialogical preaching (27, 370-79). The impact of Micah's final chapter, likely written long after the text's earliest passages, is more than affective; it is subversive – amplifying the voices of terror's survivors.

Sharp sees in Micah's resonance through various periods of exile and occupation an invitation to press the implications of its testimony across broader expanses of time and space. This is a biblical book that has been returned to repeatedly in moments of communal crisis, and Sharp is convinced that it is a valuable resource for the present. To that end, she brings biblical research on poverty in ancient Israel and Judah into conversation with contemporary poverty studies (42). She underscores the significance of Micah's timely critique of land transfer from subsistence farmers to the wealthy elite (44). Most significantly, in every chapter, Sharp carefully outlines Micah's fierce connection between ecological justice and the holy. Familiar passages

like Micah 6:8 read differently through the lens of global ecosystem collapse (341-2). Sharp's intertextual eye sharpens her interdisciplinary engagement.

Indeed, one of the most impressive things about this commentary is the wide scope of its conversation partners. This is, in some ways, expected by a volume in Eerdmans' *Illuminations* series. One of the hallmarks of *Illuminations* commentaries is their attention to the historical reception of biblical texts across various faith communities. But Sharp's range of conversation partners also grows from her intersectional feminist commitments. Sara Ahmed's concept of the feminist "killjoy" in *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017) and Marquis Bey's understanding of "fugitivity" in *Black Trans Feminism* (Duke University Press, 2022) become touchstones for Sharp's analysis. Sharp places Micah's dangerous truth-telling alongside Ahmed's feminist "killjoy," who "dares to name the sordid and tragic truth of systemic patriarchal violence" (52). The differences in these witness are significant, certainly. But Sharp also points to a shared prophetic resistance to oppressive power. Through Bey's explorations of "fugitivity," Sharp does something similar. She places Bey's descriptions of fugitive testimonies, "refusing, enduring, resisting and thinking beyond that status toward future possibilities of unconfined freedom," alongside the testimony of fugitive Zion in Micah 7 (54). This fugitive Zion has "escaped the obliteration willed for her by her enemies." This is a Zion "who will be restored – which is to say, a Zion who has survived" (56). In placing these texts in conversation, Sharp illumines the ways that Micah "incites flight from dehumanizing violence and envisions other worlds and new collectives" (55). Critically, Sharp does not drop these references to contemporary theorists like pebbles in a pond. She walks with these authors throughout her text, letting them influence her reading in sustained, substantive ways.

Part of what is at stake for Sharp, I think, is her argument that Micah can be a valuable resource for feminist praxis. This is a complex assertion. There are significant feminist critiques of Micah's text, which Sharp respectfully enumerates (50-1). Sharp is convinced, however, that biblical texts can call "for justice beyond that which the prophetic author might have known" (51). And this commentary does exactly that. The book reads like a fireworks display of generative thought – backed up by careful scholarship and the wisdom of an assured scholar. Even those who maintain that the text's limits are obscured in Sharp's emancipatory framing will find the commentary a tour de force.

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\*The following review was not solicited by the Book Section Editor but the Managing Editor who has overseen its inclusion in *Homiletic*.

Matthew L. Skinner. *Acts*. Interpretation Bible Commentary. Westminster John Knox Press, 2025. 321 pages. \$45.00.

*Interpretation Bible Commentary* intends to capture the spirit of the earlier *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (1982–2003) by offering exegetical, theological, and hermeneutical insights from leading scholars taking advantage of interpretive developments over the last fifty years and written in language that is accessible and lightly suggests homiletical possibilities. Matthew Skinner's commentary on *Acts* is a herald of the new series and exemplifies the *Interpretation* approach while setting a high bar for subsequent volumes.

Professor Skinner sees Acts not as an objective historical account of events but as a theological narrative Luke created for a congregation perplexed by the delay of the second coming and other factors resulting in “confusion, disillusionment, and attrition.” The time was likely a period of “change, discernment, and possible instability” (2). To a congregation besieged by discouragement and flagging in mission, Luke seeks for Acts to “bolster the faith” and to empower the witness of the congregation (2).

Luke's strategy is to tell the story of Acts as the story of God working through the risen and ascended Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit to continue the movement towards salvation initiated in the ministry of Jesus but yet to reach its height in full and final salvation. With great sensitivity, the commentator identifies Luke's rhetorical, literary and theological artistry and its intended effects. Throughout, Professor Skinner points to God's initiative in the transformation from the new to the old as the spark for human response.

The work is enhanced by eight excurses that offer deeper considerations of leadership, humor in scenes of violent retribution, Paul as pictured in Acts, devout gentiles who reverence God, the significance of travel in antiquity, how to understand the Jewish opponents of Paul, the functions of “we” passages, and Paul's legal situation vis-à-vis Rome.

Our time, especially in the historic churches, is also one of “confusion, disillusionment and attrition” not only with respect to the church but increasingly with respect to developments in the national culture of the United States, especially in the political world. Professor Skinner highlights four ways in which Acts can encourage the church today. 1) The biblical book reminds the church of its foundational identity and mission to continue the work of Jesus. 2) Acts points to the diversity of Christian communities. 3) Acts does not impose specific agendas on the church but portrays the church responding creatively to the presence of the Spirit. 4) The narrative tells the story with “wonder, adventure, and delight” that can prompt congregations to “expect more from God” (15) and that invite listeners to see these qualities as part of Christian life.

The Revised Common Lectionary appoints readings from Acts every year on Easter Day, the Sundays after Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and other significant liturgical occasions, such as the Nativity of John the Baptist and the Conversion of Paul. Professor Skinner helps the preacher consider how themes from the lectionary and from Acts relate with one another. However, the lectionary does not allow the congregation to hear the story of Acts in sequence, thus depriving the congregation of the opportunity to experience Luke's theological artistry in its ongoing narrative expression. The preacher could easily create a season of semi-continuous preaching on Acts that would expose the congregation to the narrative movement of the biblical book by selecting representative passages from the six parts into which Professor Skinner divides Acts and summarizing the intervening developments.

I am puzzled by the editors of commentary series continuing to assign separate scholars to the commentaries on the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The two books tell one story. The preacher cannot offer a fulsome interpretation of the Third Gospel without taking account of how the narrative continues in the Acts, and the preacher similarly cannot capture a full sense of Acts without having in mind the story told in the Gospel of Luke. It would make sense to have the two books interpreted by one scholarly point of view.

The last forty years have given birth to a number of resources in support of preaching. In a world of limited financial resources, preachers must make choices among the resources. I think preachers will find this commentary to be not only a reliable companion but an exciting one that will help the preacher toward sermons that are “informed, imaginative, and critical” and that help congregations “celebrate, seek out, and proclaim God’s faithfulness” (4).

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Shauna Hannan and Gael Chandler. *Scripting a Sermon: Using the Wisdom of Filmmaking for Impactful Preaching*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2024. 206 pages. \$28.00.

*Scripting a Sermon: Using the Wisdom of Filmmaking for Impactful Preaching* is an innovative work that explores the cross-collaboration of preaching and filmmaking in mainstream culture. Shauna Hannan and Gael Chandler analyze the intersections of sermons and filmmaking by exploring development, structure, and presentation. The authors examine the art and science of artistic filmmaking in congruence and impactful preaching and provide visual images that are centralized in the text (11).

The book makes a significant contribution to discourse related to preaching and filmmaking by modeling a “cinematic literacy” converging homiletics and filmmaking for enlivening and communicating the Gospel (12). As noted in the “Introduction,” “theologians have mined films for biblical themes and filmmakers have sought out theologians as conversation partners when incorporating theological themes into their films” (15). Chapter 1 takes shape from this premise, permitting a starting point for preaching to find commonality with filmmaking: both begin with the story.

Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of collaboration in filmmaking and preaching. Each part of the film requires distinct personnel who work together to tell one succinct story. Such collaboration is at the heart of collaborative preaching. Preaching will find new meaning in pre-sermon collaboration. It involves the preacher alongside “prescreen writers and coeditors,” individuals offer story input long before the sermon is presented. This method of preparation is relatively new to me because it challenges me to invite others in my sermon development.

Chapter 3 expands on the importance of the sermon and film’s introductory moments. The authors suggest, “the beginning of a sermon sets in motion the sermon’s theme and tone, the connection to the biblical story, the relationship between preacher and hearer” (82). This chapter empowers preachers to approach the beginning of the sermon with meaningful engagement. In film, the screenwriters seek to create short, efficient exposition that places the audience into the “showing” of the film. Building sermonic suspense moves our preaching from information to a cinematic experience.

Chapter 4 provokes the preacher to envision the sermon in scene segments. This recalibrates what preachers refer to as “small segments” or blocks within a sermon to become visual sermonic scenes. Such recalibration propels listeners to visualize the sermon as a story “to run it in their heads and experience its sights, sounds, and emotions” (122-123). In so doing, sermonic embellishment arises as a potential critique of the homiletic method recommended in this book. While visual and sensory preaching elevates storytelling, it invokes a temptation for preachers to deviate from or interject into the biblical text.

Chapter 5 addresses the importance of editing in film and preaching. The authors suggest that “editing is the part of filmmaking that is closest to human thought, emotion, and experience” (167). It follows, the film takes on different dynamics of pace, speeding up and slowing down as the story expands. The audience sees it unfold as the sound, music, and shots move throughout the film. I see these preaching characteristics embodied in the African American tradition.

Chapter 6 recommends a conclusion of ecstasy, celebration, or lament. The close enacts a climax that leaves the audience in resolution or wanting more. It provokes the listener to know (cognitive), feel (emotive), or do (behavioral) something specific. Much like Frank Thomas’s *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God*, preaching helps listeners experience the assurance of grace. This specificity is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Overall, *Scripting a Sermon* is a transformative resource for those interested in the intersectionality of homiletics and filmmaking. The authors offer fresh alternatives to sermon presentations. While it does not offer preaching methodologies, it does challenge preachers to consider innovative ways to engage listeners. They suggest, “increasing such homiletical literacy begins with the practices of preachers themselves” (18). Preaching with visual aids and sermon scenes makes for interactive, intergenerational preaching. Therefore, this work is essential for pastors and preachers who seek to merge the imaginative and sensory worlds of film and preaching.

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Casey T. Sigmon. *Engaging the Gadfly: Reflective Online, Hybrid, and In-Person Preaching in a Digital Age*. Cascade Books, 2025. 151 pages. \$26.00.

In the wake of pandemic-accelerated shifts to streaming and hybrid worship, Casey T. Sigmon reframes preaching for a networked environment often labeled Web 3.0. Drawing on process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, she employs the “gadfly” metaphor to describe technological change itself—the persistent buzz of new media challenging established proclamation patterns. New ideas, Whitehead observed, are “a danger to the existing order” (xxi), and Sigmon sees the rapid shifts in how people communicate—through social media, algorithms, and blurred physical-virtual spaces—as just such a gadfly for the church. Her thesis is concise: because Christian proclamation has always adapted to major media revolutions, the church's response today should be incarnational—not a retreat from digital technoculture, but a faithful entry into it—reshaping sermons as participatory conversations rather than one-way addresses. Pastors, worship planners, and homiletics faculty are the intended readers.

The early chapters rehearse how communication revolutions have repeatedly reshaped homiletic form—from house church gatherings to imperial basilicas, from print to broadcast to Web 3.0’s networked platforms. This historical pattern reveals that preaching adapts faithfully, not by chasing technological trends, but by holding fast to its unchanging purpose while allowing the “how” to evolve. Sigmon locates this purpose in incarnation theology: if the Word became flesh to meet people in their context, then preachers today must carry the gospel toward people as they actually communicate—on timelines, in comment threads, and through screens—through what Sigmon names “touch,” the “theological posture for preaching in the digital age” (99).

At the heart is a dialogical homiletic unfolding in three explicit steps: media change → incarnational response → dialogical/participatory preaching. This triad grounds the book theologically while inviting practical experimentation. The shift reframes the preacher’s role: rather than protecting a monologue inherited from print and broadcast norms, Sigmon casts the preacher as a discerning facilitator who centers Scripture while convening congregational wisdom in interpretation and proclamation. She introduces the neologism “homilecclesiology”—a blending of homiletics and ecclesiology that refuses to separate the sermon from the community it shapes. Preaching is an “entanglement” where preacher, people, Scripture, Spirit, tradition, and context interact dynamically rather than as one-way transmission (14–15). The Holy Spirit works through multiple voices to build up the Body without dissolving the preacher’s vocation, as preachers become “co-conspirators with God” (88–89).

Later chapters translate theory into practice: designing sermons that invite response, building feedback loops, and experimenting with formats that distribute agency beyond the pulpit. Participation begins with accessible practices, including prompts, listener input, interactive polling, and social media conversations. Sigmon equips pastors with immediately applicable tools: sermon series developed through congregational input, midweek sermon clips, and lay moderator roles in hybrid services. Asynchronous channels welcome homebound, time-constrained, or younger listeners without requiring live participation. The book also addresses emerging technology like AI, insisting they require pastoral discernment rather than uncritical adoption. In the academy, this work bridges disciplines by treating technology as integral to ecclesiology.

A critique concerns cultural translation. Writing from North American Protestant settings, Sigmon inadequately addresses contexts shaped by different traditions. In many Asian contexts—including Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese churches in North America—Confucian-

influenced patterns privilege lecture-based learning where pastoral authority is deeply respected. Open dialogue may feel uncomfortable, not only because congregants hesitate to challenge clerical authority, but because conversational formats are unfamiliar. Unlike Western contexts cultivating debate from childhood, many Asian congregants experienced lecture-based education where open discussion itself—not merely theological conversation—feels culturally uncomfortable. Introverted participants also risk marginalization if confident voices dominate—a concern Sigmon acknowledges but could explore more deeply. Dialogical formats risk message fragmentation when diverse interpretations disperse attention from Scripture’s core claims. While Sigmon offers small-scale pilots, lay facilitator training, anonymous polling, and Scripture-centered prompts, readers need more culturally attuned strategies and guidance on maintaining theological coherence. These observations suggest fruitful directions for contextual adaptation.

Overall, *Engaging the Gadfly* succeeds on its own terms. It tells plainly what the book says and for whom: pastors and homiletics educators seeking a theologically grounded, pastorally realistic path for preaching in online, hybrid, and in-person spaces. It situates the argument within wider conversations about media change and ecclesial identity, showing how an incarnational posture can animate concrete practices without surrendering the preacher’s vocation. For churches navigating post-pandemic hybrid realities, this work offers timely pastoral wisdom and theological conviction. Sigmon writes: “Jesus would not hunker down and ignore the shifts, nor should we” (83). I recommend it warmly for homiletics classrooms and clergy study groups seeking to move from reaction to reflective preaching in a networked age.

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Karyn L. Wiseman. *Queering the Pulpit: A Sexegetical Approach to Preaching an Inclusive Word*. Cascade Books, 2024. 122 pages. \$19.00.

Karyn Wiseman's *Queering the Pulpit: A Sexegetical Approach to Preaching an Inclusive Word* offers a distinctive approach to inclusive preaching in pursuit of a queer-affirming method of gospel proclamation capable of addressing the gap that persists between the church and the queer community. Throughout the book, Wiseman presents her personal story of queer self-discovery, situates queer lives within historical contexts, reexamines biblical texts that have long been used to marginalize queer people, and envisions a theology rooted in an unequivocal and affirming "Yes, PERIOD!"

In the book's first chapter, Wiseman reflects on her journey of coming to understand herself as a lesbian while growing up in West Texas as a member of the United Methodist Church—a church which, until 2024, officially held that homosexuality was "incompatible with Christian teaching" (14). In particular, she shares how the process of coming to terms with her sexuality affected the way she understood her role in the world and in a church that repeatedly responded, "No, period" to questions of queer affirmation (23). The second chapter presents a brief survey of queer life in historical context. In challenging the myth of homosexuality as a modern development, Wiseman helpfully relates the nuanced understandings of "homosexuality" (though, as she reminds us, no such term existed until the late nineteenth century) across different historical periods, discussing ancient Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman cultures, as well as a theological shift in the Middle Ages. Wiseman next discusses the rise of queer oppression in the modern era, from the well-known persecutions of the Nazis, to the infamous Stonewall Inn raid of 1969, and the lesser known 1973 arson of a Metropolitan Community Church congregation gathered for worship above a bar in New Orleans's French Quarter. Chapter 3 explores critical interpretation of scriptural texts, commonly called "clobber texts," whose traditional interpretations have been used to devalue queerness. By emphasizing the use of tradition, reason, and experience in scriptural interpretation, Wiseman reminds the reader of the importance of contextual awareness for an individual's hermeneutical lens. She focuses in particular on Gen 19:1–11 and Rom 1:26–27, situating them in their respective historical and biblical contexts in order to counter fundamentalist notions that the primary purpose of such passages is to communicate lessons about sexual morality.

The book's first three chapters make plain the need for a "Yes, PERIOD" theology, discussed in chapter four, that can challenge heteronormative conventions of pulpit discourse in favor of a mode of preaching that "affirms [queer listeners], honors their very being, and that helps to heal the wounds inflicted on them by the church, their families, and in their daily lives" (77). Given the book's concentration on affirmation and inclusion, the sexegetical approach outlined in Chapter 5 suggests four areas of exegetical focus for preachers preparing to preach about queer-related issues in their local context: 1) congregational demographics, including church members' worldviews; 2) congregational context with regard to human sexuality, taking into account members' experience with dialogue around human sexuality; 3) the polity and doctrine of the denomination to which the congregation belongs; and 4) the existing level of congregational support for sermons dealing with queer themes. After exploring what it means to craft sermons sexegetically, Wiseman concludes with a brief case study devoted to preaching that is both honest about harms perpetrated against the queer community and steadfast in its communication of the good news of God's love for queer people.

In this book, Wiseman offers a concise, inspiring, and much needed addition to the field of queer homiletics. Its importance is especially evident in its reinforcement of the need to address the chasm between the church and the queer community by preaching clearly about God's love for queer people. Wiseman's exegetical method represents homiletical evolution that can support future work in the field, especially in terms of how queer hermeneutics might push conversations in queer homiletics beyond elements of affirmation toward broader understandings of how queer ways of knowing might shape gospel proclamation. With a deeply pastoral sensibility, Wiseman inspires queer preachers to bring their whole selves to the preaching event, invites non-queer preachers to better understand the realities of oppression that persist against queer people, and provides practical tools for truly inclusive preaching. Above all, she asserts that queer people deserve to hear sermons that speak to their realities—their pain *and* their hope—and calls on all preachers to take queer homiletics seriously.

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Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi. *Unraveling Religious Leadership: Power, Authority, and Decoloniality*. Fortress Press, 2024. 237 pages. \$29.00.

From the uniquely fertile vantage point of her own social location and her positionality at the inter-traditional intersections of the church and academy, Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, offers in this book a broad yet deeply thoughtful and wholly accessible examination of the phenomenon of religious leadership within North American Christianity today. Building upon the ongoing work of postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, Lizardy-Hajbi analyzes the specific assumptions, processes, and notions of authority baked into the structures of leadership often at work within congregations, parachurch organizations, denominational bodies, and seminaries and divinity schools. In this book, Lizardy-Hajbi seeks to challenge the structural integrity of the colonial enterprise of North American religious leadership by pulling on various “threads” of coloniality, an epistemological and ontological reality which the author posits has become so embedded within American Christian thought and practice that it (along with a number of other marginalizing ideologies, like white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism) that it threatens to “strangle” communities of faith and their leaders (2).

In her introduction and first chapter, Lizardy-Hajbi begins the project by laying out the “garment” of contemporary leadership constructs, fleshing out the biblical and historical origins of prevalent models and distinguishing her decolonial approach from that of theorists that utilize the primary lenses of antiracism and diversity and inclusion. The author also offers a brief but helpful literature review in the area of decolonial frameworks of leadership. Emphasizing values such as pluriversality, hybridity, communality, and subversion, the author nods to the book’s goal, which is to encourage the reader to consider the possibilities of a “subversive, subjugated reenvisioning toward *leaderships*,” a purposefully “improper” term intended to capture the expansive potential for co-existent, highly contextual, non-archetypal models of leadership within the increasingly diverse landscape of North American Christianity, both inside and outside of institutional religion (47).

Chapter 2 takes up the first of these pulled-upon threads, which is *individualism*—specifically the notion that the autonomous “fixed self” is the true center of economic, religious, political, and rational reality, and that tapping into one’s so-called “authentic self” is at the heart of the kind of leadership that effects the most institutional good. The author instead urges toward an understanding of the self as *relational person* and offers models of collaborative leadership that operate counter to singular-authority modes.

In chapter 3, the author pulls on the thread of *roles*, attempting to disrupt not only the modern/colonial ideal of the “white, self-sufficient male” (borrowing the term from Willie James Jennings) as the quintessential model for leadership underlying many of the processes and standards of formation used by religious leadership, but also to interrogate various archetypes in which the exertion of *power over* people is the primary mode of operation (77).

Power itself is the pulled thread of chapter 4. The author draws on the work of Weber and Foucault, as well as various decolonial scholars to sketch out modern/colonial frameworks of power. She examines the notions of management and leadership, fleshing out the differences between the two, and problematizes the popular religious leadership trope of *servant leadership*. Lizardy-Hajbi suggests that religious leaders engage in the disruptive movements of “revealing” power dynamics within organizations and “reweaving” them through tactics such as mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity (124-130).

In chapter 5, Lizardy-Hajbi tugs on the thread of expertise in order to show the ways that the core habitus of *certainty* within modern/colonial frameworks of leadership (that is, the intertwining of knowledge and power) can lead to the exclusion of gifted leaders who do not meet the eurowestern standards of “excellence” demanded of a “learned clergy” (147-151). The author calls instead for institutions to employ a habitus of *curiosity*, placing higher values on more embodied and experiential knowledges and skills.

Finally, in chapter 6, the author takes up the thread of *change*, analyzing two popular models of *transformational leadership*: Ronald A. Heifetz’s adaptive leadership and John P. Kotter’s eight-step process for leading change. She challenges both of these models for their dependence on a singular leader and their underlying assumption that the telos of any institution should be to continue in perpetuity (167). As alternative models, the author highlights the work of adrienne marie brown around emergent strategy and collective leadership as well as that of Tricia Hersey around rest and resistance.

This book serves as an excellent primer in decolonial organizational theory and offers accessible, well-researched arguments to support the author’s deconstructive aims and her nods toward new theoretical possibilities. Few practical suggestions are offered, which the author admits is by design, so as to not tempt any notion of universal application that may reinforce hegemonic thinking (194). Nonetheless, Lizardy-Hajbi’s book easily earns a place on the shelf—alongside the work of those like Willie James Jennings, Keri Day, and Mark B. Jordan—for any theological education administrator, denominational leader, faculty member, or pastor looking for thought partners as they seek to reimagine the leaderships of their organizations.

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Maria Liu Wong. *On Becoming Wise Together: Learning and Leading in the City*. William B. Eerdmans, 2023. 158 pages. \$19.99.

Contributing to the *Theological Education Between the Times* (TEBT) series, Maria Liu Wong's *Becoming Wise Together: Learning and Leading in the City* seeks to engage in critical discourse on the purpose of theological education. Wong, the provost of City Seminary of New York, brings a fresh and dynamic perspective that challenges traditional Euro-North American paradigms of theological formation. Through an integrative approach, Wong incorporates her own lived experiences, pedagogical expertise, and praxis-oriented scholarship to advocate for a more holistic, communal, and contextually relevant model of theological education and a preaching class.

Wong claims that theological education must transcend rigid institutional frameworks and instead embrace a lifelong, relational, and contextually diverse process of learning. Wong's narrative is constructed through the lens of autoethnography, interweaving personal vignettes with critical reflections on education, leadership, and faith formation. Wong's immigrant background as a British-Chinese woman, her experiences as a missionary kid, and her life as a wife and mother inform learning as an ongoing, embodied, and communal act. Wong argues that theological education should not be confined to classrooms but should unfold within the interstitial spaces of life—on city streets, within friendships, and across generations.

A recurring motif throughout the book is the importance of lifelong and communal learning. Wong builds on the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5–9) to assert that theological education is not merely an academic pursuit for a select few, but a shared endeavor that involves the entire faith community (17). She underscores the significance of relationships in shaping theological understanding, emphasizing that true learning occurs in community. This perspective challenges the dominant individualistic and hierarchical models of theological training, advocating instead for an approach that values collaboration, diversity, and mutual accountability.

To be specific, Wong structures the book around six key themes, each forming a chapter: waiting, family, friends, learning, leading, and becoming. The first chapter explores waiting as the initial step in theological education, emphasizing the communal journey toward wisdom (5). Chapter two presents family as a foundational learning community (24), while chapter three highlights the role of friends as theological educators (53). Chapter four underscores the significance of shared learning as a holistic, interdisciplinary, and continuous process (79). Chapter five examines leadership as a dynamic, collaborative practice (100). Finally, chapter six concludes with a reflection on the process of becoming wise within a community (118). Wong enriches each chapter with artifacts and images from her personal history using them as symbolic entry points into the book's themes. These artifacts serve as prompts for reflection, encouraging readers to engage with their own formative experiences and explore the intersections of faith and learning in their lives.

Especially, in her discussion on leadership, Wong draws from her own experiences as an Asian woman in positions of influence and her research on global leadership styles among women. She presents leadership as a dynamic, relational process rather than a top-down exercise of authority. Her model of leadership is one of accompaniment rather than direction, reflecting Pope Francis's vision of a field hospital approach to ministry. Wong's insights challenge traditional notions of ministerial leadership, calling for a reimagining of theological formation that prioritizes listening, presence, and communal discernment over rigid institutional structures.

One of the book's most insightful contributions to preaching education is Wong's use of the metaphors of theological education as a pilgrim journey and the communion table (118–123). Those metaphors may frame preaching education as an inclusive, participatory, and transformative practice, fostering responsiveness to systemic injustice while cultivating wisdom deeply rooted in communal discernment. In this light, preaching education can be understood as a communal act that actively engages with evolving concerns and advocates for a process-oriented approach—one that prioritizes continuous engagement over static solutions.

In sum, *Becoming Wise Together* is a highly recommended resource for those interested in theological education, ministry leadership, and urban faith formation. Wong's innovative approach to theological education offers an inclusive, communal, and lifelong learning process. Wong's vision is relevant in a diverse and interconnected world, where theological education must adapt to the complexities of contemporary ministry. *Becoming Wise Together* is an essential addition to seminary and urban academic libraries, as well as a valuable resource for anyone committed to reimagining the future of Christian formation and preaching pedagogy.

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E. Trey Clark. *Black Contemplative Preaching: A Hidden History of Prayer, Proclamation, and Prophetic Witness*. Baylor University Press, 2024. 202 pages. \$39.99.

For the last two decades, scholars of Black preaching have contributed scholarship that has explored and described many compelling nuances and rich diversity within this broad preaching landscape. Their varied answers to the question, “What is Black preaching?” have given new insights for homileticians to consider. E. Trey Clark’s recent contribution to the body of contemporary scholarship on Black preaching is a valuable addition that casts light on another expression that has remained relatively hidden. His guide into the understudied subject of Black contemplative preaching embarks on describing, clarifying, and offering unique examples of this underappreciated homiletical expression, all while situating it within the broader conversations of Black preaching traditions.

Students of Black preaching will find Clark’s book to be more than an introduction to this distinct mode of preaching. What Clark offers is a lucid description of the theology and spirituality that underpins this sermonic expression, and he accompanies this descriptive work with clear and compelling examples from sermons of some of the most impactful Black preachers of their era. From beginning to end, Clark answers the question “What is Black contemplative preaching?” by pointing readers to preaching models of the past—in Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barbara Harris, as well as the present—in Frank Thomas, Luke Powery, and Ineda Pearl Adesanya. Constructively, Clark’s list does not end with these notable preachers but also includes the names of other contemporary preachers who embody the Black contemplative preaching tradition. While he does not offer extensive treatment of the latter group, Clark’s list lays the groundwork for students who wish to build on this tradition. Clark accomplishes his goal of presenting a clear definition of Black contemplative preaching as well as providing persuasive examples of preachers who model this tradition.

Helpfully, Clark’s methodological decision to include close readings of the sermons of his main subjects grants students opportunities to reflect on how contemplative preaching looks in practice. Despite the absence of audio/visual media to accompany his readings, Clark does an admirable job of describing the world of each text as well as how it functions within a Black contemplative homiletic framework. While finding the right balance between explanation and demonstration is always a challenge, my one wish was for additional examples of how the contemplative homiletic functions across multiple sermons for each of the model preachers. Further evidence of where and how the contemplative homiletic appears would have strengthened Clark’s claims.

For scholars interested in fresh interpretations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman, this volume satisfies. Those familiar with Thurman’s preaching might anticipate finding him among Clark’s list of preaching examples in the contemplative tradition. However, Clark’s chapter on King might be surprising. Was King, who is commonly noted for his stirring sermons that have rhythm, cadence, and passion, a contemplative preacher? Clark answers in the affirmative, and he provides good evidence to support his claim. Clark’s careful approach to re-interpreting King and suspending popularized images of him offers new insights that reveal a preacher who fits compellingly within the contemplative categories that Clark describes.

As with any attempt to place a preacher within a specific preaching tradition, some will certainly question the preachers that Clark elevates as models for the contemplative tradition, and for various reasons. One overarching concern might be that his list is too narrow. For example, each of the preachers on Clark’s list are “seminary trained,” a distinction that has been described

in scholarship as being in contrast to the Black “folk preaching” tradition. Folk preachers appear to be outside the scope of Clark’s inquiry, nevertheless, a more diverse list may strengthen his overall argument.

In the end, Clark’s project showcases another branch of the diversity within Black preaching traditions. For teachers of preaching, this volume will be a useful supplemental resource that will pair well with the more foundational texts on Black preaching, especially in courses that engage or at least survey the history and vast field of African American preaching.

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Donyelle C. McCray. *Is it a Sermon?: Art, Activism, and Genre Fluidity in African American Preaching*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2024. 166 pages. \$28.00

In her stimulating book, *Is it a Sermon?: Art, Activism, and Genre Fluidity in African American Preaching*, Donyelle C. McCray challenges traditional and contemporary perceptions of the sermonic genre. Seminarians and professors of preaching will find this book to be a pivotal discussion piece centered around powerfully effective alternatives within sermonic proclamation. McCray argues for sermon fluidity and centers the African American church as the home of these sermonic expressions. By fluidity, McCray communicates that sermonic genre is not monolithic or static; sermons are fluid, with movement and a variety of performance expressions. She sets the stage for an argument that stretches our imagination, fosters proclamatory inclusion, and empowers the body of Christ, particularly those who have been historically silenced and marginalized. McCray suggests that this book is about “the shoreline of homiletics, the place where preaching laps up against other forms of expression” (1).

In the introduction, McCray’s very writing reflects resistance, as she challenges the normative and conventional hermeneutical and homiletical definitions of the sermon. She offers a homiletical treatise that confronts those who often limit Christian proclamation to Sunday morning oratory from the pulpit. This traditional site of preaching, largely derived from dominant and conservative ecclesial and academic voices, attempts to legitimize “who” is authorized to preach and “how” the sermon should sound. To challenge this, McCray invites the reader to ask these poignant questions: “What modes of preaching get overlooked due to genre classification? What types of proclamation go unrecognized because they don’t meet our expectation for what a sermon is supposed to look like?” (2).

McCray organizes this seminal text in five chapters, each one focusing on an African American who engages in “genre-bending preaching” in their own improvisational and boundary-expanding proclamatory practice. True to the title of the text, McCray explores the artistry of dance in Thea Bowman, the melodic lyrics of Mahalia Jackson, the mystical contemplative practices of Howard Thurman, the literary genius of Toni Morrison, and the sacred skillful quilt making of Harriet Powers. These examples assert that artistic expression is, in fact, a form of preaching that transcends a stationary and static Sunday sermon.

Each chapter follows a consistent structure. First, a brief, but attention-gripping biographical sketch invites readers into the important details that shaped the inner lives of each “preacher.” After these personal portraits, McCray explains why and how the expressions of each of these artists and activists legitimately function as a sermon. She makes a compelling case that preaching in the African American church tradition is a bodily, sacred performance that requires mental and physical exertion. Of Mahalia Jackson, McCray states, “The emphasis on embodied wisdom turns on the assumption that a sermon is less like a speech and more like a performance of a biblical text or a performance of Christian truth” (22).

Three components make this text vital reading for upper-level graduate students looking to become more effective scholar-practitioners. First, McCray anchors her argument within the African American preaching tradition by identifying familiar artistic modes within the Black community and church as valid and bona fide acts of proclamation. For example, McCray rightly states, “African American women’s quilting has been an embodied practice that has often transferred cultural knowledge” (26). In similar fashion, the art of dancing and singing, represented here through Jackson and Bowman, respectively, are as foundational to worship in the Black church as preaching.

The second noteworthy strength is McCray's privileging and prioritizing of women as equally powerful partners of proclamation alongside their male colleagues. Four of the five preachers in the book are women. Black women have long struggled to find agency within the Black church, all while being ardent and powerful supporters. By featuring Jackson, Bowman, Morrison, and Harriet Powers (and fellow quilter Rosa Lee Tompkins) within their own autonomy and power, she demonstrates that these women are exemplars in their respective artistic medium, totally independent from male assistance and permission. The book includes various options for contemporary application, including, "Legacy and Practical Insights," stimulating questions for contemporary audiences, and challenges to identify other wordless ways of preaching (24).

While McCray mentions other possible examples of art and activism in the introduction, one or two more exemplars could have strengthened her argument and provided even more possibilities for exploration and reflection. Nevertheless, *Is it a Sermon* makes an important contribution to the field of homiletics by inviting us to think expansively and creatively about the forms and instantiations of preaching.

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Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornall. *Second Thoughts about the Second Coming: Understanding the End Times, Our Future, and Christian Hope*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2023. 180 pages. \$18.00.

For many contemporary Christians whose default framework is shaped by a scientific worldview, the return of Jesus and the notion of life after death remain perplexing and seemingly unverifiable mysteries. Because it is difficult to wrestle alone with questions that lack clear answers, popular understandings of the end times, the Second Coming, and the afterlife often emerge as a blend of fragmentary apocalyptic references and elements of popular culture. In *Second Thoughts about the Second Coming*, Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornwall engage these significant yet often neglected topics within mainline Christianity. They present the diverse understandings of eschatological themes found in Scripture, church history, and theological traditions, situating them within the broader framework of God's ultimate purposes.

The book is organized into twenty chapters across five sections. In the first section, Allen and Cornwall trace the diverse biblical perspectives on the Second Coming as they appear throughout the Old and New Testaments. From the apocalyptic imagery of Daniel to the Johannine theme of realized eschatology, they show how these visions emerged in times of struggle and offered hope in light of God's ultimate purposes, emphasizing Scripture's multivocal witness to the end-time.

The second section surveys how the church has continually reinterpreted eschatological themes across history. As Christianity became integrated into the dominant culture, the early expectation of an imminent return of Christ faded, though apocalyptic movements resurfaced in times of crisis. The Eastern Church envisioned the ultimate end as the universal restoration of all things, while the Western Church, influenced by Augustine's spiritualized eschatology, located hope in experiencing resurrection life in the present. During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin employed apocalyptic language to critique the papacy without anticipating a literal millennium, while more radical reformers sought to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth through theocratic communities.

In the third section, the authors summarize three major modern perspectives on the coming reign of God: premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Premillennialism anticipates Christ's imminent return to establish a literal thousand-year reign, often interpreting global crises as signs of the end. Postmillennialism, by contrast, envisions the church building the kingdom before Christ's return through the spread of the gospel and the Spirit's transforming work. Amillennialism interprets the millennium symbolically as the present reign of Christ within the church while retaining an open-ended expectation of the Second Coming (91). Each model represents a distinct way of relating divine purpose to human history and remains influential in different strands of Christian thought.

The fourth section explores contemporary theological voices that reinterpret eschatology for the modern world. Rudolf Bultmann's *demythologization* reinterprets the symbols of the Second Coming in existential terms, depicting them as expressions of redemption from the bondage of the old age—a form of realized eschatology (100). Jürgen Moltmann grounds his theology of hope in a relational God who seeks to redeem and heal the cosmos; believers experience “the presence of the future” in the present, living in hope and participating in God's work of liberation and healing through the Spirit (105). Liberation theology highlights the inbreaking of God's reign through human action for justice, while open theism and process theology portray the future as open, relational, and co-created with God. The Eastern Orthodox

vision centers on the Eucharist, and deification as the believer's journey into union with God. Together, these perspectives demonstrate ongoing efforts to articulate Christian eschatology in ways that are both intellectually credible and spiritually transformative for modern readers.

In the final section, the authors trace evolving understandings of death, resurrection, and the afterlife from Scripture to modern theology. The Bible emphasizes human beings as embodied creatures, affirming bodily resurrection rather than disembodied existence. Under Greek influence, however, the dominant view became that the soul ascends to heaven at death and reunites with a new body at the final judgment. Modern theologians variously interpret the afterlife as continued consciousness in God's consciousness or as the enduring influence of one's life beyond personal consciousness.

The authors recognize the deep interconnection between how we understand the future and how we live in the present, and they make complex theological ideas about eschatology and life after death accessible to readers without formal theological training. While the book's strength lies in its clarity and comprehensive scope, it functions primarily as an introduction. Rather than promoting a single viewpoint, Allen and Cornwall allow readers to appreciate the diversity of Christian reflection on the end times and the afterlife, inviting them to deepen their own theological understanding. While the book does not offer a distinctive argument, its restraint is intentional, serving as a theological primer that invites further study rather than offering definitive conclusions. For pastors, students, and lay readers alike, the book's clarity, accessibility, and balanced perspective make it a valuable resource and an excellent entry point into complex theological terrain.

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Oswald Bayer. *Promissio: The Reformational Turn in Luther's Theology*. Translated by Jeffrey G. Silcock. Fortress Press, 2025. 464 pages. \$59.99.

Oswald Bayer's scholarship on Luther has long focused on centering the notion of promise as the preeminent marker of the "Reformational turn" in his theology. His first book *Promissio*, having undergone a few editions since, was actually the product of Bayer's *Habilitation* writing decades ago in German. Since then, English speaking scholars have made do with translations of Bayer's subsequent works on Luther over the years (*Martin Luther's Theology*, 2008; *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 2017; and *Living by Faith*, 2017). But with Jeffrey Silcock's new and helpful translation of *Promissio*, Bayer's earliest wrestling with Luther is now more readily available to English readers.

Why should homileticians and preachers care about yet another work in the history of theology about Luther? At the heart of Bayer's thesis is the notion is that what truly shapes the Reformation is Luther's focus on God's promise given in the external word of preaching as a kind of effective sign. In Bayer's later publications, he adds sections where he links this notion of *promissio* to contemporary works by Austin and Searle on Speech Act Theory, which seeks to get beyond a constative understanding of words to get at their illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. But here in this new translation of Bayer's *Promissio* from 1971, this Reformational turn is understood chiefly through a constructive lens: a promise causes something to be and is not just a linguistic *signum* separated from its more important *res*.

It may be that Bayer's work is important for homileticians and preachers who have grown weary of the inflated claims of the so-called New Homiletic that tried to dress up its high theology of the Word in Heideggerean philosophy and the Post-Bultmannian theologies of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. Our own recent struggles with such high claims for language and ontology have been empowered by critical theories of race and gender and more carefully wrought, thoroughly contextualized ways of limiting and relativizing the kinds of language we imagine are germane to early twenty-first century homiletics.

Yet this is precisely why a close reading of this new translation of Bayer's reading of Luther can be so valuable. Luther was not just some prematurely Modern figure towering over time but somehow not embodied and rooted *in* his late Medieval context. To the contrary, Bayer's interest in what makes Luther's turn to promise significant for the emerging Reformation is deeply shaped by Luther's late Medieval context, the theological options of the day, and above all a painful struggle with the sacrament of penance and its relationship to the spiritual practices that ran deep in Luther's own mind and body. The genius of Bayer's work is the way he describes in slow motion the painfully wrought changes of mind and conviction between 1514 and 1520 that make possible later works like *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *The Freedom of the Christian*. Bayer doesn't rehearse the story of Luther's insight about "promise" as some acontextual, inevitable victory, but as a struggle realized in fits and starts, and even by 1520, still conflicted and ambiguous.

The succession of chapters makes this plain. The struggle for Luther begins with a sermon from 1517 and the Old Testament professor's connection of his study of the scriptures with the penitential psalms in Part I (chapters 1-3). Part II (chapters 4-12) begins to identify key ways in which Luther shifts from his prior approach clearly suited to a monastic view of Christ "in the psalms" helping the spiritual reader to become aware of judgment and the need in salvation to appropriate the cross and suffering in one's life as the place where grace and salvation become active, even if that salvation is ambiguous and unsure. And it is this ambiguity

here that centers Bayer's important insight: what emerges out of Luther's early writing is not a dash toward the righteousness of God in Romans 3, but a deep reflection on the sacrament of penance itself and how its promise of absolution works. Luther's hard-won insight about the role of promise in absolution, of course, eventuates in ever more fulsome appreciations of how promise actually shapes first the Lord's Supper (chapter 6) and later Baptism (chapter 7), reforms his view of how the scriptures should be read meditatively (chapter 8) and the basis of prayer (chapter 10), and only then begins to ground Luther's view of preaching and the role of the Word of God. Along the way, the reader of Bayer's *Promissio* sees the real spiritual and theological struggle that Luther undergoes as he reflects on the role of the promise of absolution for penance and the sea change that only slowly effects its changes to Luther's thinking and praxis.

For my part, it makes no sense to recapitulate the heroic tendencies long enshrined in our understandings of the Reformers and their high regard for the Word of God over against the medieval synthesis. That is the path of cultural hegemony and only justifies forms of domination that still haunt us today. Bayer's take on Luther's reformational insight on promise, however, embraces the struggle and embodies the conflict in Luther's own life and the emergence of hard-won insight. For those of us who even now *struggle* with promise at the gates of hell, in the hauntings of colonial histories, and in the midst of exclusion and injustice, Bayer's *Promissio* allows readers to press toward a more critical appreciation of Luther's notion and how it might still hold value for us today.

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Jacob D. Myers and Sunggu A. Yang. *Preaching Philosophy: French Thought for Gospel Proclamation*. Baylor University Press, 2025. 274 pages. \$49.99.

Jacob D. Myers and Sunggu A. Yang provide a rich intersection between major 20<sup>th</sup>-century French philosophers and homiletics. *Preaching Philosophy* is not a book on how to preach philosophy but a formulation of several ways that philosophy does, or at least should, underpin homiletics. “Our preaching philosophy is that preaching *is* philosophy” (1). The authors in no way wish to supplant the centrality of the gospel for preaching’s content; however, they persuasively show how “the mode, medium, and message of Christian preaching overlap at every point with philosophy” (2). The five chapters are structured such that they pair an influential philosopher with a major preacher or homiletician. These pairings are typically topical. Myers and Yang allow the individual views of the figures to remain distinct while placing the perspectives in critical conversation.

The first chapter connects Julia Kristeva and Jarena Lee as a means of relating abjection and horror with Lee’s experiences preaching as a black woman. Pairing these two yields a focus on marginalized identity, especially regarding race and gender. The second chapter continues to examine the impact of the sociopolitical context on preachers and pulpits, drawing on Foucault and Craddock. Yang and Myers invite readers to consider Craddock’s investigation of authority and Foucault’s wrestling with power as a necessary reconsideration of the entangled power of preachers and pulpits. Chapter three foregrounds Philip Brook’s “truth through personality,” especially in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s articulation of habitus. This reframing of how Brooks is typically treated in homiletics continues to deepen the guild’s current emphasis on the intersection of experience, identity, and truth. Importantly, habitus and personality are viewed as more collective or interdependent than individualistic.

Chapter four places Luce Irigaray and John Broadus in conversation to discuss “their shared confidence in the power of discourse to shape the lived experiences of others” (99). Irigaray pushes back against phallogocentric discourse and how discourse itself is phallogocentric which offers points of connection and disconnection with Broadus’ emphasis on authenticity. The authors note that both “share a desire for discourse to foster the others’ becoming” (121). The final chapter explores Jean-Luc Marion and Henry Mitchell as a way of deepening homiletical considerations on biblical interpretation, revelation, and the Word of God. Mitchell’s central place for celebration is enhanced through “Marion’s phenomenology of givenness,” which “provides homiletics with a rigorous way of describing the unfolding of the Word as a gift for Christian proclamation” (151). While shorter than a full chapter, the book also contains a coda titled “Disturbing Homiletical Pedagogies with Gilles Deleuze” (161). Myers and Yang engage practical theology and theological education here, along with Deleuze, to shift toward a rhizomatic orientation for preaching.

*Preaching Philosophy* is intellectually rigorous but accessible for scholars of homiletics. Readers do not need to be experts in French philosophy to benefit from the book as the authors do an excellent job framing concepts and figures. In fact, the book would serve well to introduce advanced homiletics students to the intersection of philosophy and homiletics. In addition to the main interlocutors of the chapters, the work engages many recent significant texts in homiletics which discuss matters of identity or experience. In this way, the text engages robustly 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy and 21<sup>st</sup>-century homiletics. Yang and Myers do not seek agreement between their intra-chapter interlocutors. This is important as it would otherwise reduce their arguments

and views. It's helpful to read the points of convergence and divergence, which hopefully prompt additional critical consideration in the reader.

The introduction outlines a helpful homiletical circle which can serve as a framework for the book. The authors argue that each element of the circle is essential to preaching, and the individual chapters relate to some aspect(s) of the circle. The circle includes *socius* (congregation/society), Selfhood (Preachers), Scripture, and Sermon (5). The episodic nature of the chapters though means the homiletical circle fades out of view in the chapters as a heuristic guide. While I believe it was not the intention of the authors to provide a full description of the homiletical circle, or how the individual thinkers could contribute to the homiletical circle, perhaps readers needing additional conceptual guidance navigating the work would benefit by returning to the homiletical circle in the introduction every so often. However, such a structure might counter the rhizomatic pedagogical approach outlined by the authors in the Coda.

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Nelson Cowan. *Let the Children Lead: Models for Worship with All Generations*. Abingdon Press, 2025. 95 pages. \$17.99.

In this theologically rich and pastorally sensitive book, Cowan invites us to shift away from a transactional approach to ministry with children that focuses on “institutional preservation” and to instead prioritize forming lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ (ix). *Let the Children Lead* is Christocentric, ecumenical, and practical.

Cowan understands the anxiety many feel about the decline of organized religion in the United States but cautions against the idolatry of numbers. He reminds us that children are “worshippers in their own right” (x) and not “numbers that ensure the survival of church institutions” (xii). Worship is not the domain of adults but “the work of all God’s people,” and Christ’s youngest disciples deserve agency in worship (13). Rather than recommending a separate service, Cowan offers five different models to help ministers empower children to participate and lead in intergenerational worship.

Chapter 1 begins the “intentional work of unlearning” in order to reframe how we approach ministry with children (1). Cowan describes the shortcomings of a transactional model and lays theological groundwork for the alternative models to follow by offering “four scripturally rooted ‘reframing’ statements” about children and worship (2). Chapters 2-6 provide five different models for ministry with children and each is accompanied by two case studies demonstrating how a particular model has been implemented by a local community (from different denominations in diverse locations).

Chapter 2 focuses on creating a hospitable worship environment for children through the example of pray-grounds. Chapter 3 offers strategies for sensory sensitive worship and reminds us that people with Sensory Processing Sensitivity “are not an obscure subgroup within our congregations—they’re a significant part of our worshiping body” (26). Chapter 4 argues that worship needs to extend beyond the church’s walls through missional outreach because many families with children may not attend Sunday services and the church must “meet families where they are” (40). Chapter 5 emphasizes the importance of church-school partnerships, addressing both religiously-affiliated and public schools. Finally, Chapter 6 explores children’s participation in contemporary worship through planning and leading. While the majority of this chapter is devoted to music, the case studies also demonstrate that children “contribute ideas about scripture passages, song selections, and artistic elements, provide feedback, and engage in theological reflection about worship” (71). Finally, Chapter 7 pairs insights from scripture and social science to offer four central takeaways about children’s participation in worship. These “theologically informed and research-backed takeaways” emphasize “the formative value of play, the surprising importance of boredom, the generational benefits of childhood leadership development, and the necessity of empowering parents and caregivers to be faith leaders in the home” (94).

Rather than suggesting that there is only one right way to form intentional disciples, Cowan stresses that these models are like tools in a toolbox. Readers need not feel pressured to choose one or to adopt them all, but should instead discern what will best serve their particular community, following the principle of “liturgical inculturation” (51). To assist ministers with this discernment, each chapter helpfully concludes with a list of the benefits and challenges of implementing each model and includes links to additional online resources.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is Cowan’s focus on the intimate connection between worship and the arts. My one critique is that there is little in this text about how children

might lead or participate more fully in *preaching*. While Cowan devotes significant attention to liturgical spaces, the overall worship environment, and music, he says little about preaching other than a few passing comments about how “children never seem to be in the mind of preachers when writing their sermons” (81) and “we need preaching that speaks to all ages—not just the adults” (82). Readers of *Homiletic* may be disappointed that none of the models elaborate fully on how to remedy this difficulty.

While addressed most explicitly to pastors, this book is a worthwhile read for parents, professors, and anyone invested in children’s faith formation. The book is oriented most clearly to a Protestant audience, but as a Roman Catholic reader, I found many insights applicable to my own tradition. Cowan writes with clarity, credibility, and compassion drawing on his experience as an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, the director of the Center for Worship and the Arts at Samford University, and the father of a young daughter.

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Neal D. Presa. *Worship, Justice, and Joy: A Liturgical Pilgrimage*. Cascade Books, 2025. 108 pages. \$17.99.

Many Christians would describe their current season as one marked by hurry, burnout, and the felt absence of God's reconciling justice. Put another way, those in the pulpit and the pew are often experiencing joylessness. In *Worship, Justice, and Joy: A Liturgical Pilgrimage*, Neal Presa offers a vulnerable recounting of his own recent journey from joylessness to a place of deep-seated rest and orientation in Joy.

This concise and accessible book is part of the Worship and Witness series, intended to offer interdisciplinary, global perspectives on contemporary issues in public worship. The purpose of *Worship, Justice, and Joy* is most clearly summarized in the epilogue: "We live to worship the living God, who is the source and embodiment of joy, and because he is our Joy we seek to follow the Lord's will and ways. That means seeking the healing and reconciliation of the world." Presa speaks from his experiences as a pastor, liturgical theologian, and former moderator (2012) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He also speaks as an American citizen who maintains rich familial and cultural ties with his Filipino heritage, and as an individual with a passion for reconciliation and justice.

The book's five chapters loosely trace the liturgical movements of gathering around, proclaiming, responding to, sealing, and bearing the Word. When we gather, it is an intentional act of becoming present to one another and to God, showing up with an expectation of encountering "Joy's Truth" (12). Presa suggests that the key to "Joy's Identity" is grounded in baptism, because "the promise of baptism's joy lingers with us for a lifetime" (19). Just as familial and cultural narratives reiterate aspects of personal identity (for better or worse), remembering our baptism reiterates our identity in connection *to* the Church and *for* the flourishing of the world (25).

The third chapter situates "Joy's Speech" in several words of wisdom Presa received upon beginning a portion of the Camino de Santiago. Presa suggests that the proclamation of the Word, especially through the vehicle of preaching, is "the antidote to our proclivity to listen to ourselves" or any other voice incapable of bringing true joy (37). Presa then turns to the significance of the Eucharist as "Joy's Feast." Here, we are encouraged to "attend to unfinished business in the household of faith" as we are reconciled to one another and spurred to offer the feast of joy where injustice has reigned (53). The final chapter discusses "Joy's Work and Witness," which Presa describes as "prayerful action and active prayer for God's shalom vision of transformative justice to be effected in the world" (67).

*Worship, Justice, and Joy* is directed toward church leaders and congregants alike. It will speak most deeply to those seeking ways to connect with the liturgy in desert seasons. Within each chapter, Presa intertwines several salient episodes from his own recent experience. Though Presa suggests in the introduction that this is "not a personal memoir," the prominence and level of detail in his personal narrative nonetheless shape the overall tone of the book (xx).

As a result, the book is most successful when read as a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage occurs in a specific context, allows for "stops" to make observations within that context, and has an intended destination. Here, the pilgrimage is distinctly Presa's, set within the worship pattern of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The stops along the way include the sights of the Camino de Santiago, the virtual spaces of ministry during Covid-19, the traditions of Filipino family gatherings, and peaceful demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd's murder. The destination

is a renewed encouragement that we have “been given this season of eternity called life for worship, with joy, for the sake of God’s transformative justice in the world” (79).

Readers will get the most out of this book in their own pursuit of communion with Joy by turning inward after each chapter to consider their own current narrative. The need for this space is anticipated in the structure of the book, which provides questions for reflection and discussion alongside prayers for individual or communal use at the end of each chapter.

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Cole Arthur Riley. *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*. Convergent, 2024. 336 pages. \$22.00.

Dear Reader,

It's a beautiful late summer evening in Indiana, and I am currently enjoying looking at the light that hits the trees just outside my office window. During this golden hour, I am reminded of the invitation of breath that Cole Arthur Riley offers in her work, *Black Liturgies*. You may be wondering why you are reading a letter when you are supposed to be reading a more traditional book review. I often find it difficult to offer an official review for books that call us to creative rest. They offer resources for what our hearts long for, putting words to longings we have not yet been able to articulate. Through words, they carve out space and time for rest, reflection, and rejuvenation. And in that way, reviewing or grading them feels wrong. This is exactly how I felt reading *Black Liturgies*. This text has created so much space personally for me and for others who are wrestling with the spaces that their faith seems to demand, but their bodies are not able to go. Perhaps this is because we are dealing with the kind of whiteness, heteronormativity, and patriarchy that restricts our bodies but demands our spirits to assimilate into a way we were never meant to be. *Black Liturgies* gives us room to reclaim our agency and power to become all that we are and to allow our faith to not forget our bodies. Because of this, I ask that you allow me the liberty of being inspired by this work to offer a reflection that mimics its structure.

**INHALE:** This isn't what I thought it was going to be

**EXHALE:** I am open to the experience

In so many ways, *Black Liturgies* is a love letter to my frustrations and my hope. Offered in two parts, Riley captures the kind of spiritual emergence that is just as painful as it is wonderful. She artfully incorporates letters that offer snapshots into her life (an exquisite form of storytelling we encounter in her previous work, *This Here Flesh*), with breathwork, prayers, poetry, and confessions. The first section is dedicated to the questions and longings of the human experience (Belonging and Wonder are two of my favorites), while the second offers liturgies for moments in time (including traditional liturgical calendar dates and other cultural moments like Juneteenth). Although you can, it is not a work I would recommend reading cover to cover. This is something you are meant to live *in* and *with*.

**INHALE:** Not everything is for my consumption

**EXHALE:** I get to take my time

One of the most important aspects of this text is the focus on the emergent and expansive nature of black spirituality. Conceived in a time of wrestling and reclaiming of Riley's own spiritual story and birthed through social media in response to the continued harm to black bodies, *Black Liturgies* itself becomes a portal to the kinds of worlds where Black bodies and experiences are centered and seen.

A prayer as you read *Black Liturgies*:

To the One who sees: We often come to texts eager for what they will teach us. We want to learn, to know, to master. In doing so, we can miss the opportunity that this work invites us to. Remind us that it is ok to take our time. Let the prayers and breath invocation of this work stop us in our tracks. When we are eager to read and finish so that we can say we've conquered the material, make us lie down and rest. For those of us who come to this material as a non-black person, remind us that our decentering is not a threat. For those of us who are black, remind us not to shy away from being seen and heard. Let this work give us permission to stand fully in our rage, our

lament, our hope, and our joy. Let the practice of the breath remind us that we are here, that you and the ancestors are with us, and much like our life, our breath matters.

It is my hope that you will not only read *Black Liturgies*, but that you will allow the work to inspire the kinds of practices that invoke a wonder and dignity immersed throughout its pages.

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