

## 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/ao-h-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.