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## **Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation on Preaching and Postcolonial Theology**

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The essays that follow were first presented as part of a consultation on preaching and postcolonial theology at Boston University in October, 2014, sponsored by the BU Center for Practical Theology. The consultation was an opportunity to bring together a leading scholar in postcolonial theology, Dr. Kwok Pui-lan of Episcopal Theological Seminary; two homileticians who have already started to grapple with postcolonial theory and theology in their work, Drs. Pablo Jiménez and Sarah Travis; and two Ph.D. students, Revs. Tim Jones and Lis Valle, from BU and Vanderbilt respectively.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this interdisciplinary consultation was to jump start a wider conversation on today's postcolonial context in North American homiletics for the sake of the practice of preaching. As an ad hoc research team for the fall term of 2014, we editors named above were all pleased to help bring this consultation together and are now excited to bring its fruits to you, the international and diverse body of homileticians based in North America, the Academy of Homiletics.

### **About “Us”**

The editorial word “we” is chosen with postcolonial care and apprehension. In fact, even “we” are not the same. Revs. Go and Lee, as co-editors, write as graduate research assistants in connection with the mentoring goals of the homiletics Ph.D. program at BU. Both Go and Lee are from Korea and have thus crossed borders for the sake of graduate education in homiletics in the US. Dr. Jacobsen, by contrast, is an Anglo academic employed full-time as a professor and research project director at BU. The point of this self-reflexive disclosure is two-fold. First, one of the hallmarks of postcolonial theory is that it encourages a kind of self-reflexivity about difference and differential power. While the topic of the consultation itself was “preaching in intercultural contexts,” graduate education itself at BU is already intercultural and this, too, needs to be acknowledged and named and not occluded. This is important because both preaching and homiletics are affected by a postcolonial context of migration of persons, intercultural communication, and power differentials that are shaped by the realities of neocolonialism today. We editors are not seeking to be trendy by advancing postcolonial theory as the latest intellectual fad, but honestly facing the truth of our daily realities in church and academy—one that we know first-hand, albeit differently. “We” are always and already affected in our deepest interactions by colonialism. Second, our self-reflexive disclosure establishes from the beginning a complex way of thinking that has not always shaped the way North American homiletics has conceived its work with respect to culture and identity. Identity, or better, identities are not fixed, self-possession, some object of individual self-mastery in understanding, but realized precisely in relationships marked by intercultural interactions. Some of this is inflected in our editorial work by the fact that our discourse is gendered. Still, the capacity for self-reflexivity is not done for its own sake, but for the sake of sound preaching. Both preaching and homiletics are enmeshed in intercultural relationships, that is, take place in a postcolonial context of cultural difference, immigration, and the vestiges of colonial power in the lives of

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks go to Drs. Shelly Rambo, Cristian De La Rosa, and Sung Jung Oh, who together with Revs. Yohan Go and Duse Lee, responded to the papers at the consultation in October, 2014. Their responses were crucial in the process of revising these papers for publication.

human beings living in God's good creation. In the Heidelberg Disputations, Luther argues that a theology of the cross calls a thing what it really is. "We" as the editors of these papers, seek to help North American preaching and homiletics to preach good news in the shadow of that cross: that means, seeing our postcolonial context for what it really is. It may not be easy, but "we" think you will find it worthwhile.

### **Postcolonial Theology: A Primer for Reading the Essays to Follow**

All of this self-reflexivity begs for a definition of just what postcolonial theology or theory is. We therefore write a few paragraphs here at the outset to present you collegial readers with a postcolonial primer. The goal of such a primer is not to get you the reader ready for some univocal definition, but to prepare you to engage the gracious difference that is to come.

We begin by noting that bringing postcolonial theology and theory in closer relationship to the work of the Academy of Homiletics may not actually be a far stretch.<sup>2</sup> A number of us in homiletics are also members of the biblical guild. For years, biblical scholars like Warren Carter, Richard Horsley, and John Dominic Crossan have profited from Empire studies that situate biblical texts in the context of imperial and colonial realities in history. Biblical scholars have also witnessed since the early 1990s a burgeoning of literature on postcolonial hermeneutics, which then asks how to interpret biblical texts in light of the *present* context of neocolonial relationships as both a global and local reality. These include scholars like Fernando Segovia, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Musa Dube. In recent years, similar work has been done in theology where the writings of Kwok Pui-lan, Myra Rivera, and Catherine Keller have brought postcolonial theology to the fore. Many homileticians have likely dabbled in postcolonial theology or theory indirectly just by looking over their colleagues' shoulders.

For those who have not, however, it might be helpful to consider some of the main elements of postcolonial theory as developed in the work of scholars like Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.<sup>3</sup> We might begin with the prefix "post." The idea here is not so much that we are looking at colonial relationships in the rear view mirror: as in, once there were subjugated colonies, but now there are democracies. The term postcolonial is about naming a set of relationships that continue to haunt the realities of life lived in world of the migration of peoples, economic oppression, intercultural meetings and conversations, and the privileging of certain American or Euro-centric ways of doing things, thinking, and speaking. Many postcolonial theologians point to the neocolonial reality we live in today. Perhaps the United States is not a full-fledged imperium with vast colonies in the style of say, the British Empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (although there are parts of the *Pax Americana* world where that would be true!), but even after the wave of nations who threw off the yoke of European colonialisms in the 1960s still live under the *neocolonial* power of the US, which influences life elsewhere by being the guarantor of an economic, cultural, and military world order. The post in postcolonialism does not mean that the relational reality of colonial interactions in life is over. Far from it—in fact, that is precisely part of its complexity and plurivocity.

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<sup>2</sup> A few homileticians have ventured into postcolonial spaces already. See Pablo Jiménez, "Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González's Contribution to Hispanic Preaching." In *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Apuntes in honor of Justo L. González* (A. Padilla et al., eds.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 159–67; Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); and Luke Powery, "Postcolonial Criticism," *New Interpreter's Bible Handbook of Preaching*, (P. Wilson, J. Childers, C. LaRue, and J. Rottman, eds.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful introductory summary that places some of the above named figures in the context of the literature, one may wish to read Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.; London: Routledge, 2005).

For postcolonial theory culture and identity are not fixed realities, but interactive. This is why postcolonial theory includes nuanced and differentiated terms like hybridity and third space.

Hybridity refers to the way identities are not fixed and univocal, but themselves “hybrid” or mixed. It is the nature of our postcolonial context that identity is usually constructed by means of a foil: a binary that differentiates between good and bad cultural identities, white vs. non-white, reasonable vs. emotional, civilized vs. barbaric. In reality, our identities are not so univocal as such colonial discourse would seem to stipulate and for whom the notion of hybridity and mixing (whether understood racially or culturally) is a matter of anxiety. It is as if we needed colonialist language to shore up the truly conflicted identities we are! Hybridity challenges the notion that cultural identities are about purity and superiority. Hybridity also assumes that one need not surrender one identity for another (say, a person living in a colony adopting the worldview of his/her colonizer) nor simply recover some ancient identity pure of colonial influence (a romantic move). Instead, hybridity can help persons attempt to construct an identity out of the postcolonial context itself, an intercultural meeting place of differentiated power where identity is necessarily forged. Depending on the colonizing power and its work of subjugation, both colonizer and colonized find their identities problematized in the postcolonial context, which has huge implications for preaching itself. So much of recent homiletic theory in North America has tended to speak of identity and culture in univocal terms in a given community, whether in the general turn to culture in the Tillichian tendencies of the so-called new homiletic or in the countercultural embrace of postliberal versions of identity. Hybridity can help contemporary homiletics explore identity as a place of productive, multivocal tension.

Third space refers to a notion that Homi Bhabha developed to describe new places where cultures meet and form. If hybridity refers to the kind of mixing of identities and cultures that empires feared but inevitably spawned, third space refers to the new places or locations where identities and cultures meet and hierarchies may be overturned.<sup>4</sup> The notion of third space is itself both troublesome and promising for thinking through and living out decolonized identities, practices (like preaching), and discourses (like homiletics). Given the fact that preachers and hearers find themselves in ever more diverse contexts, postcolonial theology offers new vistas for thinking about the language and images we use in preaching as acts of representation, the ways we construe ourselves and our hearers in their contexts, and the kinds of sinful realities and hopeful visions we might name in the intercultural, postcolonial reality that we live in.

This in turn is important for the practice of preaching and the discipline of homiletics in North America and beyond. “We,” the editors, and “you,” the readers are already enmeshed in a postcolonial context, both as colonizer and colonized. We do not enter into these realities on behalf of someone else, but mixed up in our own entanglements and de-formations of relationships and identities with others. Our hope is that you will view the dialogue in the articles to follow itself as an intercultural process: where the Word of God is heard in interaction with others, whether African-American, Anglo, Korean, or Latin@. Just what does gospel sound like in this intercultural, postcolonial context in which we live? The papers to follow will help all of us to discern not only each other and ourselves, but the new thing God is doing.

### **The Essays: Preaching, Postcolonial Theology, and Intercultural Contexts**

Although there is also no single, univocal definition of postcolonial preaching among the authors of these essays, there are notable convergences among the essays in understandings of postcolonial preaching and its tasks in intercultural contexts. In this brief summary, we aim for

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<sup>4</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Cultures In Between” in *Artforum* (September 1993), 167–214.

an overview of what is to come in this conversation to enable your deeper participation as readers.

In “Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Context,” Kwok Pui-lan explores the central issues of postcolonial preaching and proposes a definition of postcolonial preaching as “a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encountering God’s salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized.”<sup>5</sup> According to this definition, preaching is a performative action that seeks to create new places where two or more cultures meet and new potential identities, which are fluid, porous, and hybrid, are forged. This is a subversive action against the binary logic of colonial discourse that seeks only a univocal identity and one narrowly defined by territorial, cultural or racial essentialism. Second, preaching as performance is not an individual task of the pastor but is a communal task of an entire faith community. Not only the authority to preach is to be shared with members of the community, but also the recovery of the dynamic interaction between a preacher and a congregation in the preaching event is necessary. The purpose of preaching is to create and nurture a multivocal and dialogical community rather than seeking a univocal and homogenous communal identity by means of persuasion through preaching.

In his article “If You Just Close Your Eyes,” Pablo Jiménez criticizes traditional deductive preaching as colonial preaching and calls for developing a postcolonial Caribbean homiletic aimed at the liberation of the Caribbean people. He points out some of the necessary building blocks for a postcolonial homiletic from the Caribbean. First, Jiménez advocates for a *new reading of history* that helps Caribbeans realize the foundational crimes of modernity perpetrated upon them. Second, he calls for a “pastoral theology” that empowers the people of God to face and resist against both personal and social sin. Third, Jiménez champions a *biblical hermeneutics* that rejects imperialistic readings of the Bible and fosters the liberation of people. Fourth, he calls for a *critical dialogue with postmodern homiletics* in North America that will provide a fertile resource to develop a postcolonial Caribbean homiletic. With these fundamental building blocks, Jiménez envisions developing a multilingual, multicultural, and ecumenical postcolonial homiletic in the Caribbean context.

In “Toward Postcolonial Liturgical Preaching,” Lis Valle points out the segregation of Christian congregations in the United States as both a consequence of imperialism and colonialism from the past and a cause of continuing cycles of oppression in the present. As a way of overcoming segregation in worship and decolonizing religious rituals, Valle develops a postcolonial liturgical preaching from a distinctively Caribbean perspective by means of a dialogue with the Caribbean religion of the Taíno. In the complementary dualities of the Taíno worldview, Valle finds a contextually relevant resource to resist colonial systems and a corresponding worldview that is built upon antagonistic, binary divisions. Her proposal is a postcolonial liturgy in three movements: “(1) spaces of tension, consisting of lament and repentance; (2) journeying imaginatively, consisting of proclamation; and (3) experiences of connectedness, consisting of celebration and praise.”<sup>6</sup> The two-fold role of preaching in a postcolonial liturgy is to fund the imagination of the worshipers and construct alternative realities. A further role may be to facilitate worshipers in moving imaginatively from spaces of tension to eschatological moments of convergence characterized by connectedness and reconciling between colonized and colonizer.

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<sup>5</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Lis Valle, 9.

In his article, “Black Preaching in Brown Places,” Timothy Jones argues that, due to current demographic shifts in the United States, it is necessary to develop new homiletic strategies for black preaching that enable and aid intercultural congregational development. By using postcolonial concepts such as marginality, hybridity, and self-reflexivity, Jones finds some points of convergence between Black communities and Hispanic communities and takes them as the points of departure toward a Black Mestizo homiletic. The shared, oppressed condition of Black and Hispanic communities and the naming of their experience of marginalization in society offer a connecting point for the two merging communities. The postcolonial concept of hybrid identity provides a conceptual framework for developing a new understanding of preaching’s primary goal as the formation of a new kind of racialized identity beyond narrowly defined univocal ones.<sup>7</sup> The idea of self-reflexivity helps Black and Hispanic preachers critically reflect on their motives and connections to empire, thus revealing internalized and unquestioned colonial values and assumptions.

In “Troubled Gospel” Sarah Travis, like the other authors above, is keenly aware of her social location as a white, well-educated woman with stable financial resources. She is therefore clear about delimiting her work mainly for those who are white, affluent, European descendants. Travis develops a postcolonial understanding of preaching that “resists colonizing discourse by casting an alternative vision of human community”<sup>8</sup> based on the social doctrine of the Trinity. Travis defines postcolonial preaching as “a process of awareness, renaming, and identity formation.”<sup>9</sup> A function of decolonizing preaching is to awaken people with relative power from the delusion that they have so much power as to change the system. It also should make them realize their own captivity to empire and need of liberation. Thus, decolonizing preaching rejects a binary division of identity between colonized and colonizer and follows instead a postcolonial understanding of fluidity and hybridity of identity. In this sense, postcolonial preaching as the process of identity formation does not seek homogeneous identity. Rather it is the process of forming hybridized identity, even in communities of privilege.

### **Toward a Third Space in Homiletics: Preaching In Between**

Our hope in bringing together these conversation partners is to create a new kind of discussion, a homiletical-theoretical “third space,” if you will, in which we try to open a meaningful conversation about the inflection and transformation of theories and practices of preaching in light of a postcolonial, intercultural reality that we find in between us. “We” hope that you, as we have in undergoing this research process at BU School of Theology, will find yourselves both challenged and graced in mutuality and openness to hearing and perhaps even speaking gospel in new ways.

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<sup>7</sup> In this project I am searching for a homiletic that would lead Black congregations to be places of welcome for Latin@ members such that the racial identity of the church would be hybridized. These churches would no longer be seen solely as Black churches but as congregations that were able to be home for Black and Latin@ people. However, I am not interested in jettisoning the role that Black and Latin@ preaching has played in the formation of Black and Latin@ identity, respectively. On the contrary, I am imagining a homiletic that would both assist with the formation of Black and Latin@ identity while also forming a community that fused these identities together. This holding of relatively static Black and Latin@ individual identities in tension with the formation of a hybridized community racialized identities puts separates my understanding of identity from that of many postcolonial scholars who tend to see identity as a much more fluid concept.

<sup>8</sup> Travis, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



## Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts

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**Abstract:** *Postcolonial studies has been introduced to biblical studies, theology, and more recently to preaching. This article portrays postcolonial preaching as a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world. Postcolonial preaching must be done in the context of decolonizing worship, taking consideration of the use of symbols, liturgical texts, hymnody, scripture, and time and space. The author discusses how the preacher can engage the performative in postcolonial biblical studies and deal with heteroglossia in intercultural congregations.*

Postcolonial studies was introduced to biblical studies in the mid-1990s and to theology in the early 2000s. Postcolonial theory has raised our consciousness about the politics and rhetoric of empire in the Bible and theological tradition, in Eurocentrism and colonialist assumptions, in hidden and submerged voices, and in the plurality and diversity within Christian traditions. Several practical theologians have employed postcolonial insights in pastoral care and counseling, ministry, and missional practices.<sup>1</sup> However, relatively little has been written so far on how postcolonial studies might open up discussions in homiletics,<sup>2</sup> though several volumes have offered postcolonial perspectives on worship.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past several decades, much has changed in the discussions on the nature and function of preaching, the role of the preacher, and the form and rhetoric of the sermon in homiletical theory. The emphasis has shifted from the preacher as God's messenger delivering divine truth to God's people, to one that celebrates mutuality and solidarity between the preacher and the congregation.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, North American societies have become more culturally and religiously pluralistic because of immigration, travel, refugees, and diaspora. This paper explores issues of postcolonial preaching in intercultural contexts, discussing preaching in the hybrid church, preaching and decolonizing worship, engaging the performative in postcolonial biblical criticism, and preaching and heteroglossia.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Postcolonizing God: New Perspectives on Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2013), and Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Pablo Jiménez, "Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González's Contribution to Hispanic Preaching," in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. Alvin Padilla et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 159–67, and Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2011), and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

### Postcolonial Preaching in the Hybrid Church

Christian community can be intercultural in many ways. For example, as the global cities have become the crossroads of global migration, an urban church in a metropolitan area may have parishioners coming from diverse racial and national backgrounds. Some Black and Hispanic/Latino churches have members from a number of African and Latin American countries and must negotiate commonalities and differences in multiple ways. Even in a seemingly racially homogeneous church, such as a Korean American congregation, members of different generations may speak different languages and relate to the mainstream white culture in various ways. Both in our faith communities and in the wider society, more and more people are living in intercultural realities. As a result of colonialism and slavery in the past and globalization in the present, cultures are not isolated from but are intertwined with one another. I have defined “intercultural” as “the interaction and juxtaposition, as well as tension and resistance when two or more cultures are brought together sometimes organically and sometimes through violent means in the modern world.”<sup>5</sup> This intercultural approach allows us to theorize identity, experience, agency, and justice through a cross-cultural lens.

An important contribution of postcolonial theory is the challenge to the myths of racial or national purity, homogeneity of identity, and monolithic culture. Homi K. Bhabha uses the term “hybridity” to describe the intermingling of cultures, particularly in a colonial context. For him, hybridity is different from multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, which liberals embrace and celebrate. For hybridity focuses on “the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.”<sup>6</sup> Bhabha has called this in-between space the Third Space, which transgresses binary logic and questions narrowly defined identity politics. Postcolonial hybridity and the emergence of the Third Space challenge narratives of modernity based on colonialism, class, and patriarchy and any attempts to define the other based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other indicators.<sup>7</sup>

Christopher Baker builds on Bhabha’s theory to elucidate the characteristics of the hybrid church in the city. Studying emergent patterns of church-based communities that are involved in urban regeneration and civil renewal in England and the United States, Baker noticed important themes and implications for what he calls Third Space ecclesiology.<sup>8</sup> These church-based communities had constructed a local performative theology that was keenly aware of how global forces impinge upon the histories, experiences, and memories of locality. For Baker it is “performative,” which means it is pragmatic and committed to delivering outcomes. These communities hold the tension of local and global identities, which is an important form of hybridity in our global society. Instead of constructing rigid boundaries and narrow identities, these communities develop blurred identities to make room for all members, and to build coalitions with other faith groups and non-governmental organizations. In terms of structure, these communities exist in the hybrid spaces between the solid church and the liquid church. The solid church is associated with institution, hierarchy, and formal procedures, whereas the liquid church is dynamic and adaptable,

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<sup>5</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 38, emphasis his.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 125–35.

relying on networks and relationships. These communities also display a greater understanding of a spectrum of different types of hybridity—some do not challenge the status quo while others aim to subvert and destabilize the center. Baker recognizes that the Third Space is a difficult space to inhabit, with both potentialities and dangers. He writes, “This is the paradox of the Third Space; that just as it creates new potential identities and methodologies for all sections of society, but especially churches and other faith groups,” it also “creates the climate of fear of encountering the Other, who is now more in our midst than ever before.”<sup>9</sup>

Drawing from Baker’s work, I would portray postcolonial preaching as a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encountering God’s salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized. Traditional homiletical theory understands the purpose of preaching as persuasion or transmission of the sermon’s truth and message to the congregation. This understanding presumes that there is a gap between the preacher and the congregation, and that “the preacher has some insight or belief that the congregation needs to understand and accept.”<sup>10</sup> Preaching as performance does not concentrate on the preacher, but calls for greater focus on context and the rich convergence of performer, situation, setting, audience, and society. As some speech act theorists, such as J. L. Austin, have pointed out, utterances are not mere words, for they perform actions and have outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Through speech act and gestures, the preacher as performer seeks to act or consummate an action, to construct new realities, and to perform or signal possible new identities.

As both globalization and localization intensify in our contemporary world, it is critical for the preacher as performer to understand multiple subjectivities and belongings among members of the congregation. She must avoid defining identity based on territorial essentialism (e.g. Asia or Africa), cultural essentialism (e.g. Confucian), or racial essentialism (e.g. Black), because identity is fluid, porous, and hybrid, and is constantly shifting. With migration, international travel, and diaspora, we have to speak of identity not only in terms of multiplicity, but also translocality. Eleazar S. Fernandez says, “The translocal is a self that is porous to the interweaving of the many localities in the self. This person is locally rooted and globally winged. A translocal is one who experiences the interweaving, the tension, and the possibilities of one world of many worlds.”<sup>12</sup> Like a jazz player or a *bricoleur*, the preacher has to create or construct her performance from a diverse range of traditions and bring disparate elements together. Biblical scholar Tat-siong Benny Liew exhorts postcolonial critics to draw “resources available from various sites and transits liberally and flexibly, without pledging to any cultural, racial, or national canons or canonical standards, for the sake of justice making.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Orchestrating New Theological Overtures: Heterogeneity, Dissonance, and Fluidity vis-à-vis Imperial Monophony,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.1 (January 2012): 9, [http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume\\_3\\_\(2012\)\\_files/2%2013%201%20Intro.pdf](http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_3_(2012)_files/2%2013%201%20Intro.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Introduction: Intervening on the Postcolonial,” in *Postcolonial Intervention: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 15.

Since the aim of postcolonial preaching is to create a subversive Third Space, the preacher must dislodge the audience from common sense (which usually serves the status quo) and challenge the legacy of colonialism and the logic of empire. Sarah Travis describes the tasks of decolonizing preaching as follows:

These include recognizing difference and diversity within the listening community and beyond, naming colonialism/imperialism as a past and present reality, speaking against the damaging and destructive patterns and discourses that have emerged within colonial/imperial projects, and coming to terms with the relationship between Church and empire.<sup>14</sup>

To accomplish these tasks, preachers can learn from some of the approaches used by postcolonial theologians, including questioning Eurocentrism in biblical studies and theology, changing signifying practices, creating oppositional readings, questioning ideologies shaping gender, race, and class, lifting up marginalized or subjugated voices, and committing to anticolonial and anti-globalization theory and praxis.

The creation of Third Space is to enable both the preachers and listeners to imagine new ways of being in the world and to discern God's grace for the victims of history and the marginalized. The authority to speak and preach cannot reside in one person—usually in the pastor—but should be shared among members of the community. The separation of the preacher from the community could reinforce clericalism and the notion that the expert knows best. Instead, the postcolonial approach is “multivoiced, dialogical, and polycentric,” as theologian Christopher Duraisingh says.<sup>15</sup> The responsibility of preaching can be rotated among ordained and lay leaders, and others can and should be trained and equipped to take up the task. In a reversal of empire, those who are not given voice by society should be given the space and be empowered to share their stories and God's action in their midst.

Preaching as performance is political when it does not reinscribe power dynamics in the church and society but seeks, rather, to change and subvert them. As the work of Judith Butler has shown, the performative, including gestures and speech acts, produces results and constructs social reality. For her, identity is not something inborn or natural, but is acquired through repeated performances, which can be challenged and queered.<sup>16</sup> Butler has increasingly focused on the performative in the political and she has worked with her colleague Athena Athanasiou, a Greek feminist theorist. Commenting on the mass protests such as the Occupy movement, Athanasiou says these public gatherings enable and enact a “performativity of embodied agency” for social and political changes.<sup>17</sup> The participation in these gatherings involves corporeal vulnerability of fatigue, weariness, and police repression, but also “a shared affective economy of motivation, endurance, changeability, and vitalization.”<sup>18</sup> I have written elsewhere about how the church can learn from the

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<sup>14</sup> Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Duraisingh, “Towards a Postcolonial Re-Visioning of the Church's Faith, Witness, and Communion,” in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), 337.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 178.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Occupy movement.<sup>19</sup> The Christians I have interviewed who participated in the Occupy movement have experienced the presence of God in ways they have seldom experienced in the traditional church. The liturgy, the songs, and the preaching are often so patterned and routine they seldom stir people's imagination or touch their deepest feelings. It is little wonder that people in the pews are sometimes called "God's frozen people." For the church to be relevant and faithful to its prophetic calling, it needs to recover the "performativity of embodied agency" in preaching and worship.

### **Preaching and Decolonizing Worship**

Postcolonial preaching as performance does not take place in a vacuum, but in the matrix of Christian worship. Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns have applied postcolonial inquiries to the study of worship, including liturgical texts, symbolic contexts, hymnody, the use of Scripture, and time and space. They aim to expose "the issues of ideology and colonial agenda of western Christianity," and to problematize "the issues of language, imageries, symbols and representation in our liturgical/worship texts and symbols."<sup>20</sup> For example, they point to the ubiquitous use of the imageries of light and darkness in key texts and symbols in the classical Western liturgical tradition. Privileging light over darkness can lead to the marginalization of dark-skinned people, and the reinforcing of negative racial stereotypes. Their study also demonstrates that "much of European hymnody advances the cause of European colonialism." Victorian hymns were imperialistic, and many of them focused on empire and Christian militarism.<sup>21</sup> Many of these hymns, unfortunately, found their way into hymnody in many parts of the world and are still sung in translated versions. In the conclusion of their study, Jagessar and Burns call for more conscious reflection on liturgical rites and worship, with an openness to tradition—its authority and ambiguity—and a concomitant commitment to subject it to questions of colonial and postcolonial concerns.

Postcolonial preaching must take into consideration the totality of the worship experience, and the communal environments in which the preaching occurs. The preacher needs to pay attention to the use of sacred space, liturgical texts, symbols, architectural design, and hymnody. A tall pulpit placed far and separate from the congregation reinforces the authority of the preacher and her distance from members of the community. Also, the effects of liberative and subversive preaching are undermined by the singing of nineteenth-century triumphant, missionary hymns. The message of God's inclusive love for all is compromised by the use of androcentric language and images, which marginalize women's experiences. The pale-skinned Jesus and his disciples portrayed in the stained glass windows, together with predominant Western symbols and ambience in many churches, will also work against intercultural emphases in worship and preaching.

The preacher must be self-reflective about how her role, persona, rhetoric, style, and gestures might either hinder or further the cause of decolonizing worship. For example, in many traditions, the pastor or the preacher robes or puts on particular clothing or

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<sup>19</sup> Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 111–32.

<sup>20</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–53.

vestments.<sup>22</sup> Some, such as Presbyterian priest Jeffrey J. Meyers, argue that robing or putting on special clothing will emphasize the office of the pastor (or the preacher) and deemphasize the personality of the person in the pulpit. The preacher plays a symbolic role in worship, and the robe does not set him or her above the congregation; rather, it sets him or her apart because of the unique office the pastor or preacher plays in leading Sunday worship. Robing adds dignity and reverence to worship and makes the preacher look less like a CEO in formal business attire.<sup>23</sup> However, robing or wearing special clothing also has the danger of reinforcing a two-class system—clergy and laity—and a hierarchical structure. Moreover, in some traditions, the vestment or clothing reflects vestiges of empire and colonial authority. Glauco S. De Lima, Anglican bishop of San Paulo, Brazil, notes,

Beyond the very order and linguistic sources of our worship, even our clothing bears witness to a colonial origin. In the vestments and trimmings of the clergy, for example, on the bishop's surplice, the sleeves finish up at the cuffs in the same way as those of the noblemen in the British court.<sup>24</sup>

Even when the majority of Anglicans now live in the global South and more women being ordained, with a few even becoming bishops, the vestments have not changed much. It is important for the preacher to remember that she assumes certain roles and projects a certain persona when she robes or wears special clothing, since there are both expectations of and projections from the gathered community. If she chooses to wear the robe or vestment, she must be clear in her mind on why she is doing so and on how such a gesture will facilitate or hinder her postcolonial preaching. She should also explain the reasons to the congregation.

Traditionally, preaching means delivering a sermon behind the pulpit. Many books on homiletics provide guidelines and hints for the development of sermon forms, narrative structures, and rhythm and cadence of delivery.<sup>25</sup> But preaching a sermon is monological and, as such, does not create a plurivocal and dialogical community.<sup>26</sup> Except in the case of gifted preaching, listening to a sermon can be monotonous and boring, especially for young people who have grown up with mixed media in a digital age. Preaching as performance emphasizes the act as an art form; hence, it can borrow from different creative styles, such as dialogue, storytelling, dramatized presentation, skit, street theatre, call and response, and mixed media with images and music. In addition to using words, the preacher can evoke memory of the past and can inculcate new values and understanding through intentional movements, gestures, music, habits, and affects in the creation of new communal environments. Instead of delivering a lecture-style sermon taught in the academy, preachers

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<sup>22</sup> Martyn Percy discusses the development of vestments and clerical collar in *Clergy: The Origin of Species* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 88–91.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey J. Meyers, "Why Does the Pastor Wear a Robe?" *Theologia*, <http://www.homes.org/theologia/jeffrey-meyers/why-does-the-pastor-wear-a-robe>.

<sup>24</sup> Glauco S. de Lima, "Preface," in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Methods* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), and Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Burns makes some suggestions to make preaching more dialogical in *SCM Studyguide to Liturgy* (London: SCM, 2006), 88–90.

can learn from creative forms used by the common folk, and in popular religiosity. Justo L. González writes, “Most Hispanics do not see the sermon as a text, but rather as an event.”<sup>27</sup> An example is a sermon for Good Friday preached by Virgilio Elizondo and Patricia Elizondo in a dialogical form. The sermon included the voices of the narrator and the preacher, and between each section, a popular hymn in the Hispanic congregation was sung.<sup>28</sup> Virgilio Elizondo writes, this sermon “demonstrates that preaching is a lively way of doing ‘teología en conjunto’ [doing theology as a group].”<sup>29</sup>

Postcolonial preaching challenges Eurocentric styles of worship and preaching methods. Much has been written on how Black culture and preaching style are important for the vitality and empowerment of Black congregations. For example, Henry H. Mitchell focuses his study on the use of storytelling, role-play, spontaneous dramatization, imaginative elaboration of biblical stories, and preaching styles rooted in African American culture. He accentuates the idea of preaching as performance by discussing the use of mannerisms, musical tones or chanting, rhetorical flair, and slow delivery in preaching.<sup>30</sup> Evans E. Crawford turns his attention to a particular style of African American folk preaching: call and response. Rooted in West African tradition, the call and response style accounts for the musicality of speech in Black churches. In some churches, as the preacher speaks, the choir responds with a low rumbling hum to the musical intonations of the preacher. Crawford calls this “hum thoughts.”<sup>31</sup> In other styles of call and response, members of the congregation respond with sounds and gestures, and unburden their hearts with a “Preach!” or “Have Mercy!” or “Truly!” Both the preacher and congregation are engaged in creating a multivocal and lively performance that transgresses the speaker-listener model seen in most white churches.<sup>32</sup> Black female scholars have also discussed the gifts of Black women preachers and their struggles to overcome institutional sexism and gender bias.<sup>33</sup> Besides Black preaching, other preaching styles in racial and ethnic minority churches have also been studied. For example, Eunjoo Mary Kim analyzes the use of silence, indirect communication, and the spiral-form sermon in Asian American preaching.<sup>34</sup> Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez discuss the history, character, and methodological issues of preaching in the Hispanic congregation, and illustrate the discussion with samples of sermons.<sup>35</sup> These different preaching styles, however, are seldom analyzed in white,

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<sup>27</sup> Justo L. González, “Standing at the Púlpito,” in *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching*, ed. Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 57.

<sup>28</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, “Seven Last Words,” in *Púlpito*, 89–94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>30</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Act* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 88–97.

<sup>31</sup> Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Jones notes that sometimes the dialogical or the call and response models can also reinforce the authority of the preacher and the context must be taken into consideration.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God’s Word* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003); Donna E. Allen, *Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 106–28.

<sup>35</sup> González and Jiménez, *Púlpito*.

mainstream texts on preaching, which often focus on the preacher and the sermon, and less on the audience and the context.

### **Engaging the Performative in Postcolonial Biblical Criticism**

Postcolonial biblical criticism has made significant contributions to the field of biblical studies. R. S. Sugirtharajah writes, “What postcolonial biblical studies does is to focus on the whole issue of expansion, domination, and imperialism as central forces in defining both the biblical narratives and biblical interpretation.”<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew people and early Christians lived under the shadows of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. The Bible lends itself to postcolonial and intercultural studies because it deals with the themes of travel, space and spatial construction, movement, boundaries, borderland, border-crossing, crossroad, indigenized women and population, ethnic formation, diasporic communities, rhizomic fragments, uprooting, dis-placing place, displacement, transplantation, international power relations, and globalization processes.<sup>37</sup> Several scholars have discussed the implications of postcolonial biblical criticism for worship and preaching. Jagessar and Burns apply postcolonial criticism to the questioning of the assumptions and biases of lectionaries, while Travis offers examples of how postcolonial biblical criticism can be used in preaching.<sup>38</sup>

I want to explore the performative aspect of postcolonial biblical criticism, in order to glean insights from it for postcolonial preaching as performance. Musa W. Dube, a Botswana biblical scholar and author of *Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Interpretation*,<sup>39</sup> has written a creative piece of work, entitled “The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth.”<sup>40</sup> In the beginning of the piece, Dube creates a scene telling the readers how the narrator has found Orpah’s letters. Several women were sitting outside around a fire at night, discussing the images of Africa on TV, and in newspapers and books. A young woman named Lesedi was among them, and though she had been offered a scholarship to study anthropology elsewhere, she had just returned to Botswana. Lesedi was offended by the portrayal of non-Western and non-Christian people as savage, childish, lazy, and sexually immoral in the anthropological books she had read. All the women around the fire agreed they should tell their own stories, and not let others define who they are. And even though the eldest Grandmother had been telling stories about their intelligent ancestors all her life, no one had ever written or published them. Lesedi said she had returned to write their stories, and spent day and night doing it, though she could find no publisher. The narrator of the story found the letters to Ruth in a box in Lesedi’s room labeled “NO PUBLISHER.”

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<sup>36</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>37</sup> Fernando F. Segovia discusses these themes in the Gospel of John, see “Johannine Studies and Geopolitical: Reflections upon Absence and Irruption,” in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 281–306. These themes can also be found in other parts of the Bible.

<sup>38</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 71–85, and Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*, 109–26.

<sup>39</sup> Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Musa W. Dube, “The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth,” in *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (second series), ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 145–50.



By creating this imaginative scene, Dube lifts up several important themes in postcolonial criticism. Since the publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, postcolonial critics have paid much attention to the politics of representation.<sup>41</sup> Colonized peoples and people living in the global South have been portrayed as inferior, immoral, and lazy in order to justify Western colonization and control. The production of knowledge is closely related to power, and the native peoples do not have easy access to the means to publicize their own ideas. This reinforces the colonial ideology that the natives cannot represent themselves; therefore, the colonial West must represent them. In many cases, colonial knowledge about natives is taught to the natives as "objective" scholarship, so that they will harbor and internalize a biased view about themselves. But the natives are not passive, for they have constructed a counter-memory through their stories, told from generation to generation, and women have played a critical role in their remembrance.

The four letters that Orpah sent to Ruth, the younger Moabite sister, told about the origins of the Moabite people. Long ago after an earthquake in the land, Lot's children fled and sought refuge in Zoar, a small town in the southern end of the Dead Sea, and they multiplied into a people called Moabites. Because of a severe famine in Judah, Elimelech and Naomi came to Moab, and King Eglon offered them hospitality, so they settled there. Elimelech was very loyal to the King for this, and he was killed when he went to fight for the King's country during a war. The King vowed to bring up Mahlon and Chilion, the sons of Elimelech and Naomi, and betrothed his own daughters, Orpah and Ruth, to them. After King Eglon died, Balak, brother of Orpah and Ruth, succeeded him, but Mahlon and Chilion wanted to usurp the throne, so they murdered the king. Naomi became so distraught that she decided to return to her country with her daughters-in-law. Ruth had been close to Naomi since childhood and Orpah said it was right for Ruth to stay in Judah to take care of Naomi, an old childless widow. But Orpah followed Naomi's advice to return to Moab to take care of their widowed mother, and she later became the regent queen and priestess to her people. Orpah married a priest named Balaam, and they had a son named after Lot and a daughter named after Ruth, so that Ruth's name would not be forgotten in her own land. Orpah asked Ruth to tell her children about the stories of the Moabites, of their origins, of their hospitality, and of their struggles to survive.

In Orpah's letters, Dube uses the storytelling method to portray the history of the Moabites in a positive light, since the Hebrew Scripture often describes them negatively because Moab was often in conflict with its neighbor Israel. The letters tell the story from the side of Orpah, a minor and often forgotten character in the book of Ruth. Ruth's story is included in the canonical Bible and she is remembered as an ancestor of Jesus in the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel (1:5). But Orpah, who returned to Moab, was forgotten and she is never mentioned again in the Bible. The letters say Orpah and Ruth were princesses who lived in the royal court and were victims of the power struggles among their male kinsmen. After returning to Moab, Orpah became a leader of her people and officiated in religious duties, and she also bore two children. Even as Orpah's name was erased from Jewish memory, Orpah wanted Ruth's name to be remembered among her own people. Dube's storytelling demonstrates that the Bible can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, and she highlights the suffering of women and their children during war and

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<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

political strife. By creatively imagining the history and voice of the subjugated Orpah, Dube contributes to a growing body of postcolonial biblical criticism that focuses on the stories of indigenous women and women living in the contact zone, women like Rahab, Ruth, Orpah, and the Syrophenician woman.<sup>42</sup> Her storytelling offers a concrete example of postcolonial feminist criticism, which she says, must resist “both patriarchal and imperial oppression in order to cultivate a space of liberating interdependence between nations, genders, races, ethnicities, the environment, and development.”<sup>43</sup>

Another example of performative postcolonial criticism is my self-interview, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” published in one of the early texts of postcolonial biblical criticism.<sup>44</sup> I decided to use the form of interview that many other postcolonial theorists such as Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have used, which offers tremendous insights to their work and the background of their thinking.<sup>45</sup> In this self-interview, I playfully create a character “Quest” as the interviewer, since I want to discuss the contemporary interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus. The interview is conducted in a dialogical and colloquial manner:

**Quest:** Why are you obsessed with Jesus?

**Kwok:** I am not obsessed with Jesus, but I am obsessed with other people’s obsession with Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The mock interview discusses the work of the Jesus seminar, formed in 1985, to determine who Jesus really was and what he actually said. The participants cast colored balls to vote to determine which sayings are close to what Jesus actually said and which are less certain or were created by his followers. The interview proceeds to point out that the quest for the historical Jesus is a coded quest for origins. In the nineteenth century, the quest first took place in Europe, when Europe underwent tremendous changes as a result of the encounter with the colonized world. The current quest began in the United States around the 1980s and caught the attention of the mass media, and it was reported on National Public Radio, in *People* and *Time* magazines, and on TV.

**Quest:** Then why do the Americans have to search for origins?

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<sup>42</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*; Laura E. Donaldson, “The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth through Native Eyes,” in Brenner, ed. *Ruth and Esther*, 130–42; Kwok Pui-lan, “Finding Ruth a Home: Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Otherness,” in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 100–21; Kwok Pui-lan, “Woman, Dogs, and Crumbs: Constructing a Postcolonial Discourse,” in *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 71–83; Laura E. Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of Biblical Criticism,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Stephen D. Moore (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 97–113.

<sup>43</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 176–88.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Joseph A. Buttigieg and Paul A. Bové, “An Interview with Edward W. Said,” *Boundary 2*, 20 (1993): 1–25; Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–21; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> Kwok, “On Color-Coding Jesus,” 176.

**Kwok:** The straight white males in America have made a lot of noises saying that they have lost a lot of ground to women, minorities, and gays and lesbians. The mass media in the US has played up the angry white male syndrome. Whenever the white males are not certain about their identity, they search for Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

The self-interview discusses important topics, such as the changing contexts of the historical quests for Jesus, Orientalism in the study of the Bible and other sacred texts, and the treatment of the Bible as fetish and a museum object instead of a living tradition. It asks Christians from the global South to liberate themselves from the European and Euro-American hallucinations, and to reimagine reading the Bible as diasporic adventure. Yet, the interview is conducted with humor and satire, poking fun at the work of scholars engaged in the quests. The lightheartedness of performance is a great way to say that we cannot take the historical quest of Jesus seriously as if anyone can really truly offer us the “real Jesus.”

Postcolonial biblical criticism has been done in creative and imaginative ways, especially by women. In these two examples using letter writing, storytelling, and interview, I have shown how preachers can learn from the ingenuity of postcolonial critics, and can use different methods to introduce postcolonial biblical criticism in lively and contextual ways. I have published dramatized Bible studies and sermons, which can provide additional resources and insights for preachers.<sup>48</sup>

### **Postcolonial Preaching and Heteroglossia**

If the aim of postcolonial preaching is to create a multivocal and dialogical faith community committed to justice, we have to attend to the issue of language in intercultural contexts. In urban global cities, it is increasingly common to have church members speaking different mother tongues and immigrants struggling with English or another colonial language. Many of them live in bicultural and bilingual worlds, speak the dominant language with an accent, and must negotiate and translate constantly between hybrid contexts. The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of heteroglossia, which refers to the co-existence of a diversity of voices, styles of discourses or points of views in a literary work, particularly in a novel.<sup>49</sup> For Bakhtin, as Andrew Robinson notes, “Even within a single perspective, there are always multiple voices and perspectives, because the language which is used has been borrowed from others.”<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin criticizes monoglossical language, which is closed or deaf to the voices of difference and supports centralized forces. Heteroglossia interrupts the dominant discourse with other voices, and celebrates diversity and folk and festive language. How might heteroglossia impact our ways of thinking about preaching and its cultural environment?

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>48</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Prologue,” in *Discovering the Bible*, ix–xvi, and “Epilogue,” in *Discovering the Bible*, 96–100; Kwok Pui-lan, “Worshipping with Asian Women: A Homily on Jesus Healing the Daughter of a Canaanite Woman,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 236–42.

<sup>49</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Robinson, “Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia,” *Ceasefire*, <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/>.

Acts 2 offers a powerful image of heteroglossia. On the day of the Pentecost, the Spirit descends on the disciples. Biblical scholar Frank Yamada notes that “they do not break into a meta-language, a single tongue,” but “*divided* tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other *languages*” (Acts 2:3-4).<sup>51</sup> The people who gathered in Jerusalem were quite diverse, for there were diasporic Jews scattered throughout the empire and other proselytes.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. . . [there were] Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs (Acts 2:5–11).

The crowd gathered was bewildered, “because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (v.6). Yamada says that this passage affirms that God “prefers the plural over the singular, languages over a single-tongue, [and] cultures over one defining culture.”<sup>52</sup>

The diversity of the crowd speaking in different tongues in Jerusalem is not unlike what we can find in today’s urban churches in global cities, where immigrants from different nations gather to worship together. Language continues to be an important issue in postcolonial studies. In *Not Like a Native Speaker*, cultural critic Rey Chow discusses racialization as an encounter with language. The colonized encounter with the colonizing language has racial overtones, and is associated with the severance with the mother tongue and with the deprivation of linguistic autonomy and integrity. But Chow argues, such an encounter also “offers a privileged vantage point from which to view the postcolonial situation, for precisely the reason that this language has been imposed from without.”<sup>53</sup> The discussion of the use of Black English in preaching is a case in point.

Black English is the rich rendition of English spoken in the Black community, full of subtle shadings of sound, cadences, and color. For Henry H. Mitchell, a Black preacher must be able to preach in Black English in order “to touch the souls of Black folk with soul language,” and “to generate rapport with the congregation by means of an identity which is perceived as close.”<sup>54</sup> The kind of closeness and emotional support is not available in White-language preaching. He asserts, “No Black person can truly identify with a God who speaks only the language of the White oppressor.”<sup>55</sup> The use of Black language supports Black identity because it demonstrates that God’s message can be expressed by the language of the people. Yet, the use of Black language has pushback from middle-class Blacks, who think that the preacher should not use the language of the Black ghetto. Moreover, colleges and seminaries have trained Black clergy in standard white middle-class American English, with the assumption that “White is right.” The Black-culture churches find it difficult to understand or relate to trained Black clergy persons “preaching Whitese to them.” Mitchell’s

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<sup>51</sup> Frank M. Yamada, “The View from 2040: the Futures of Theological Education,” <http://mccormick.edu/assets/Inaugural%20Address.pdf>, emphasis his.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 83.

hope is that the Black clergy can both preach Black English in Black-culture churches and use “standard” English when communicating with the larger community, so that the Black churches will not be isolated. In this sense, the preacher serves as a cultural translator between the two communities.

Language is also an issue in Latino congregations, as they are bicultural and bilingual in varying degrees: some are Spanish-dominant and some are English-dominant. There are also generational differences between the older and younger generations, with the older generation being less acculturated into the mainstream culture. González describes the various ways Latino preachers adapt to the bilingual contexts:

Many preachers preach in one language and summarize their sermon in the other. Some translate their own sermon as they go along. An increasing number are becoming adept at a style of preaching in which a few sentences are said in English, the next few in Spanish, and so on, and this is done in such a way that people who have very limited proficiency in one of the two languages can still follow the sermon.<sup>56</sup>

González says that we should not regard bilingualism as a problem to be overcome, because the church should look toward a future in which a great multitude will come from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9). The church serves as a subversive sign to the future when it finds ways to worship and live in multicultural and multilingual ways.

The issue of language multiplies in a congregation with people who come from different nations and cultures. Even though we cannot expect the preacher to be multilingual, he or she needs to develop cultural sensitivity in working with a diverse congregation. Since words, metaphors, and symbols are polyvalent and might mean different things in different cultures, the preacher needs to be careful in cultural negotiation. For example, the symbol of the dragon represents the Devil or something evil in the Bible and in the Christian tradition. The book of Revelation is replete with negative images of the dragon and slaying and throwing down the beast (12:9; 13:1-2; 16:13; 20:2-3). However, in Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes power, strength, and good luck, and during the Chinese New Year, there is the dragon dance in Chinatowns in many cities.<sup>57</sup> The preacher can avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding if he or she is alert to the cultural backgrounds of church members. Opportunities for different groups of church members to share their culture with the congregation will promote dialogue and inclusivity.

Heteroglossia can be a threat but also a promise. In traditional homiletical theory, language is seen as transparent and meaning as stable. The task of the preacher is to impart to listeners the claim of the scriptural text or a message from God. In postcolonial preaching, preaching is a communal event, with the congregation participating and responding. The preacher needs to respond to the congregation—with its diversity and heteroglossia. As Edward Farley notes, “the world of preaching is not the safe and efficient world of applying verses and passages but the more muddy, unsafe, and uncertain world of interpreting the

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<sup>56</sup> González, “Standing at the Púlpito,” 61.

<sup>57</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew mentioned the different understandings of the symbol of the dragon during his lecture “Haunting Silence: Failed Orality and Mark’s (Messianic) Secret,” at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, October 2, 2014.

mysteries of faith.”<sup>58</sup> Heteroglossia is a promise, when different voices and discourses are brought to negotiate with one another, on how to best accommodate diverse perspectives. All are invited into the Third Space to examine the “inter” in our identities, languages, and cultures, and by doing so encounter the liberating grace of God in fresh ways.

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Farley, “Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching,” in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 169.

## **If You Just Close Your Eyes: Postcolonial Perspectives on Preaching from the Caribbean**

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**Abstract:** *This essay builds on the author's experiences hearing preaching while growing up in the Caribbean. The author offers an acute critique of the traditional sermon, affirming that "deductive preaching is colonial preaching." Acknowledging the contradictions common in the Caribbean, where the colonial and the postcolonial clash every day, Jiménez calls for the development of a postcolonial Caribbean homiletic.*

### **Introduction**

I had the joy and privilege of growing up in the Caribbean. While the majority of my friends grew up in Puerto Rico, where I lived most of my childhood, life led me to experience firsthand the English-speaking Caribbean.

I was born in New York City, in 1960, where my mom had escaped to hide the shame of being a single mother. In turn, my father moved to the US Virgin Islands, where he lived for almost 25 years. My mother's untimely death forced my father and me to begin a father-son relationship when I was 14 years old. From that time and until I turned 21, I spent close to three months of every year in St. Croix, which became my second home.

I came to the faith of Jesus the Christ when I was 15 years old, in the midst of much emotional turmoil. Therefore, I experienced life in the greater Caribbean at a crucial time in my formative years, not only in my social life but also in my intellectual and spiritual life.

### **St. Croix at Pentecost**

Maybe the deepest spiritual experience I had in St. Croix was a Pentecost celebration. I was a 20-year-old candidate to the ministry in 1980. I preached at my home church in Bayamón, PR that Pentecost morning, leaving straight to the airport to catch the short PRINAIR flight to the Alexander Hamilton Airport in St. Croix. My father picked me up around 2:00 p.m. and told me: "We are going to a *fiesta* before getting home."

The "*fiesta*" was a Pentecost celebration at an open-air auditorium in the middle of the Island. Over a thousand persons from different Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal congregations were gathered there, praising God. About a dozen ministers, including four Catholic priests, sat at the podium. The most amazing part of the celebration was the "Confession of Sins," where every priest and pastor acknowledged that they had contributed to the divisions of the Church. They not only asked God for forgiveness, but also apologized to their fellow ministers and to the ecumenical congregation in front of them. Then we all sang the "Our Father" to a beautiful Calypso beat, while one of the priests encourage us to dance to the Lord.

Sadly, that wonderful celebration ended on a low point. And, you guessed it, that low point was the sermon. The preacher for the evening was a renowned pastor affiliated with the Assemblies of God. He was considered as the best preacher in the Island at the time. He was so good, that a friend of mine once described him using the following words: "If you just closed your eyes, you think Billy Graham is preaching." If you just close your eyes...

## Deductive Preaching as Colonial Preaching

In all justice, the sermon was a flawless example of the traditional “three points and a poem” expository form. This form arrived to both the English and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean through books that advanced principles taken from the British rationalistic homiletic school, exemplified by Charles Haddon Spurgeon and John A. Broadus. It is a rather rigid form that sees the sermon as a rational exposition of the gospel, which aims to persuade the listener. It begins with an introduction where the preacher states a “proposition,” which is developed in the three sections or “points” that form the body of the sermon. The conclusion restates the “proposition,” illustrating it with an anecdote or a poem. At the end of the process, listeners should be convinced of the veracity of the proposition, leading each hearer to a deeper personal relationship with God.

As I hinted earlier, this deductive preaching style is a colonial vestige. It is patterned after colonial values and, unbeknownst to the preacher, even today it promotes a colonial mentality and a culture of dependency.

Let us enumerate some of the key characteristics of the traditional sermon.<sup>1</sup> First, it is deductive, privileging the concepts, ideas and hypothesis presented by the preacher from the very beginning. Such ideas are disincarnated from the biblical text, following a similar logic to Bultmann’s demythologizing program.<sup>2</sup> The biblical story is seen as the “outer shell” that must be “discarded” in order to reach the “propositional truths” that abide at the core of the Bible.

Second, the traditional sermon is monological, because it aims to be a scholarly discourse preached by an authoritative figure. In this scheme, the preacher is the expert that pours knowledge in the parishioners’ empty cups. This reminds us of Paulo Freire’s critique of the “banking model of education.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the roles are clear: the preacher speaks while the congregation listens.

Third, the traditional sermon is rationalistic, given that it aims to be an exposition that “proves” the veracity of its “propositional” central statement and its ultimate goal is to “persuade” the listener.

Fourth, if I stress the role of the listener—using the word in the singular—is because the traditional sermon is individualistic. Following the evangelical tenets of the eighteenth century, deductive preaching calls individuals to make “personal” decisions of faith. The aim is not to effect social change, but to help individuals to become closer to God. Instead of transforming society, traditional preaching seeks to change individuals. This explains why deeply pious people could preside over monstrosities, such as slavery, in the Caribbean. While they pitied the fate of the slaves, they felt no urge to challenge the slave trade nor to change the social system based on such trade.

Fifth, this all leads us to consider the topic of authority. The traditional sermon is authoritarian, because—in large part—it mirrors how authority is exerted in colonial societies. As we said earlier, in Colonial times deeply devout people presided over monstrosities, without ever challenging the system. This was all due to the idea that social stratification was divinely ordained. If Kings and Queens ruled by divine providence, then God legitimized all colonial structures, including slavery. According to this perspective, God also called preachers to affirm the colonial social order, in which religious leaders occupied positions of authority. The colonial

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<sup>1</sup> I have addressed this issue in my book, *La predicación en el Siglo XXI: Homilética contextual y contextual* (Barcelona: Editorial CLIE, 2009), particularly in Chapters 1 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Norman Perrin, *The Promise of Bultmann* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).



sermon is authoritarian because a person that is not only considered an authority but who also represents the colonial powers expounds it.

*In short, traditional deductive preaching is colonial preaching.* The persistence of this preaching style in the Caribbean transcends personal preferences, for traditional deductive preaching is an ideological expression of colonialism.

### **Worlds Colliding**

The reason why that wonderful Pentecost celebration in St. Croix fizzled as the sermon began was because the experience showcased the clash between the colonial and the postcolonial.

The celebration as such was thoroughly postcolonial. The gathered crowd, including its religious leaders, offered immense hope for change. White, Black and Latino/a parishioners and leaders united to worship as one. Differences disappeared, as people from the US Virgin Islands, The British Virgin Islands, Trinidad, Tobago, Martinique and even Puerto Rico worshiped to the beat of Calypso and Soca. Religious leaders transgressed traditional ethnic, racial and denominational lines in order to affirm the one true God. This was liberation worship at its best.

However, as soon as the sermon began, “if you just closed your eyes...,” everything changed. The preacher’s diction was flawless, leaving behind any Caribbean accent. His theology followed traditional Evangelical lines, ignoring the ecumenical setting of the service. The sermon was rationalistic, individualistic and authoritarian, betraying its colonial roots. This traditional sermon could have been preached in any other English-speaking country, given that it never made direct references to the Caribbean.

In short, while worship was postcolonial, the sermon was colonial. While worship called to liberation, the sermon called the people to acquiesce to inherited colonial power structures.

In many ways, the Pentecost Celebration I just described exemplifies what is wrong with preaching and homiletics in the Caribbean as a whole. As our societies struggle to move forward, negotiating the impact of colonialism in our many Islands, the traditional sermon continues to be a beacon of colonial ideology. Even when we make an effort to change our theological perspectives, the very form of the traditional deductive sermon affirms the values of colonial times.

The clash between the colonial and the postcolonial is evident in the Caribbean, leaving us with only one choice: We must “deconstruct” the traditional deductive preaching style in order to develop new homiletic vehicles aimed at the liberation of our people. Ministers, denominations and local churches must unite in this effort, creating myriad new preaching forms that embody the tenets of a postcolonial Caribbean theology.

### **Building a Postcolonial Caribbean Homiletic**

Of course, building a postcolonial homiletic from the Caribbean is no small task. Many factors divide our many islands. Beyond geographical considerations, we are divided by our colonial heritage into three main groups: English-speaking, Spanish-speaking and French-speaking nations. In turn, these groups may be also divided by language and culture, given that some islands still have colonial relations with the US while others relate to Great Britain.

Another wrinkle is the political spectrum, given that the political status may vary from island to island. In the Caribbean you can find independent nations, commonwealths that relate to a former colonial power, fully incorporated territories that function as “states” of the former metropolis, and non-incorporated territories, which are little more than colonies. Currently, I live

in Puerto Rico, a “non-incorporated” US territory, which makes it one of the oldest colonies in the world. Puerto Ricans are US citizens; yet, those who live in the island cannot vote for president and have no senators or voting representatives in Congress.

Finally, we are also divided by our economies, for in the Caribbean you can find some of the poorest nations in the world, such as Haiti, and nations with large per-capita income, such as the Cayman Islands.

Still, people of the Caribbean have many elements in common, which leads me to reiterate the need to somehow join efforts in order to rethink the faith from our multicultural and multilingual Caribbean setting.

### **Building Blocks**

In the space left we will point out some of the blocks needed to build a new postcolonial homiletic from the Caribbean. It is a simple outline, given that an in-depth exposition would require a book on the subject, illustrated with sermons preached from a postcolonial perspective.

### **History**

The first building block is a new reading of history, both of general and ecclesiastical history. Our point of departure must be, as Dr. Justo L. González stressed in *Mañana: An Introduction to Hispanic Theology*, a non-innocent reading of history.<sup>4</sup> Such non-innocent reading confronts us with the crimes of modernity, many of which took place with the Church’s silence or complicity. We know that we are born out of an act of violence of cosmic proportions in which our Spanish forefathers raped our Indian foremothers.<sup>5</sup>

Seen from the Caribbean, the violent conquest of America, the genocide of native peoples and the slave trade are modernity’s foundational crimes. Of course, these crimes took place with the blessing of the Church, as Luis N. Rivera-Pagán demonstrated in *A Violent Evangelism*.<sup>6</sup>

Church history, as a discipline, has minimized the role of the Church in the conquest. This explains why so many books about the Protestant Reformation fail to point out that this movement took place at the same time as the conquest of America. King Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire was Charles I of Spain. Therefore, the same King who confronted Martin Luther also presided over the colonization of the Caribbean basin. For that reason, González argues that it is impossible to understand the Reformation without studying the conquest of America.

However, many of us studied church history precisely in that way, as if the Reformation and the conquest had nothing in common.

Besides, church history rarely analyzes the development of Christian movements in the Caribbean. Most surveys read church history from the perspective of the so-called “First World,” expounding on the development of the Christian movement in Europe and in the United States. The history of Christianity in the Caribbean has been largely relegated to books about the history of Christian missions;<sup>7</sup> volumes that are rarely used as main textbooks on required church history courses.

Following González, we argue that a non-innocent reading of history will lead us to

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<sup>4</sup> Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Justo L. González, *The Development of Christianity in the Latin Caribbean* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969); Dale Bisnauth, *History of Religions in The Caribbean* (Kingston: LMH Publishing Limited, 1989).

recognize the continued impact of our colonial heritage in our collective minds. Furthermore, such new reading will help us overcome the artificial geographical and cultural boundaries imposed on the Caribbean by our colonial condition.

### **Pastoral Theology**

From history we move to theology. We use the qualifier “Pastoral” because we want to stress that all theological endeavors must empower the people of God to face and overcome personal and social sin as well as its dire consequences. This leads me to repeat a statement written by José David Rodríguez, a Puerto Rican theologian and professor of systematic theology, who said: “Our theology..., being the product of the painful encounter between the word of God and the experience of marginalization of our communities, will necessarily reflect the marginality to which this experience is subjected in the context of the social structure.”<sup>8</sup>

This formidable statement affirms that theology, in order to be faithful to God and relevant to the people of God, must take reality as its starting point. Theological reflection must be based on the condition of our communities, taking into account both their religious experience and its socioeconomic condition.

Viewed from the Caribbean, this means that the point of departure of a postcolonial homiletic must be the very condition of poverty, marginalization and disenfranchisement experienced by our communities.

For those who have not experienced it, colonialism may be seen as a benign paternalism that ultimately aims to better the condition of the colonized. However, such view minimizes the psychological impact of colonialism in our societies. For example, Aimé Césaire, the scholar and politician from Martinique, wrote a wonderful poem titled “Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal,”<sup>9</sup> about his return to Martinique after studying in Paris where he befriended scholars such as Leopold Sédar Senghor.

Césaire expresses the long pain endured by communities of African descent in the Caribbean; peoples who lost their languages, their traditions, their religions, their tribal allegiances and their folklore. I read this poem at the University of Puerto Rico, led by Jean-Claude Bajeaux, a Haitian scholar who also happened to be a former Catholic priest. The late professor explained us that one of Césaire’s aims was to denounce the colonial condition; a condition so pervasive that even to insult the French, people from Martinique had to do it in French.

This condition repeats itself throughout the Caribbean. Only islands like Puerto Rico, which was ceded by Spain to the USA at the end of the nineteenth century, have the “luxury” of insulting their current colonial power (the USA) using the language of its former colonial power (Spanish).

While the impact of contextual and political theologies is now taken for granted in most theological schools, the fact is that most churches in the Caribbean still see theology as something you learn from a thick book. It is seen as an intellectual exercise, largely futile, that focuses on rather esoteric issues that have little or no impact in our daily lives.

Many churches are still distracted by traditional theological debates, most of which are totally alien to our Caribbean context. For example, the controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism is still “alive and well” in the Caribbean, as well as the debates over

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<sup>8</sup> José David Rodríguez, “De apuntes a esbozo: diez años de reflexión,” *Apuntes* 10:4, (Winter 1990): 75 (our translation).

<sup>9</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000).

Dispensationalism, Millennialism, and the Rapture. And we cannot underestimate the impact of prosperity theology, which glorifies the pursuit of fame and fortune as a godly endeavor. Preaching a pseudo-theology of success in the midst of a context of dire poverty is simply immoral.

In order to develop a postcolonial homiletic from the Caribbean, we must reject these futile controversies, focusing on the pastoral aspects of theological reflection. We must deconstruct theological statements that advance individualistic, otherworldly and authoritarian views. We must deconstruct such ideas in order to forge new ones.

The emphasis in daily life, “lo cotidiano,” is a concept increasingly common in Latina Theology. This concept can help us to better understand the pastoral and contextual aspect of Latino/a Theology. Loida Martell-Otero defines this concept in “Abuelita Theology,” the introductory essay to *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, co-written by Martell-Otero, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier & Zaida Maldonado-Pérez. The second characteristic of a Latina theology is that it is a critical reflection based on the day-to-day, or popular, religious belief of the Latin@ community, whose faith forms what Espín has called the “epistemological womb” of daily life. It is an integral part of *la vida cotidiana*. *Lo cotidiano* is more than the simple translation of “daily” or “every day.” According to Isasi-Díaz, it is that which “constitutes the immediate spaces of our lives, the first horizon in which we have our experiences that in turn are constitutive elements of our reality.” As such, *lo cotidiano* is not an object to be studied, but the very matrix of life as it is lived by the marginalized and oppressed. For cultural and historical reasons, popular religious faith is integral to *la vida cotidiana* of the Latin@ community. Thus Latina theology is not simply about a list of specific practices upon which Latina scholars reflect. Rather it is the articulation of a given praxis, a reflection on *una manera de ser* (“a way of life”) in a community that struggles daily with issues of survival within a context of economic injustice and multilayered discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

A pastoral theology understands that “lo cotidiano” is an important *theological locus*. Only by departing from such a standpoint can we achieve our goal: the transformation of the oppressive colonial mentality that keeps us in a permanent state of dependency.

### **Biblical Hermeneutics**

The idea that “lo cotidiano”—the reality that we face daily—is the point of departure of all relevant theological reflection is compatible with an idea advanced by Carlos Mesters in his beautiful *Flor sin defensa*.<sup>11</sup> Mesters affirms life has a deep connection with the Bible, so that we can read “life in the Bible and the Bible and life.”

We come to understand the Bible as we trot through life. The Bible helps us understand both the giver of life, and life itself. Read in such way, the Bible becomes a doorway to the life of our people.

The Bible also leads us to discern the liberating presence of God in *la lucha por la vida*, in our daily struggle for life. As we correlate the experiences of suffering collected in the Bible with our own experiences of suffering, we learn to read Scripture in a new light. In particular, we learn to seek in the Bible answers to relevant questions that stem from our own reality.

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Zaida Maldonado-Pérez; & Loida I. Martell-Otero. *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* ((2013-01-15, Kindle Locations 273–283) Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos Mesters, *Flor sin defensa: Una explicación de la Biblia a partir del pueblo* (Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, 1984).

From a postcolonial standpoint, biblical interpretation is also a communal experience that takes into consideration the questions of those who suffer around us. Exegesis, thus, should not be done in isolation by individuals seeking academic approval.

In short, postcolonial exegesis sees the Bible as a “faithful ally” that fosters the liberation of people of faith.<sup>12</sup> Such emphasis on liberation leads us to cherish anti-hegemonic readings of the Bible; interpretations that reject the imperialism that has been pervasive in the Caribbean.

### Postmodern Homiletics

As any scholar in the field of homiletics can discern by now, I believe that those of us who teach and preach in the Caribbean must enter into a critical dialogue with the New American Homiletic school, particularly with the writings of Fred B. Craddock, Eugene Lowry and, my mentor, Ronald J. Allen, among many others. I say “critical dialogue” because we cannot simply import foreign preaching styles to our many islands. On the contrary, we must develop our own homiletic reflection, informed by the provocative changes spun by this new homiletic school.

While we have much to learn about sermon design and the theology of preaching from these new generations of American homileticians, some topics have to be addressed from and for our context. A burning issue that the Church in the Caribbean has neglected to address is language. In which language should we preach? How can we develop resources for the Caribbean as a whole, when language barriers divide us?

I have had the privilege of teaching and preaching in the Spanish-speaking, in the English-speaking and, albeit clumsily, in the French-speaking Caribbean. However, I do not speak Creole, the language common in Haiti, nor Patois, the Jamaican dialect. Homiletic resources in French are few and largely dated. For example, you can download a copy Alexandre Vinet’s *Homiletique* for 99 cents from Kindle, but this survey was written in 1853. However, I have found impossible to a copy in French of Fred Craddock’s *Prêcher*, the translation of his groundbreaking *Preaching*. Therefore, finding textbooks on homiletics for Haitian preachers is a daunting task.

Sermon Delivery is another key issue that we must address from our context, given that preaching styles are determined not only by culture but also by denominational traditions. Again, little has been written about this issue from the perspective of the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I am convinced that the Church in the Caribbean must develop a postcolonial homiletic, through a critical dialogue with contemporary homiletic theory in the United States. I am also convinced that such postcolonial homiletics must be multilingual, multicultural, and ecumenical.

We cannot continue to foster a preaching style so alien to our people that “if you just close your eyes...” you may think that the preacher is a foreigner. Our preaching style, in both theory and practice, must honor the Gospel of Jesus Christ, leading people to salvation, liberation and self-determination “for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22.2).

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<sup>12</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, “Hispanic American Theology and the Bible: Effective Weapon and Faithful Ally” in *We Are a People!: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology*, edited by Roberto S. Goizueta (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Justo L. González and I addressed this issue from a Latino/a perspective in Chapter #4 of *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

**Toward Postcolonial Liturgical Preaching:  
Drawing on the Pre-Columbian Caribbean Religion of the Taínos**

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**Abstract:** *Postcolonial criticism has made its way into the field of religion mostly in the disciplines of theology and biblical studies. Little has been done to approach liturgics and homiletics from a postcolonial perspective. Building on such initial approaches, this paper recovers the tradition of the Taíno religion—the pre-Columbian religion in the Antilles prior to colonial times—and borrows from it a worldview of “complementary dualities” and a ritual pattern that embraces both conflict and unity. Drawing on the tradition of the Taíno religion and building on the work of postcolonial theologians, this paper proposes a liturgical dynamic that moves the community from spaces of tension to experiences of connectedness in order to alleviate the segregation of colonized and colonizers.*

It seems that little has changed in Christian congregations in the United States since Martin Luther King, Jr., said that, “eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of Christian America.”<sup>1</sup> This segregation is part of the aftermath of imperialism and colonization, and their corresponding worldview of opposing and antagonistic binaries that continues to hurt both colonizers and colonized peoples by keeping them divided and engaged in cycles of oppression. Thus, both the colonizers and the colonized need healing and reconciliation from the effects of colonialism. Toward this end, I suggest that postcolonial liturgies and preaching can help us overcome segregation in worship; achieve healing, reconciliation, and complementarity; and find a new way of being in community that truly embodies the unity of the body of Christ and the diversity of its parts.

From a distinctive Caribbean perspective, this paper develops a postcolonial approach to liturgical preaching.<sup>2</sup> It recovers the tradition of the Taíno religion<sup>3</sup>—the pre-Columbian religion in the Antilles prior to colonial times—which I suggest can teach us how to decolonize our religious rituals. Borrowing from the Taíno religion a worldview of “complementary dualities” and a ritual pattern that embraces both conflict and unity, in this paper I propose a liturgical dynamic that moves the community from spaces of tension to experiences of connectedness.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, “Communism’s Challenge to Christianity,” sermon delivered on August 9, 1953 in Atlanta, GA.

<sup>2</sup> The approach that guides this proposal is based on these postcolonial critical perspectives: 1) to expose colonial ideologies, 2) to recover the histories and traditions of the colonized, and 3) to give voice to the previously voiceless. See Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub. Ltd., 2010); and Pablo A. Jiménez, “Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González’s Contribution to Hispanic Preaching,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 159–67.

<sup>3</sup> While scholars contest the term “Taíno,” it has not been effectively substituted and continues to be used to refer (1) to the natives inhabiting most of the Greater Antilles prior to and during the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Western hemisphere, and (2) to their culture. See José R. Oliver, *Caciques and Cemí Idols: The Web Spun by Taíno Rulers between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Cristian De La Rosa and Lucy Atkins Rose who inspired the language of tension and connectedness, respectively.

this postcolonial liturgical process preaching encourages imagination and guides the community in the journey from tension to connectedness.

### **Drawing on the Taíno Religion to Develop a Postcolonial Liturgy**

In my context of origin, Puerto Rico (a territory and colony of the United States), people attend worship as colonized persons, even if most of them live rather unconscious of this fact. Puerto Ricans enter the church building as marginal people because we are colonized, and exist still at the margins—an experience common to most immigrants and racial minorities in the United States. Yet in predominantly Euro-American congregations, most people enjoy white privilege and a concomitant sense of being at the center of society, byproducts of white supremacy and imperialism. The colonial system and its corresponding worldview of opposing and antagonistic binaries together have produced this situation in which colonizers and colonized people worship separately.

Yet in the Taíno culture, a different worldview does not entertain antagonistic dualisms but instead portrays the world in complementary dualities. In this worldview dualities do exist (male/female, night/day, visible/invisible), but instead of excluding one another the worldview considers them to be simultaneously opposing and complementary forces. If we open ourselves to recover the wisdom of this culture that was suppressed by colonization, and if we let it influence our worship rituals, we may find a way to overcome the effects of colonialism that maintains the colonized and the colonizers as opposites of an irreconcilable binary. We may find a way to overcome segregation in worship by reconsidering how our differences or dualities might instead be complementary forces. Let me introduce this Taíno worldview to you through the examples of their religious and political organization, beginning with the Taíno divine pantheon.

### **Complementary Dualities**

The Taíno worldview is one of complementary dualities, as we learn from archaeologist Antonio Stevens-Arroyo. He used the concept of *coincidentia oppositorum*<sup>5</sup> (coincidence of the opposites) to explain the structure of the *cemí* pantheon.<sup>6</sup> A *cemí* is a portable religious artifact, made of stone, bone, or wood, “that the Taínos and other natives of the Greater Antilles... regarded as numinous beings and believed to have supernatural, magic powers.”<sup>7</sup> They are not the mythical beings of primordial times, but the sacred beings pertaining to the here and now who the Taínos believed had the power to affect their real and everyday world.<sup>8</sup> Stevens-Arroyo identified a pantheon of *cemíes*, which are organized in two dualities of opposites that form four parts of a whole. There is a female and a male principle for the *fruitful order*, which corresponds to the day; and there is a female and male principle for the *reversal order*, which corresponds to the night. This is a total of four principles and each one has a main *cemí* with two helpers,

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<sup>5</sup> *Coincidentia oppositorum* is a Latin phrase that means literally the coincidence of the opposites, in reference to opposite parts that form a whole. It was proposed in 1464 by Nicholas of Cusa but it is a concept that may have a history that goes all the way back to the notion of unity of opposites in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> José R. Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico: Simbolismo Iconográfico, Cosmovisión Y El Poderío Caciquil Taíno de Boriquén* (Oxford [England]: Archaeopress, 1998), 110.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver, *Caciques and Cemí Idols*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 110; my translation.

making a total of 12 *cemíes*.<sup>9</sup> For the Taínos, the number four—two pairs of elements—indicated totality and completeness.<sup>10</sup>

In this worldview the opposites coincide to form complementary dualities. As archaeologist José R. Oliver explains, “The Taíno vision is one of a dynamic cosmos, alternating between opposing forces that are simultaneously complementary . . . , alternation which ultimately was ruled by the numinous powers of *cemíes*.”<sup>11</sup> For example, the pair of divine beings known as Atabey-Yúcahu served to show the complementary female-male duality.<sup>12</sup> Another example is Atabey, who has both an angry and a benevolent manifestation that together constitute a balance between destructive and harmonizing forces.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in the religious-political organization, the *cemí* as a category of power from the extraordinary world formed a pair with the Cacique,<sup>14</sup> who was the political and religious leader of the community and the power in the ordinary world. We also see this structure in how the ceremonial space of Caguana in Puerto Rico is divided up. It has ritual spaces at the periphery in which Taínos embodied conflicts through a *batey* and it has a main square at the center to embody unity through an *areyto*.<sup>15</sup> In short, opposites need, constitute, and complement each other.

Attending to this understanding of the world in which the opposites are not supposed to be kept separate but rather brought together to form a whole, it is necessary to bring together colonizers and colonized peoples. This is not only an implication of the Taíno worldview, it is also an imperative from the Gospel in which “there is no longer Jew or Greek, . . . slave or free, . . . male and female; for all . . . are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>16</sup> This is not an easy task given the long history of opposition, oppression, violence, and segregation that afflicts the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized.

The Taíno worldview filtered through the lens of postcolonial theory allows us to draw on the two main Taíno rituals of *areyto* and *batey* and to reclaim their functions in order to propose a way toward postcolonial liturgical preaching. These rituals, to which we now turn our attention, along with the work of theologians and scholars who have used postcolonial theory to enhance the fields of liturgical studies, homiletics, and theology together lead me to propose a postcolonial liturgy in three movements: (1) spaces of tension, (2) journeying imaginatively, and (3) experiences of connectedness.

### Spaces of Tension

The first movement of the liturgy, spaces of tension, I illustrate with the Taíno ritual *batey*, a ball game. The Taínos used the same word to refer to the ball, to the game, and to the space or court where they played it. The ceremonial space for the *batey* was located in the periphery of the village, in zones of ecological and topographic transition.<sup>17</sup> According to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, at the outskirts of some villages there were parks with

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 110–111.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 106; my translation.

<sup>12</sup> Sebastián Robiou Lamarche, *Mitología Y Religión de Los Taínos*, 1st. ed. (San Juan, P.R.: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2006), 5–6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup> Taíno villages could have a male or a female chief. The female term for Cacique is Cacica. For the sake of convenience and space, every time the word Cacique is used, the female Cacica is implied.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 3:28, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 101.



seats for people to watch the game. It is possible that each clan or lineage had its own *batey* park.<sup>18</sup> Thus the squares at the periphery served as scattered spaces for confrontation and competition that people embodied and ritualized in the *batey*.

The main functions of the *batey* were to mark moments of transition or disjunction and to provide a mechanism for interaction and coordination between social groups within the community—groups that were unequal or even competitive.<sup>19</sup> Taínos understood the *batey* to be a religious ceremony insofar as they believed the *cemíes* controlled the outcome of the game.<sup>20</sup>

To develop a liturgical form for today that manifests the function of spaces of tension, I will draw on the work of Caribbean Christian theologian Michael N. Jagessar and liturgical theologian Stephen Burns. In the field of liturgical studies, these theologians approach Christian worship from the perspective of postcolonial theory in order to decolonize rituals. They identify the following postcolonial perspectives: “(i) affirmation of the equal dignity of human beings, (ii) exposure of imperial dynamics at play in culture and politics, unreflective everyday practices as well as carefully and intentionally constructed policies, and (iii) celebration of subaltern wisdom, creativity, and resistance to dominant supposed ‘norms.’”<sup>21</sup>

Jagessar and Burns argue that the liturgical genres that serve as counterparts to each one of these postcolonial perspectives are (i) proclamation, (ii) lament, and (iii) praise, respectively. In addition, they propose that the convergence of postcolonial and liturgical critical perspectives also beckons an invitation to repentance.<sup>22</sup>

Jagessar and Burns also identify interruption as a liturgical strategy that builds on the concept of lament in order to generate worship that disturbs and dislodges an imperial agenda. What is novel in Jagessar’s work on interruption is that it brings “different narratives, moods and sources into creative, immediate ‘collision.’”<sup>23</sup> Some concrete ways of doing this in worship include using non-scriptural readings or unexpected music or songs. The authors recommend that anything and everything is a good topic for interruption in the liturgy.

The concepts of interruption and collision seem to describe well what is going on in the *batey*. The *batey* from the Taínos and the lament and invitation to repentance described by Jagessar and Burns provide the raw material for the first movement of the postcolonial liturgy proposed here, that of spaces of tension.

Using the function of the *batey* and liturgical genres identified by Jagessar and Burns, the first movement of the liturgy I am proposing embodies lament and repentance. In this first part of the liturgy the worshipers will bring into the ritual unexpected elements that show the conflicts, violence, collisions, and damaging effects of colonialism in their lives. This is the time to lament racism, segregation, oppression, as well as the privileges that come with an imperial system and that alienate human beings from one another. This is the time to expose imperial dynamics present in culture, society, and politics. This is also the time to repent from any participation in the perpetuation of such systems and its consequences. This liturgical moment recreates scattered places that characterize imperialism. This could be done through prayers of confession, litanies, call and response, and through songs and the telling of stories that show the negative effects of imperialism and colonization in the life of the congregants. However, all these liturgical forms so

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 100.

recognizable to us should be designed in such a way as to achieve interruption as a liturgical strategy. This is the point or place in the liturgy at which worshipers experience confrontation and disjunction or recreate spaces of tension.

### **Journeying Imaginatively**

The second movement of the liturgy, journeying imaginatively, consists of proclamation of liberation through preaching. Since this postcolonial liturgy begins with tension and culminates in connectedness, how do worshipers move from one place to the other? Postcolonial liturgical preaching helps with this move. The sermon should bring together these two places, these two Taíno rituals, these two times. It is a companion in the journey from tension to connectedness. The two-fold role of the sermon is to fund the imagination of the worshipers granting them access to the extraordinary realm, and then to inspire their movement from one place to the other.

Jagessar and Burns tie proclamation to the postcolonial perspective of affirming the equal dignity of human beings. The role of preaching within their proposal, which affirms the dignity of human beings by not colonizing the listeners of the sermon, they borrow from Walter Brueggemann and it consists of “funding” the imagination of a new world. They cite Brueggemann’s words from *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*:

It is not, in my judgment the work of the Church (or of the preacher) to construct a full alternative world, for that would be to act preemptively and imperialistically as all those old construals and impositions. Rather, the task is to fund—to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined. Our responsibility, then, is not a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations.<sup>24</sup>

Feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan also advocates for the imagination as an important tool in overcoming the impact of colonial systems. In her book *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, the author engages critically with postcolonial thought in order to create a “space to imagine that an alternative world and a different system of knowing are possible.”<sup>25</sup> This perspective emphasizes the need for another reality. This reality is born of the imagination that has experienced colonial systems. It is an imagination that does not expand the circle to extend the privileges of the colonizers to the colonized; but rather it is imagination that proposes a completely different reality, a different way of being in the world, and of relating to each other.

In addition to imagination, the postcolonial liturgical preaching I propose requires movement from tension to connectedness. Here, the contributions of Pablo A. Jiménez in the field of homiletics are useful because he proposes a structure for postcolonial sermons that has motion: struggle >> empowerment >> celebration. This motion mirrors the movement of the liturgy I am proposing that uses the liturgical genres identified by Jassegar and Burns: lament and invitation to repentance >> proclamation >> celebration and praise.

The first movement of the sermon proposed by Jiménez is “struggle” because its point of departure is the conflicted reality of the colonized. The preacher first needs to understand the

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<sup>24</sup> Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, “Fragments of a Postcolonial Perspective on Christian Worship,” *Worship* 80, no. 5 (September 1, 2006): 430.

<sup>25</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 3.

reality or situation that needs to be transformed. This is the situation of Hispanic/Latin@s<sup>26</sup> living in the United States (born in the U.S. or immigrants), a situation characterized by suffering. According to Jiménez, Hispanic/Latin@s are a complex set of subcultures. Though they are both united and divided by language, all of them have experienced the effects of racism, discrimination, and bigotry—the effects of colonialism. The oppressive practices of colonialism are based on the premise that the colonizer is inherently superior to the colonized. Jiménez states, “Colonialism locks both the colonizer and the colonized into a rigid hierarchy of difference.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, decolonization is not just for the benefit of the colonized but also to provide a better world for all human beings.

The second movement of the sermon is “empowerment,” through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jiménez suggests this is important because colonialism taught the colonized to be silent and stay in his or her place. These two notions are in conflict, and require Hispanic theology to address the imperial discourse that renders the colonized as subalterns who cannot speak. To respond to this challenge, Jiménez engages Gayatri Spivak’s question, “Can the subaltern speak?” He summarizes existing answers to this question and adopts the response that affirms that subaltern groups have always found ways to keep their voices through cultural practices and texts, even though the colonial powers disregarded or suppressed these voices. For Jiménez, the subaltern not only can speak but also can preach because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The third movement of the sermon is “celebration.” Jiménez explains that Hispanic worship is often long and loud because worshipers celebrate having that power of the Holy Spirit; they know that even if imperial powers kill the colonized, there is resurrection. In the difficult contexts in which Hispanic/Latin@s live, Hispanic worship still celebrates God’s mercy and presence among the community. The closing prayer does not end the celebration; the celebration continues as believers go off to their schools, homes, and places of work. Jiménez asserts that Hispanic preaching emphasizes God’s promises to the believers and God’s sustenance in response to our prayers. Through *testimonies* people share how God has responded to their prayers; they share their stories of survival, empowerment, and hope. This eschatological hope affirms that the status quo is not all there is. There is something else, something that the community must build using the prophetic imagination of prophets in the Old Testament and of current theologians, in addition to their own.

This three-fold movement of struggle-empowerment-celebration is found in Latin@ preaching, teaching, and worship. As Jiménez notes, “The person who arrives in utter despair is ushered into this movement, which seeks to help every person face his or her situation, receive the necessary tools to address it, and find joy in the process of struggling for life.”<sup>28</sup> According to Jiménez, Hispanics are not the only ones who resonate with and preach in this manner; every person from a persecuted or marginalized group will appreciate this sermonic structure. Indeed, this common approach could help different oppressed groups to build bridges and work together.

The role of the sermon does not end in the worship service. The sermon provides pieces that fund the imagination of the worshipers and inspire them to act. Imagination and inspiration go with them as they face daily cycles of struggle, empowerment, and celebration. The sermon reminds them that they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to imagine and generate different kinds

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<sup>26</sup> Latin@s is a shorter way to express Latinos and Latinas.

<sup>27</sup> *Preaching God’s Fiesta: Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic* (McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL, 2014), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6WmVu357\\_s&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6WmVu357_s&feature=youtube_gdata_player). 17:34-17:46.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 40:20–40:43.

of relationships. The sermon reminds them that they have the power to generate hybridity that leads to connectedness.

### Experiences of Connectedness

The third and culminating movement of the liturgy, experiences of connectedness, I illustrate with the *areyto*, a Taíno ceremony of unity and social continuity characterized by synchronized music, song, and dance. Symbolically, it was held in the central square of the village. The songs served as history books for the Taínos, in that they narrated the genealogies of their caciques and their mythologies.<sup>29</sup> Fray Ramón Pané describes the *areyto* in these terms:

In fact, just as the Moors, they have their laws gathered in ancient songs, by which they govern themselves, as do the Moors by their scripture. And when they wish to sing their songs, they play a certain instrument that is called *mayohabao*.<sup>30</sup> ... To its sound they sing their songs, which they learn by heart, and the principal men play it; they learn to play it as children and to sing with it, according to their custom.<sup>31</sup>

Through storytelling, the *areyto* functioned to foster unity and to celebrate the history of the Taínos.

The *areyto* required synchronization to physically demonstrate unity. The reward of the unity and harmony of the community in the *areyto* was to transcend the ordinary and experience the extraordinary, sometimes under the influence of mind-altering substances.<sup>32</sup> The Taínos believed that only under an extraordinary mindset would a person be able to experience and communicate with the extraordinary world. As previously discussed, I propose imagination as the igniter of the extraordinary mindset needed to transcend the ordinary. Transcendence then was experienced via an altered mindset and unity was expressed bodily.

The *areyto* was also a space where different realms converged. Oliver analyzed the structure and dynamics of the symbolic and ceremonial space of Caguana and found that the iconography of the central square followed a cyclic and timeless logic. One half of the central square represents the primal cosmos and the other half the ordinary cosmos. The iconography expresses the Taíno cosmos as one “that is simultaneously constituted by the sacred and the profane, by the visible and the invisible, the primal and remote, and the terrestrial and near.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, the central square serves as a place where the two realms converge and multiple complementary dualities are manifested as one. This should not be surprising, since topologically the central square marked the primordial cosmic axis or vertex—*axis mundi*—through which the numinous forces of the ancestors invoked by the *areytos* were channeled and projected onto the ordinary world.<sup>34</sup>

The central square was also a space in which different categories of time converged. According to Oliver, the central square was oriented astronomically towards the solstices and

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<sup>29</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 94–100.

<sup>30</sup> This was a particular kind of drum. For a detailed description, see Robiou Lamarche, *Mitología Y Religión de Los Taínos*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World Encounter*, A new ed. / with an introductory study, notes, and appendixes by José Juan Arrom; translated by Susan C. Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>32</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 193; my translation.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

equinoxes of the sun, and towards the exit of main constellations. This probably served the function of marking the calendar times. That is how the Taínos measured ecological time, a cyclical non-linear time, and the cycle of eternal return.<sup>35</sup> Bordering the central square were the *cemíes*, the sacred images that connected the mythical and the historical times.<sup>36</sup> Their position represented mediation between the ordinary space and the extraordinary space, but also mediation between the space below the ground and the space above the ground, thus making both horizontal and vertical connections. Therefore, this ceremonial space served as the point of connection between opposite and complementary times and spaces.

From a postcolonial perspective the coming together of the opposing forces cannot be unified into a whole that merges the different parts making them lose their particularities. Rather, postcolonial theory would identify this space in which opposing forces meet as a hybrid space. Hybridity denotes mutuality and interdependence instead of integration into sameness. It is an in-between-space that allows the coincidence of opposites and difference without assimilation into a “monolithic cultural whole.”<sup>37</sup> The exchange between groups in tension when they come together into the hybrid space is not a one-way process in which colonizer subsumes the colonized. The mutuality in the process allows “a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past.”<sup>38</sup> The notion of hybridity in postcolonial theory leads to the reframing of the coincidence of opposites of the Taíno worldview.

Besides providing a mechanism for opposing forces to coincide, the *areyto* was a presumptive celebration of the realization of the will of the *cemíes*. The ceremonial practices of the Taínos reflected their understanding, specifically that *batey* and *areyto* complement each other; and they structured the ritual movement from competition to unity, and from discernment to celebration. The pair *batey-areyto* required physical movement from periphery to center via the discovery of the divine will for liberation. The movement culminated by celebrating the *already-acquired* and *yet-to-be* liberation.

That the Taínos used the periphery for discernment and then moved to the center for celebration is illustrated in what is known as the “case of Sotomayor.”<sup>39</sup> In this case, a Cacique wanted to kill the colonizer Cristóbal de Sotomayor as a solution to the negative effects of the Spanish colonization. In order to make the decision, he consulted the *cemíes* through a *batey*. The outcome of the game would decide the fate of Sotomayor as well as the fate of the Taínos.

The result of the game was as follows: “It is presumed that victory by one of the baseball teams gave the prerogative of carrying out the act of war and execute Sotomayor, whom the indigenous people perceived not only as an enemy but as representative of harmful forces and unbalancing of the cosmos: the Spanish conquerors.”<sup>40</sup> The Taínos understood as divine will the idea of killing Sotomayor. Their understanding of the *cemíes*’ support for the task led them to celebrate as if Sotomayor were already dead. Therefore, they moved to the central square and celebrated an *areyto*, telling of the death of Sotomayor as if it had happened, even though they were planning to execute the plan the next day.<sup>41</sup> In such a way an imagined past joined the stories of their past as they celebrated a future event in the present moment allowing past,

<sup>35</sup> Robiou Lamarche, *Mitología Y Religión de Los Taínos*, 46–47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> R. S. (Rasiah S.) Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 249.

<sup>38</sup> Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 183.

<sup>39</sup> Oliver, *El Centro Ceremonial de Caguana, Puerto Rico*, 116–118.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 116; my translation.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

present, and future to converge. The powers of the Cacique-Cemí ritually accessed the power of the extraordinary realm and in turn the community celebrated this with extreme confidence, as if that liberation were already a reality.

This presumptive celebration echoes the eschatological hope of *Latina Evangélica* theology. From this perspective, eschatology is about the fulfillment of God's vision. The fulfillment of God's vision is not about another place—going to heaven after death or the Second Coming of the Lord. Instead it is about the advent of a new and just order.<sup>42</sup> The principal elements of the *areyto* of song and dance, that are still present in *Latina Evangélica*'s spirituality and modes of worship, show an intimate joining in a dance of salvation, where salvation is “the coming together of God, humanity, and creation,” not an individualistic decision or an event at the end of times.<sup>43</sup> Spatiality takes precedence over temporality in the belief that “God is present in sacred spaces, which continue to be holy throughout time. These spaces are the intersection of divine space and *kairos* with creation. They are border crossings, *eschatos* moments, and places in the midst of us.”<sup>44</sup> These eschatological moments of convergence of human and Divine may happen at any time and any place. They do not happen exclusively in formal worship. They may happen in the kitchen, in the ladies restroom, or in the laundromat, as we learn from *Latina Evangélica* theology. The final movement of this prophetic postcolonial liturgy is then the celebration of *coincidencia oppositorum*, the coincidence of the divine and the human in the present moment and in a timeless eternal moment, not something to wait for, but rather something to be experienced already now during worship as the Taínos did during the *areyos* and also in other moments in life.

Like the Taíno *areyto* and the eschatological hope of *Latina Evangélicas* theology, celebration is the third postcolonial perspective that Jagessar and Burns address. They tie it to the liturgical genre of praise. In particular, the postcolonial perspective on which they focus celebrates subaltern wisdom, creativity, and resistance to dominant norms.<sup>45</sup> Celebration of a new order and of the convergence of forces in tension embodies unity in these experiences of connectedness in worship, the unity of the body of Christ. This unity is characterized by hybridity instead of uniformity and comes as a result of reconciliation between colonized and colonizer. This reconciliation generates an experience of connectedness and results in wholeness that arises out of shedding the affliction of colonization and imperialism. The celebration of reconciliation and wholeness is also a celebration of particularity and multiplicity in the experience of connectedness.

Connectedness in this proposal is the effect of the convergence of forces in tension overcoming the spaces that separated them. It builds on the unity sought by the *areyto* filtered through a postcolonial lens resulting in hybridity. It is the coming together of forces in tension generating hybrid experiences in any chronological time and physical space. In these hybrid experiences there is “continual and mutual development of independent” particularities.<sup>46</sup> As a hybrid experience, connectedness is characterized by mutuality and interdependence.

This culminating movement of the liturgy embodies celebration and praise to demonstrate connectedness. The dynamic of this part of the worship service should be

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<sup>42</sup> Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado-Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 117.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Ashcroft and Griffiths, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 184.

synchronization and conjunction in opposition to the confrontation and disjunction experienced during the first movement of the liturgy. During this part of the liturgy, celebration and praise could take the shape of the celebration of the Eucharist, prayers in unison, affirmations of faith, testimonies, and praise songs, for example.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing on the tradition of the Taíno religion and building on the work of postcolonial theologians, I have developed a postcolonial liturgy in three movements: (1) spaces of tension, consisting of lament and repentance; (2) journeying imaginatively, consisting of proclamation; and (3) experiences of connectedness, consisting of celebration and praise. This liturgical dynamic moves the community from tension to connectedness in order to alleviate the segregation of the colonized and the colonizers.

The liturgy proposed here begins at spaces of tension by naming and engaging the conflict that characterizes colonization and ends in experiences of connectedness by celebrating the convergence of all peoples in Jesus Christ. To move us from the one place to the other, preaching plays a particular role; it funds the imagination of the community and facilitates the journey. These liturgical movements will look different in a Euro-American congregation than in a congregation of immigrants or descendants of colonized social groups, or even than in an intercultural congregation. The hope is for this kind of postcolonial liturgical preaching to provide a mechanism for interaction and coordination between colonized and colonizers, culminating in the imagining and celebration of a new order characterized by connectedness. Perhaps one day Sunday morning will be the time of greatest unity in Christian America. Perhaps one day we will be able to embody in worship that in Christ we are one.

**Black Preaching in Brown Places:  
Towards the Development of a Black Mestizo Homiletic**

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**Abstract:** *Many Black neighborhoods across the United States are becoming increasingly Latin@. Black churches in these neighborhoods will need to adjust their ministry practices in order to build community amongst this changing demographic. Borrowing Elizondo's notion of mestizo as one who can operate as both insider and outsider in different cultural locations, this paper begins to reimagine Black preaching in the churches that serve these changing neighborhoods. Using the postcolonial themes of marginality, hybridity, and self-reflexivity, this paper proposes the beginnings of a Black Mestizo homiletic that looks to merge Black and Latin@ preaching traditions in order to form congregations representative of the community.*

The Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, CA, has served its community faithfully since it was founded in 1885. The oldest Black church in Los Angeles, Second Baptist played a very important role in the Civil Rights Movement and actually became the west coast pulpit of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during the movement. While ministering at Second Baptist, Dr. King preached messages about serving the community and building the “beloved community” for all people. The challenge of preaching in this “beloved community” has changed in recent years for Second Baptist’s current Pastor, Rev. William Epps, as there have been major shifts in the demographics of Second Baptist’s neighborhood. A community that was once comprised of mixed income African Americans, has now become “a very low-income, largely Latino immigrant community.”<sup>1</sup> While the church continues to be primarily African American, made up of members that commute in from other areas, there is a new challenge of preaching in ways that promote the idea of serving this newly Latino community. As the community surrounding this Black Church changes how will preaching within the church change in order to continue to encourage service to this new community? How might the rich tradition of Black Preaching, to paraphrase Rev. Epps, serve the community “without losing its identity or history?”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, current demographic trends in the country suggest that the challenge Rev. Epps and the Second Baptist Church face are not unique to him and their location but that many black churches will see a significant increase in the Latin@<sup>3</sup> population of their neighborhoods. As such, many Black pastors will be challenged to develop new homiletic strategies in order to preach effectively to these Black congregations in changing neighborhoods. This paper will describe potential homiletic options for this context. After a brief description of the rationale for focusing on preaching in these shifting congregational settings, postcolonial theory will be the critical method used to develop a new homiletic for this emerging Black and Latin@ context.

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<sup>1</sup> Veronica Terriquez and Vanessa Carter, “Celebrating the Legacy, Embracing the Future: A Neighborhood Study for Second Baptist Church” [http://csii.usc.edu/documents/2nd\\_Bapt\\_Report\\_web.pdf](http://csii.usc.edu/documents/2nd_Bapt_Report_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Medina, *In Years Since the Riots, a Changed Complexion in South Central* NY Times online, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/25/us/in-south-los-angeles-a-changed-complexion-since-the-riots.html?\\_r=4&pagewanted=all&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/25/us/in-south-los-angeles-a-changed-complexion-since-the-riots.html?_r=4&pagewanted=all&)

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper Latin@ and Hispanic will be interchangeable terms when referring to a people group or when used as a descriptor.



More specifically, by putting some of the major themes of postcolonial theory in conversation with tenets of Black and Latin@ preaching, this paper will offer suggestions on the creation of a *Black Mestizo* homiletic.<sup>4</sup>

### Why Preaching?

For the Black church, especially those churches that reside in the urban centers of our country, this demographic shift will prove to be a great challenge. Pastors who were used to preaching to congregations of people who share a common culture and history will now be forced to address congregations with less obvious similarities. There are many aspects of church life that will be affected by these demographics shifts but the place where most change can be affected in the congregation is through the sermon. Black preaching is a special practice to the Black church, one that is central to its life. In their seminal work, “The Black Church in the African American Experience,” Lincoln and Mamiya say that “the sermon or, more accurately, preaching is the focal point of worship in the Black church, and all other activities find their place in some subsidiary relationship.”<sup>5</sup> If the Black church is going to find a way to welcome new Latin@ neighbors into the congregation, the pathway will have to be forged by the sermon. It is through the preaching moment that the congregation will be able to be prepared to better receive a new population and it will also be through the sermon that any new community would be able to be maintained. It is imperative that the preached word be capable of transmitting a message of community and unity to a changing congregation. Postcolonial theory can greatly aid in this intercultural congregational development.

### Marginality

Postcolonial theory is a relatively recent conversation partner with the field of homiletics but it seems especially appropriate to help develop a way of preaching in intercultural contexts. Postcolonial thought challenges the imperialistic ways of “first world” countries in their constructions and representations of the people of “third world” countries and racially oppressed peoples of the world. Edward Said, one of postcolonial theory’s early writers, suggested that postcolonial criticism investigates those “system[s] of discourse by which the ‘world’ is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which ‘we’ are ‘human’ and ‘they’ are not.”<sup>6</sup> Postcolonial theory addresses the ways in which peoples are able to develop their story and how communities are formed in oppressive contexts. This is a theme already prevalent within Black and Hispanic preaching traditions.

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<sup>4</sup> I use *mestizo* in the way that Virgil Elizondo and other Latin@ theologians have as a reference to one who resides on the border between different cultures. A *mestizo*, in this usage, is one who does not fit easily within a particular cultural group but instead sits as an insider and outsider in different cultural backgrounds. A *mestizo* is able to operate in different cultural worlds with both understanding and some distance. A *Black Mestizo* homiletic would then take seriously the “borderland” urban communities that I am envisioning for this project, which see a mix of Black and Latin@ people. This type of homiletic is being imagined for communities that are on the border, and that have to learn to operate between these different cultural identities. For further reading see Virgilio Elizondo, “Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection,” in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 104–23. See also, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 346.

<sup>6</sup> Raka Shome, “Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An ‘Other’ View” *Communication Theory*, February 1996, 1, 40–59, 51

Black preaching is distinctively socially located; it is birthed through the sociocultural lens of marginalization and struggle. For Black preachers, the Bible demonstrates “God’s mighty actions on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed.”<sup>7</sup> LaRue argues that the heart of black preaching is the distinct interpretative key that is produced for Black preachers as they consider the sociocultural context of an oppressed people and the way that God is believed to be present in scripture.<sup>8</sup> He suggests that Black preaching choreographs an intricate but accessible dance between Scripture and experience. For Larue, the core of Black preaching is the unique way that the exposition of scripture and the life experiences of blacks encounter, inform, and affect one another.<sup>9</sup> Latin@ preaching forms also have been shaped through an experience of marginalization.

In *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching*, González and Jiménez describe the hermeneutic that much of Hispanic preaching uses to interpret the Bible. The entry point for this hermeneutic is the idea of marginality.<sup>10</sup> The way to access the liberating power of God for Hispanic people is by beginning with an examination of the marginalized and oppressed social location of Latino people in the US. Secondly and similarly to the process to what Larue describes in Black preaching, there are points of contact found in the biblical narrative for the current social location of the Hispanic community.<sup>11</sup> Both Black and Hispanic preaching traditions already encourage reading the Bible from a place and perspective of marginality for preaching. These traditions already have what could be described as postcolonial leanings as both African American and Hispanics exist as oppressed people groups within the United States.

Naming the shared oppressed condition may be one influence of postcolonial theory on Black preaching. This sentiment or including this type of analysis in preparation for preaching in these Black and Hispanic communities could go a long way towards promoting a unified community. Both Black and Hispanic people have felt the sting of being “othered” and naming that experience is a point of connection for the two merging communities. And while this begins a movement towards a Black Mestizo Homiletic more must be said about how these changing congregations can begin to see themselves as one community. Here Postcolonial notions of identity are useful.

### Hybridity

Postcolonial thought emphasizes the idea of hybridity and the space between cultures. This theory resists the urge to “totalize” cultural understanding and seeks to deal with what happens when cultures merge together. A homiletic for the kind of church environment imagined for this paper will have to engage the idea of hybridity and in order to speak to the new kind of community that is being imagined. When Rev. Epps says that they must serve their community without losing their history, he seems to be intimating a concern that developing this new intercultural context poses a danger to cultural formation. This may prove one of the largest hurdles for preaching and forming congregations made of Black and Hispanic people; both Black and Hispanic Preaching traditions have a major impact on their respective racial formation.

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<sup>7</sup> Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2000), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez, *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

A more recent take on Black preaching is found in *Practical Theology for the Black Church*, by Dale Andrews. While formulating a practical theology for the Black church that links popular folk religion and Black theology, Andrews affirms the commonly held notion that Black preaching is a communal event that ultimately creates a dialogue between preacher and congregation hearers. But Andrews also notes that within its communal function, Black preaching “nurtures black personhood within the biblical revelation of God’s activity in spiritual and historical liberation.”<sup>12</sup> The faith identity and racial identity of the congregation is forged through the preached word. Preaching then in Black congregational contexts is helping people learn who they are in God, but also who they are as Black people in the world.

Culture is also an important component of Hispanic preaching. Though there is a sense that Hispanics belong to a distinct culture, in another sense there are within this community many different cultures representing many distinct countries. “And yet, when compared with the dominant Anglo culture of the United States, all these various cultures have much in common, and therefore can properly be seen as a single culture<sup>13</sup>.” Hispanic preaching must hold this unique cultural situation in consideration while also being tasked with preserving and defending culture.<sup>14</sup> Here in lies a potential non sequitur; if one of Black preaching’s primary goals is to shape Black identity, and one of Hispanic preaching’s primary goals is to shape Hispanic identity, it may be impossible for preaching to occur Black and Hispanic intercultural settings that is able to shape each of these individual racial identities. But what postcolonial thought suggests is the notion of a hybrid identity, whereby preaching in this newly imagined environment might lead to the formation of a new kind of racialized identity. More specifically, a postcolonial concept already within the Hispanic preaching tradition offers a useful model. Hispanic theologians have devised to help make sense of this unique cultural situation is the idea of *mestizo*. This concept speaks to the great mixture among Latino people and the way that God uses this mixture to bring about a beautiful new creation.

*Mestizo* theology celebrates the mixing of cultures and life on the borders that can prove as fertile ground for God’s creative acts. Though originally a reference to the new race of people that resulted from the mixing of Mexicans and Spanish Catholics, Virgilio Elizondo and other theologians have reinterpreted the term as one that acknowledges the aesthetic appeal of mixing different people together.<sup>15</sup> In his book *Galilean Journey*, Elizondo claims that Jesus was a *mestizo* in every way as one who lived in the borderlands of Galilee and had regular contact with a diverse group of people.<sup>16</sup> This *mestizo* ethic along with the theories of hybridity mentioned in postcolonial thought may provide a starting place to cross what may be the largest hurdle for the production of a Black and Hispanic homiletic, namely how can people be formed culturally in these mixed group settings.

Black pastors’ embrace of *mestizo* theology would allow them to produce sermons that not only celebrate the newfound diversity in the congregation and neighborhood, but also sermons that would resonate with the cultural sensibilities of the Hispanic people present in these contexts as well. The task for preachers is to begin their hermeneutical analysis of the Bible with a mixed community of marginalized people in mind, that of both Black and Hispanic people. The

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<sup>12</sup> Dale Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 23.

<sup>13</sup> González and Jiménez, 28.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 92

<sup>16</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 55.

movements of Black and Hispanic preaching are similar enough that it seems a creative inclusion of a new audience can serve as a beginning step into crafting what could be called a *Black Mestizo homiletic*.

This concept of *mestizo* should ring familiar with Black people as there are already within Black culture mechanisms that allow for unity amidst diversity. One example of a pastor with these sensibilities is Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III of the Trinity United Church of Christ. In an article written for The Huffington Post entitled “Why I am Unashamed and Unapologetic about My Faith,” Moss says that he has a “jazz homiletic” that democratically appreciates the many different voices, or instruments, represented in the congregation. In that same article he describes Black religious culture as being “creole” because of its “gumbo ingredient flavor” of African American religious life. He states that “We are not ‘pure Africans’ nor are we European, but we are an amalgamation of rich traditions, and narratives shaped and formed in a kettle of Africanity.”<sup>17</sup> Moss’ point is that Black culture, and by implication black preaching, is already adept at holding together a mix of different subcultures. Though not named as such in the article, this is certainly a postcolonial way of operating. There is much in the black church tradition, already present, that would lend itself to this kind of hybridized congregation.

In *We Have Been Believers* James Evans sets out to produce a comprehensive ecclesiology of the black church. For Evans, the maintenance of community is one of the primary markers of this great institution. He argues that unlike many other ecclesial bodies, the Black church emerged out of “deep seated cultural tendencies toward solidarity and association among African Americans.”<sup>18</sup> The Black church was formed in order to create community in the face of unjust conditions. With a society that treated Black people as less than human, the Black church was able to provide a safe place to belong. Black people have always been a very heterogeneous population but one of the unifying agents of this group has been the joint experience of oppression that the community has faced over the years.<sup>19</sup> Other ethnic groups have been welcome within the Black church but the focus of the preaching, worship, and ministry has been to aid Black people.

The identity of the Black church, according to scholar J. Deotis Roberts “is best expressed in the images of exile rather than exodus, of institute rather than only event, and in terms of its structure rather than just its dynamic.”<sup>20</sup> Roberts is suggesting that the Black church is in a perpetual quest for stability within an oppressive context, a decidedly postcolonial idea. If Roberts is right, the Black church has been “postcolonial” since its inception, and the preaching that has maintained its identity in the midst of a society that seeks to oppress it has also always been postcolonial. And in the fight to maintain some identity and dignity there has always been a sense of solidarity with all who are oppressed.

This call for solidarity is further demonstrated by a walk through James Cone’s thoughts on the Black church and Black Theology. In a work focused more on Black church ecclesiology entitled *For My People*,<sup>21</sup> Cone spends more time on the need for the Black church to be in solidarity with other oppressed groups. Here Cone suggests that the work of the oppressor is to

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<sup>17</sup> Otis Moss III, “Why I am Unashamed and Unapologetic About My Faith,” The Huffington Post, January 1, 2012 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-otis-moss-iii/christianity-faith\\_b\\_1178369.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-otis-moss-iii/christianity-faith_b_1178369.html)

<sup>18</sup> James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 120.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, 131.

<sup>21</sup> The entire title is *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church: Where have we been and where are we going?*

keep the oppressed divided and fighting amongst one another in order to control them.<sup>22</sup> Cone suggests that the oppressor wants different oppressed groups to be suspicious of each other in order to prevent collaborative justice efforts.<sup>23</sup> It is possible then, that another option for preaching in this imagined space is that instead of trying to form Black or Latin@ racial identity, or even trying to form a new hybridized identity, the preacher can preach in such a way that that solidarity is established between the two racial groups through the joint experience of oppression.

Earlier I mention that both communities experience the “sting of being othered” and that the preacher could potentially preach in a way that named this feeling among Black and Hispanic groups. But beyond simply naming this joint oppression, preaching in Black and Hispanic contexts may be a place that allows for these two distinct communities to imagine and experience each other’s story. Here I turn to Howard Thurman’s notion of imagination as a potential method for making this connection across ethnic groups. Thurman understood imagination to be “the angelos of God” that allowed one person “to establish a point of focus in another man’s spirit and from that vantage point so to blend with the other’s landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic, this is the great adventure in human relations.”<sup>24</sup> For Thurman, the imagination is a tool that can allow for people of different ethnic groups to be able to understand and experience each other’s story. Learning to wield the imagination in this way could possibly be a powerful tool for preachers in the Black and Hispanic congregations that are the subject of this paper.

In both Black and Hispanic preaching traditions the preacher is not alone in the creation of the sermon. The preacher works in concert with the community to deliver the word. In *Black Preaching: the Recovery of a Powerful Art*, Henry Mitchell situates Black preaching as a communal event forged through the interaction between preacher and congregation. Here it appropriate to quote Mitchell here at length:

Black preaching has been shaped by interaction with the listeners. If the Black preaching tradition is unique at all, then that uniqueness depends significantly upon the uniqueness of the Black congregation, which talks back to the preacher as a normal part of the pattern of worship.<sup>25</sup>

The cacophony of “Amen” and “Hallelujahs” give rise to a communal sermonic event that captivates and inspires celebration amongst the entire congregation. Hispanic preaching is strikingly similar. For the Hispanic community, the sermon is not a sermon until it is actually preached. And even this preaching moment is a communal event as Hispanic preachers must be cognizant of a congregation’s audible and inaudible responses while they preach.<sup>26</sup> Hispanic congregations are known to shout “Amen” or “Hallelujah” or even wave a hand or handkerchief during the message to express their affirmation of what the preacher has to say. The preacher in a Hispanic setting must engage in a true give and take with the congregation in order to meet the needs of everyone assembled. In the communal construction of the sermon, the preacher in this new hybridized context would lean on the affirmation of the entire community, Black and

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<sup>22</sup> James Cone, *For My People* (New York: Orbis Book, 1984), 142.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 182–183.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, 100.

<sup>26</sup> González and Jiménez, 58.

Hispanic, to attempt to deliver a word for everyone present. And while a reliance on the Spirit in the moment of preaching could aid in the formation of word that would speak to a Black and Brown congregation, there may be some communal methodological techniques that could prove useful in the sermon writing process to ensure that all of the voices of the community are heard. One such method is the “Roundtable Pulpit” developed by John McClure. This method implores preachers to “ask others for sermonic input, empowering them as biblical interpreters and practical theologians through collaborative pre-sermon brainstorming and feedback sessions.”<sup>27</sup> The idea is that the preacher engages different members of the congregation as homiletic conversation partners. While this is a concept somewhat foreign to Black and Hispanic contexts, it could prove quite useful for preacher tasked with preaching in an intercultural context, specifically the Black and Brown context that has been imagined for this paper. The preacher can guard against a cultural blind spot in their preaching than by having a conversation with a representative cross section of the church during the sermon creation process. Another method that might allow a better grasp on this hybridized congregation is the type of homiletical ethnography called for by Nora Tisdale in *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Tisdale calls for preachers to be ethnographers of their congregation. She wants preachers to produce sermons that “not only give serious attention to the interpretation of biblical texts, but which give equally serious attention to the interpretation of congregations and their sociocultural contexts; preaching which not only aims toward greater ‘faithfulness’ to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but which also aims toward greater ‘fittingness’ for a particular congregational gathering of hearers.”<sup>28</sup> To craft these sermons, preachers will have to have an intimate understanding of their congregations and the conflicts and viewpoints that exist within them. Tisdale provides practical tools for doing this work in Chapter 3 of her work entitled “Exegeting the Congregation.” With a congregation that is ethnically diverse and theoretically hybridized, the kind of ethnographic work that Tisdale call for would prove quite useful for the creation of sermons that spoke to the entire congregation.

### Self-Reflexivity

A final major theme from postcolonial theory that seems appropriate to bring to a Black and Hispanic homiletic is the idea of Self-Reflexivity. Postcolonial theory challenges its theorists to analyze themselves, and to question their own motives and connections to empire. This means that in examining one’s own practice, the postcolonial critique must ask, “to what extent do my scholarly do [my] scholarly practices... legitimize the hegemony of Western power structures.”<sup>29</sup> Black preaching practice needs to go through this critique. In the development of a homiletic that will be more welcoming and formational to a changing congregation, Black preaching practitioners will need to interrogate Black preaching in search of elements of empire.

In “*Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation*,” Donna Allen offers a model of this kind of self-reflexivity as she critiques the Black preaching tradition through a womanist lens. In developing this womanist lens of analysis, Allen leans heavily on Katie Cannon’s critique of Black preaching. Cannon suggests that rhetorical criticism would need to be a part of the womanist preaching event.<sup>30</sup> In other words,

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<sup>27</sup> John McClure, *Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Nora Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 32–33.

<sup>29</sup> Shome, 45.

<sup>30</sup> Donna Allen, “*Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Canon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation*.” New York: Peter Lang, 2013, 10.

listeners would need to be able to critically engage the rhetoric of the sermon. Cannon envisions congregations where the people have the ability to name and critique the rhetorical tools that are used within a sermon. Instead of merely telling the pastor “good sermon” or “you really touched me today,” Canon is arguing for developing congregations that have the kind of skill to analyze the rhetoric in the sermon. She believes this is necessary to unmask within the sermon what she calls “linguistic violence.”<sup>31</sup> Canon is quite critical of Black preaching and believes that there are many sexist and racist social contradictions “housed in the sacred rhetoric of Black preaching that gives women a zero-image of [themselves].”<sup>32</sup> Canon’s notion of bringing rhetorical analysis to the sermon listening process would help guard against the patriarchy that is currently present. Using a womanist homiletic to bring light to the negative aspects of Black preaching is a postcolonial move of self-reflexivity and an example of the kind of process that would greatly benefit this preaching tradition in intercultural contexts.

### **Towards a Black Mestizo Homiletic**

Rev. Epps and the Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles, and other pastors across the country are blazing a trail by proactively responding to the increase of Latin@ people in their neighborhood. As they turn their minds towards how their preaching should evolve to speak to these new contexts, postcolonial thought has offered some viable strategies for reimagining the preaching task in an emerging Black and Latin@ congregational context. A Black Mestizo homiletic, as discussed here, would take seriously the idea of Black and Latin@ solidarity as oppressed peoples, hybridized identity and self-reflexivity. This research has the potential to serve as a model not only for Black churches in increasingly Hispanic neighborhoods, but for any church that is experiencing a shift in its community demographics. The rhetoric of the preacher shapes the world of the congregation. Preachers of all ethnicities will need to remain open to new homiletic strategies for the formation of the world as the world around the churches continue to change.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

## **Troubled Gospel: Postcolonial Preaching for the Colonized, Colonizer, and Everyone in Between**

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**Abstract:** *The task of preaching is imbedded in a world that has been shaped by colonialism and imperialism. Preaching in North America will benefit from an engagement with postcolonial theory and a process of decolonization. This process, however, is a significant challenge for white, wealthy western preachers whose own position vis a vis colonialism is somewhat ambiguous. Most preachers in the West are both perpetrators of imperial projects, and simultaneously oppressed by these very systems. Is it possible for such preachers to participate in a process of decolonization? This article argues that it is possible, although preachers must attend to issues such as social location, neocolonizing anticolonialism, and the experiences of those with deeper knowledge of the realities of colonialism.*

*Another key question is the manner in which the proclamation of the gospel is affected by the process of decolonizing preaching. Is a decolonized gospel good news for those who have benefited from colonial and imperial projects? At first, such a gospel may sound like bad news, as it involves a voluntary surrender of power and a willingness to occupy a marginal space. The truly good news is found in the promise of freedom from oppressive systems in which all are caught. Postcolonial preaching problematizes “gospel,” yet ultimately offers both preachers and listeners a way to escape destructive social systems.*

### **Introduction**

The world today has been shaped to a large degree by western colonial and imperial influences. Postcolonial criticism *highlights historical and contemporary manifestations of colonialism, imperialism and empire as they affect culture, politics, religion, economics and other realms of life.* I find the following definition of empire to be particularly helpful for homiletic reflection. Empire is:

a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world. . . constituted by a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind. An all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while exploiting creation, imperiously excludes, enslaves and even sacrifices humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Here I am imagining empire to be an often invisible framework on which our lives are built, and within which our identities are constructed. My previous work has been concerned with decolonizing preaching in Canada and the United States. To decolonize preaching is to recognize and resist the forces of empire which have shaped human communities in the past and present, and to reorient Christian community and identity toward a vision of human community more aligned with God’s own nature. I believe that this is an essential task, yet I confess a certain sheepishness when I disclose the subject of my academic inquiry. My social location has much more in common with “colonizers” than the “colonized.” This is also true for many of those

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Boesak, Johann Weusmann, and Charles Amjad-Ali, eds., *Dreaming a Different World* (Stellenbosch: The Globalization Project, 2010), 2.



among whom I preach and teach. Except for the very occasional experience of discrimination due to my gender, I have not known marginalization—professional or otherwise. My household income is largely provided by two organizations historically implicated in colonial processes—the church, and a major Railway company with whom my husband is employed. I continue to wonder if my temerity to address this subject might not be justly considered presumptuous, even impertinent, by those whose lives have been more obviously shaped by the domination of the “west over the rest.” Similar questions have been asked regarding the development of postcolonial theories themselves, which have predominantly arisen from within the western Academy. This paper ponders the challenge and the necessity of decolonizing preaching, specifically in contexts in which the preacher and a majority of listeners are white, affluent and of European heritage. I draw on some of the critical conversations occurring within postcolonial scholarship in order to inform postcolonial preaching.

Preachers who share my cultural and social background have been, or are perceived to have been, perpetrators, victims and observers of the work of empire. I maintain, however, that white, affluent preachers are called to participate in a process of decolonizing preaching. But how should we proceed—with what posture and with what attitude? Can the white preacher who is bound up in a colonial past and present say anything at all with authority and credibility? If we can speak, if we can participate in this process, what is the good news of a decolonized sermon for those who benefit from imperial hierarchies? A postcolonial perspective problematizes “gospel” in a number of ways. By reflecting upon the possibilities and limitations of postcolonial preaching in contexts which are primarily white and affluent, I hope to find a space for those who benefit from empire to participate in the process of decolonization.

### **Imagining the Postcolonial Sermon**

The space of our worship and preaching is a space in the midst of empire. In the early twenty-first century, Christians in Canada and the United States exist in a state of continuity and discontinuity with an imperial past. In brief, this means that the modern movements such as colonialism, imperialism and globalization have resulted in the distribution of people and goods across the globe, and have thus shaped populations, cultures, economies and the distribution of power. The consequences are negative and positive—similar processes have led to both a lovely diversity in the North American population, and racial tension. A postcolonial homiletic approach identifies and names empire as a shared historical and contemporary context. This approach searches scriptures, histories, congregations, preachers, social media, and the church for the presence of empire and signs of colonizing discourse. Distinguished from “colonial discourse theory,” colonizing discourse describes the words and actions of those in positions of relative power who seek to dominate others, create separation between different groups, homogenize difference and essentialize identities. These categories describe the actions of historical colonial powers in their relationship with colonized persons, yet the term is useful also to describe ways that “others” are marginalized and kept in subservient positions. Colonizing discourse occurs in speech, behavior, policy, and action, and is thus both discursive and material. Examples include policies of separation such as apartheid, and political rhetoric which claims cultural superiority for one nation over another. Homiletic examples include preaching that ignores the diversity of listeners, or sermons that inaccurately represent particular cultural groups.

Preaching is a theological task that names God’s action in the world. Thus, postcolonial preaching disputes and/or resists colonizing discourse by casting an alternative vision of human

community rooted in careful theological reflection. I believe that the Trinity is a useful starting point for theological reflection regarding colonialism and imperialism. The task of decolonizing preaching is a difficult one, and will lead many preachers and listeners far out of their comfort zone. By pairing a somewhat radical postcolonial perspective with a mainstream theological concept such as the Trinity, preachers and listeners may be more easily able to locate themselves within the conversation. Traditional views of the Trinity have often served to support hierarchy and violence within the human community. Despite the centrality of the Trinity for many Christian traditions, it remains a patriarchal and troubling concept, vulnerable to interpretations that are more destructive than constructive. However, some of the concepts of the Social doctrine of the Trinity, especially as envisioned by Jürgen Moltmann, constitute an interesting juxtaposition to more traditional views. While it remains an imperfect vision of God's nature, the Social Trinity perceives God to be an interrelated system in which Father, Son and Spirit exist in a non-hierarchical fellowship characterized by mutual indwelling, tolerance of difference, and openness to one another and the whole created order. In this sense, the very nature of God is a witness against colonialism. If human community in *imago trinitatis* emulates this divine community, then it too will seek to be free from domination, encourage mutual self-giving, tolerant of difference and open to human and divine others. Sermons develop our skill to live in between—as citizens of one empire, created and shaped for life in another, the Kingdom of God. Through a process of interrelation with the Persons of the Trinity, we discover both our identity and our ethics.

### **An Imperialistic Impossibility?**

North American preaching must be decolonized. Preachers, sermons, and the homiletic academy are vulnerable to the destructive influences of colonizing discourse, and may thus negatively impact relationships within the church and beyond. Does an argument for decolonizing preaching sound plausible coming from a privileged, white preacher and scholar?

Theologian Rebecca Todd Peters suggests that it is “an imperialistic impossibility for a white, affluent, Protestant woman” to plea for a postcolonial perspective on the church.<sup>2</sup> I agree that it is an “impossible” task, but paradoxically an unavoidable, even necessary task, for as Peters goes on, “decolonizing the mind is as essential for the colonizer as it is for the colonized.”<sup>3</sup> The systems that underlie colonialism and imperialism, as well as neocolonialism, are ubiquitous and omnipresent. Those with power and those without all exist within the same systems, and to some extent all are held captive, although not in the same way. The powerful live under a subtle bondage, “sufficiently rewarded that we do not notice our lack of freedom.”<sup>4</sup> In working toward a feminist postcolonial theology, Kwok Pui-lan generously makes a space in which all women may participate in the task of decolonizing the mind via postcolonial theology: both the (former) female colonizers and the (former) colonized women are able to do postcolonial theology, although they will have different entry points, priorities of issues, accents, and inflections. I also insist that female subalterns who experience the intersection of oppressions

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Todd Peters, “A Decolonizing our Minds: Postcolonial Perspectives on the Church.” In *Women's Voices and Visions*, Letty Russell, Aruna Gnanadason and J. Shannon Clarkson., eds. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Peters, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Justo González, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 26.

in the most immediate and brutal way have epistemological privileges in terms of articulating a postcolonial feminist theology that will be more inclusive than others.<sup>5</sup>

When Kwok's words are applied to the homiletic task, all preachers are invited to participate in a postcolonial conversation. It is essential, however, to acknowledge that some preachers and listeners will carry within themselves a much more vivid, accurate and painful portrait of colonial reality based on personal experience. A preacher like me must be quick to acknowledge the limitation of my own experience, and learn from others. Affluent preachers can remember their own social location, and makes space for the needs and experiences of others that are often urgent. In the words of R.S. Sugitharajah,

the task of postcolonialism is to ensure that the yearnings of the poor take precedence over the interests of the affluent; that the emancipation of the subjugated has primacy over the freedom of the powerful; and that the participation of the marginalized takes priority over the perpetuation of system which systematically excludes them.<sup>6</sup>

While there are some commonalities among liberation theologies and postcolonial theologies, there are also differences, including varying emphases on material vs. discursive, home vs. diaspora, grassroots vs. academic theory. Yet the vast homiletical literature stemming from a liberation perspective opens possibilities for the role of the relatively powerful preacher in the process of decolonization. Justo and Catherine González address relatively powerful white, American preachers who preach liberation for the poor and oppressed, and are thus in danger of announcing a gospel for which they themselves have no need: "Precisely because such agents of liberation have never experienced the bondage they now address, it is easy for them to oversimplify the problems and misunderstand the situation, both in its causes and in its cures."<sup>7</sup> Instead, "powerful" preachers are called to recognize the need for liberating gospel in their own lives—not to live out of the experience of the oppressed other, but rather to discover "in what ways he [sic] is oppressed, and learn about how the same system which oppresses others also oppresses the seemingly powerful."<sup>8</sup> A subversion of power roles, in which the "powerful" are taught by those of lesser power, can lead to liberation for the oppressed and the oppressor. Postcolonial preaching cannot happen unless preachers are willing to acknowledge to themselves and to their listeners complicity with imperial systems, the first step in bringing to consciousness the reality that all inhabit colonial spaces.

While it is possible for white affluent preachers and listeners to engage in postcolonial criticism, there are several issues worthy of attention if such postcolonial preaching is to achieve more than a token attempt to be "other-wise." Gayatri Spivak has recognized the impossibility for most scholars to engage in postcolonial or anti-colonial studies without simultaneously inhabiting colonial structures, which she termed "neocolonizing anticolonialism."<sup>9</sup> Those of us within the western academy and churches are inextricably bound up in the structures of empire. Thus, even as we say "no", we continue to benefit from the very thing we are protesting against. Such is the reality for North American preachers today. Regardless of race, ethnicity, gender,

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<sup>5</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 127.

<sup>6</sup> R. S. Sugitharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* (London: SCM, 2003), 33.

<sup>7</sup> Justo González and Catherine González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>8</sup> González, *Liberation Preaching*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 191. See also Mark Lewis Taylor "Spirit and Liberation."

colonial experience, we all continue to dwell in the midst of empire. This leads to another dangerous possibility. An important task of postcolonial preaching is for preachers to reflect upon their own captivity in empire and need for liberation, as well as that of their listeners. Yet by identifying myself as a captive of empire in need of liberation, do I claim myself as a victim of forces beyond my control and thus absolved of responsibility? It is important to maintain a sense of corporate and individual responsibility for words and behaviors which limit the freedom of others.

There lies the possibility that a postcolonial perspective employed by preachers who have not been consciously marginalized by the colonial process could become just another method of colonization. To employ a theory that has emerged from ivory towers rather than grassroots anti-colonial struggles is to risk defining ourselves and others according to yet another western system of categorization. Even to utter the term “postcolonial” is to be misheard as saying that colonialism is a thing of the past. In a well-known essay, Anne McClintock offers several pertinent critiques of the term postcolonial that are applicable to preaching. She cautions against a “premature celebration of the ‘pastness’ of colonialism.”<sup>10</sup> Many regions of the globe continue to face “imperialism without colonialism,” and many populations continue to experience the profound dehumanization of colonizing discourse. Global citizens do not share a common experience of either colonialism or the postcolonial situation. If indeed we have entered a time in which we are able to reflect critically upon colonialism and imperialism, as termed postcolonialism, my experience of postcoloniality as a white Canadian of English heritage bears little resemblance to the experience of an aboriginal man in Australia, or an American woman of Filipino descent, or a child in Ghana. Even the postcolonial identities of those who share racial, ethnic and/or religious characteristics are highly variant. For example, I have taken for granted in my own preaching that Nelson Mandela is a positive and worthy example of the fight for human rights. One of my listeners, however, a white South African, perceives Mandela as a rebellious, evil man responsible for the loss of her home and resources. When it comes to the aftermath of imperial systems such as apartheid, there are no straightforward answers. Even as postcolonial perspectives are employed in preaching, we must recognize that “postcolonial” is a term that continually undoes itself. Just as we begin to think that we understand the implications of postcolonial reality, we are reminded again how reality resists easy categorization.

Many white North Americans have a limited awareness of colonial history as it has unfolded both overseas and within North America. Perhaps because history has been taught from the perspective of the powerful, even educated adults today may not be conscious of the myriad ways that colonial and imperial realities have affected Canada and the United States, the treatment of aboriginal populations, the founding myths, the experience of immigrants, foreign policy, etc. Because of the social location of many of those among whom I minister, colonialism tends to be heard as a neutral, even positive term. There exists a continuing belief that colonialism has been a necessary duty of powerful and wealthy nations—an act of generosity to care for the poor heathen who has been unable to achieve civilization without assistance. Decolonizing preaching, then, will involve a particular pedagogy and re-telling of the stories of world history, as well as an increased commitment on the part of preachers to interpret current events with a postcolonial lens.

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<sup>10</sup> Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress.” In *Colonial Discourse, Postcolonial Theory*, by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen., eds. (New York: St. Martins, 1994), 88.

Postcolonial theories continually question the power and authority of the “colonizer.” In that sense, another question arises for affluent preachers. To what extent am I truly “powerful”? While I perceive myself to inhabit a privileged space, I may be suffering from a delusion of power that leads me to believe I have power to change a system over which I am actually entirely powerless.<sup>11</sup> This possibility reinforces the words of the González’s above, pointing to the oppression and bondage of all—rich, poor and middle class, colonized, colonizer and everyone in between. If even “powerful” preachers are “powerless,” then it is all the more necessary to engage the tools of postcolonial theory. We are reminded of the instability of authority and identity in a postcolonial world.

Identity is a key theme for postcolonial inquiry. Rather than viewing identity as fixed and static, postcolonial theorists understand identity to be socially constructed, and thus unstable. Identity is negotiated in the interaction among colonized and colonized persons. A “colonizer” for example, will attempt to inhabit a particular identity that justifies their position and defines them over and against the colonized person. If the colonizer is innately superior, culturally pure, and civilized, then the colonized population is inferior, impure, in need of moral uplift, and savage. Colonial interactions, however, reveal a much more complex reality. If neither colonized or colonizer fit the identity mold assigned by the colonizer, this also calls into question the right of the colonizer to hold power. This concept of fluctuating identities may be good news for preachers like me. Amid the shifting identities in a postcolonial world, my self-conception as colonizer is also set adrift. If identity is indeed fluid and unstable—always being shaped by our interactions— then I am potentially freed from the label “colonizer.” Instead, the postcolonial concept of hybridity allows me to acknowledge that I am not completely one thing or another— I can be both, and, neither. One of the goals of postcolonial criticism is to undermine binary oppositions. Although it is difficult within postcolonial conversations to avoid binaries such as “colonized” and “colonizer,” it is more fruitful to recognize the ambiguous nature of all reality, and talk instead about relative power and privilege; to search our lives for ways that we wield power that results in negative consequences for others.

### **Where Is the Good News?**

Recently I taught a course in an Eastern Canadian seminary entitled “Decolonizing Preaching.” One student, the pastor of a small, rural church in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, had a very challenging question for me. She began by appreciating all that she had learned in the course—the colonial and imperial forces that have shaped the past and continue to shape the present of her congregation, and the value of postcolonial theory for preaching. Despite the pertinence of the topic to her situation, she wondered “How is this good news for my church? How does this function as gospel, especially since my people, in the grand scheme of things, are more closely aligned with colonizers than colonized, yet still suffer from the effects of empire?”

Parts of Eastern Canada have suffered from economic depression as industries such as fishing have declined. These communities often find themselves at the mercy of large corporations headquartered elsewhere, who make decisions about the extraction of natural resources and the allocation of jobs and thus have the power to establish economic security. While dependent on the whims of “empire” for survival, these communities still participate in the larger frames of empire as consumers and voting citizens. Despite the severe economic challenges, these people still have a much better quality of life than much of the world’s population. They occupy land that once belonged to aboriginal peoples. Churches there, as is true

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<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Pablo A Jiménez for alerting me to this possibility.

in many regions, experience declining membership and a loss of previously held social authority. They are thus powerful, and simultaneously powerless. I offer this as an example of the complexity of the situation of many primarily white congregations.

The recent “Occupy” movement has popularized the language of “the 1%.” While the 1% is, to some extent, held captive by empire and in need of liberation, it also shares responsibility for the suffering of others and are in need of decolonizing. In what way does postcolonial preaching offer good news to those who live in-between: colonized by empire yet willing participants in the imperial processes? The concern raised by this student is extremely important to the task of decolonizing preaching, yet I admit that I faltered when I attempted to respond to her concerns. After all, decolonizing preaching does not initially sound like good news for those who benefit from the empire. A postcolonial perspective on preaching must be accompanied by reflection upon the nature of gospel. What follows are musings about gospel and the application of postcolonial criticism to the practice of preaching.

The colonial process, historically and in the contemporary world, has benefited some and caused suffering for others. What has historically been interpreted as good news has meant trouble for others. In a sermon entitled National Providence, Thomas Fanshaw Middleton said, “The history of Empires is no other than the history of the Providence of God.” This sermon was preached in Calcutta in 1815, deep in the heart of British India. Whether the history of the British in India is a sign of God’s providence might indeed depend on whether one is an agent of the empire or an Indian nationalist. Yet those aligned with colonizers have often viewed the land, resources and persons under their rule to be a gift of God granted to worthy, faithful nations. To draw on a contemporary example, I feel tremendous gratitude toward God for the land on which I live, for the beauty of the landscape around Lake Ontario. Yet I inhabit this land because it was removed from the aboriginal inhabitants who lived here first.

Surely, we must call into question the idea that God has granted wealth and power to some, while relegating others to subservient positions. History has understood God to be on the side of empires, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned with the reversal of power and wealth. However, as liberation theology has struggled with “God is on the side of the poor” so postcolonial preachers must struggle with the too-simple statement “God is on the side of the colonized.” Scripture testifies to the voices of the prophets promising liberation to the oppressed, and calling the oppressors to release the captives. Jesus, in his life and death, is an affront to empire, his words and actions are continually resisting and calling into question the power of Rome and other Powers. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for colonized persons. It does not initially sound good for colonizers. If we turn again to postcolonial critical thinking, however, we can remember that one of the goals of such criticism is to undermine the binary divisions that create too narrow categories such as colonized and colonizer. All are caught in the web of principalities and powers—some more willingly than others, and some more comfortably than others. To be freed from these systems is good news for everyone. This good news, however, will be experienced in different ways.

This is not to let evil actors off the hook. Colonialism is a human sin, and thus if freedom is to come about for anyone, those who wield the power must undergo a change of attitude and behavior. This repentance, *metanoia*, is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet these are rarely the words that we long to hear. To preach the end of colonialism is to preach the end of the world as we know it, the end of the status quo.

To let go of power, influence and authority is not only to let go of the habits and lifestyle to which we have been accustomed, but also to become vulnerable. Even to acknowledge that we

are not as powerful as we think we are. White, protestant, affluent Christians have long been at the centre of society in the United States and Canada. To preach a gospel that defies the strict hierarchy of empire is to become decentred. This decentring is already a fear and concern for mainline churches experiencing shrinking membership, budgets and decreased social authority. This process of decolonizing limits our own power in order to make space for others who currently occupy more marginal positions—those of other religions, races, and economic strata. All of this might not sound like good news. To proclaim an alternative vision might mean that we are preaching the end of ourselves, dethroning ourselves. The news gets worse before it gets better. Coming to terms with colonialism and imperialism in the past and present involves taking a cold hard look at the role of the Church in these systems, historically and in the contemporary world. Indeed, as we discover our own complicity—conscious and unconscious, personal and corporate—we will likely feel uncomfortable in our own skin, as well as in the pulpit and pew.

The challenge of finding good news in decolonization is further complicated by the reality that we cannot ever fully be extracted from these systems. Another of my students, struggling with the implications of trying to disentangle from colonial systems, remarked “it’s like the snake that eats its own tail.” That is, once one has untangled one thread of empire, it becomes clear that there are more threads waiting. Think about what happens if we try to remove ourselves from a particular consumer cycle by refusing to buy clothing created in unsafe factories in the developing world. What happens to those employees if production decreases? How do we know that the clothing we buy instead is more ethically produced? And even if we succeed in solving the problem of unethically produced clothing, then what about the coffee we buy, or the fuel that heats our homes that arrived through a pipeline crisscrossing native lands? Even as we work toward decolonized preaching, we can expect a certain circular movement rather than a straightforward, linear progress. We are so entrenched, so enmeshed in the systems of empire that it will take much more than our words to produce freedom. And thus it is the gospel that saves us—reminding us that freedom is not achieved by human actions alone, but by the Triune God working within and among us, and often in spite of us.

Given the centrality of scripture for preaching, it is important to address the manner in which decolonizing preaching will be especially difficult regarding non-traditional interpretations of scripture. A postcolonial hermeneutic approach may yield an interpretation that is unfamiliar, unpalatable to listeners. As Peter Gomes writes,

Good news to some will almost inevitably be bad news to others. In order that the gospel in the New Testament might be made as palatable as possible to as many people as possible, its rough edges have been shorn off and the radical edge of Jesus’ preaching has been replaced by a respectable middle, of which “niceness” is now God. When Jesus came preaching, it was to proclaim the ends of things as they are and the breaking in of things that are to be: the status quo is not to be criticized; it is to be destroyed.<sup>12</sup>

To some extent, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics is aimed at restoring the radical edge of the gospel. Those of us who depend upon the status quo are those who stand to lose ourselves—the anchor of our privilege taken up, setting us adrift. This is a difficult gospel, which undoes us and decentres us. Think of the rich young ruler who receives such troubling instructions from Jesus (Mark 10:17-27, Matt 19:16-26, Luke 18:18-23). While seeking to be faithful, he is dismayed when he learns that he will lose everything in order to gain what he desires. This is the good news of postcolonial preaching, even for those who stand to lose. In losing ourselves, we are

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2007), 31.

found. In this process, we are utterly dependent on God's grace, a dependence which itself is liberating.

Johnny Bernard Hill writes of his own prophetic rage as a source and inspiration toward postcolonial theology. Most white preachers will not experience that kind of rage or impetus for change. Even those who yearn with a prophetic zeal for justice on behalf of others will likely lack such personal experience. Without a profound personal experience of injustice and domination, many listeners may respond with ambivalence or apathy. This is particularly difficult in an age where many preachers ask "what's in it for my people?" and listeners ask "what's in it for me?" A postcolonial, theological approach to preaching argues that the gospel is for others, not only for us. The suffering and needs of others, the freedom and well-being of one's neighbor takes precedence over my own needs. Thus, from a postcolonial perspective, the good news is for me, but not only for me. Postcolonial preaching invokes a more generous, wide-reaching conception of gospel. Part of decolonizing preaching then, is to teach our congregations to look differently at good news. This is a gospel of self-limitation which makes space for others. We take our cue from Christ's kenotic self-giving love.

If a postcolonial gospel is to be good news for all people, it cannot be a solely deconstructive process. Ronald Allen reminds us that deconstruction must be accompanied by construction: "People need a place to stand that offers a positive vision of life."<sup>13</sup> A postcolonial homiletic calls into question so much of what is normative—the past, the present, our own identity. Preachers and listeners might become so decentred and disoriented that they feel they can say nothing at all, or have no idea what to think about anything. Thus, postcolonial preaching must not remain at a deconstructive level, but begin to construct a viable alternative vision of reality. As noted above, I have located this alternative vision in God's own nature that challenges the prevailing and familiar narrative of empire. Others will find an alternative vision elsewhere within theological discourse.

White North American preachers are only at the beginning of a conversation about the impact of postcolonial perspectives on preaching. I suspect this conversation has already been happening for many years among other groups of preaching within the North American academy—African American, Hispanic, Asian American etc., and certainly it has shaped the actual sermons of many in communities. Whether or not postcolonial perspectives will benefit mainline homiletics is dependent on the conversation partners. For affluent congregations of European heritage, this approach is intended to yield a gradual reorientation. It is not advisable to announce "I'm preaching a postcolonial sermon today," and proceed to lay bare the centuries of wrongdoing and complicity. Rather, postcolonial preaching is a process of awareness, renaming, and identity formation. Themes of empire and liberation are rampant in scripture—the central story of our faith, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is itself a story of God's victory over the power of empire that seek to kill and separate. The good news, the gospel claim of this approach is that we are being continually recreated to participate in an alternative discourse that has already been established by the Triune God.

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and the Other* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2009), 70.



**Making New Spaces in Between:  
A Post-Reflective Essay Weaving Postcolonial Threads into North American Homiletics**

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**Introduction**

This post-reflective essay is intended to take up and weave common threads from the consultation papers for the sake of making new spaces in contemporary North American homiletics. However, it should be noted that, though we weave these threads, they are themselves also porous, hybrid, and changing. The threads that we identified thematically in the papers for our homiletical reflections here include hybridity and identity, Third Space, loss and memory, performance, context, postcolonial hermeneutics/imagination, and self-reflexivity. Why these thematic threads in particular? We diverse editors believe these threads can be woven in the following way. First, hybrid identity is closely related with the notion of Third Space, since postcolonial preaching envisions a Third Space where hybrid identity is forged. Second, that which was “lost” under the influence of neo/colonialism, different subjugated memories of the past, can be recovered for the sake of constructing identities homiletically going forward. Third, forged and recovered identities call for performance elements as a means of broadening our homiletical focus to not only how and what to preach but also where and therefore with whom to preach. Fourth, by virtue of this changing where and who of preaching, postcolonial understandings of context invite us to embrace both synchronic and diachronic views of context, which means understanding the inherent power dynamics within them. Fifth, the thread of postcolonial hermeneutics/imagination is needed to revision reality in ways that are truly historical, dialogical, and diasporic. Finally, the thread of self-reflexivity helps to open up the possibility of moving beyond the reproduction of colonial discourse in preaching.

Yet because we are weaving, it is just as important for us to acknowledge, as do several of the essays above, that these postcolonial threads connect deeply with ongoing themes and threads in contemporary homiletic theory in North America as well. Along the way, we hope to show the warp and woof of this new, more explicit relationship between homiletics and postcolonial theory and theology, to see how this weaving might further develop the discourses of identity, memory, performance, context, imagination, and participation that are already at the heart of our field. In the process, we hope to open up new critical spaces in between for preaching in intercultural contexts.

**A. Hybridity and Identity**

A postcolonial understanding of hybridity and identity offers fresh insights for the field of homiletics, particularly in understanding not only the identity of preacher and hearers, but preaching’s task of identity formation in a community. With the exception of some postmodern visions of preaching, other approaches such as traditional deductive preaching, inductive preaching, and narrative preaching largely assume the homogeneity of the church and symmetrical relationships between preachers and listeners as the foundation for the communication in preaching. These approaches often explicitly or implicitly aim to develop a univocal identity of the community that relies on shared cultural, racial or ecclesial experiences and commonality. From the post-liberal perspective, for example, one of preaching’s primary goals is to create a distinctive ecclesial identity that is co-constitutive with Jesus’s identity

rendered in the gospel narratives.<sup>1</sup> Thus, preaching aims at building up a univocal and self-enclosed identity of the church based on the gospel narratives. The effort to build up a homogeneous identity of the faith community often ends up in a binary logic that differentiates between “us” and “them.” This coheres with the inner logic of colonial discourse. Unless this unconsciously employed colonial logic is overcome, preachers may unintentionally contribute to sustaining colonial discourse and serve the empire.<sup>2</sup>

The postcolonial concept of hybrid identity—which is not fixed, but fluid, porous, and constantly shifting—challenges the myths of homogeneous identity. In postcolonial perspective, building up a self-enclosed, univocal identity of the faith community by means of preaching is problematic. Rather postcolonial preaching, as Kwok defines it, seeks to create a Third Space where different cultures and identities meet and hybrid identity is forged. Instead of aiming at the development of some univocal identity of the community, preachers must destabilize hearers from the “common sense” of colonial identities by naming colonialism as a present reality and challenge the binary logic of empire by revealing an ambiguous postcolonial reality where one can be both the colonized and the colonizer simultaneously. Hence, the identity of the faith community should not move toward becoming a self-enclosed univocal identity, but to open-ended and fluid senses of identity.

## B. Third Space

Among the authors of the essays, Kwok strongly emphasizes the importance of the notion of the Third Space for postcolonial homiletics. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha’s understanding of hybridity and its in-between space as the Third Space as well as Christopher Baker’s application of them to the hybrid church, Kwok indicates that the Third Space disrupts a dominant binary logic and distinction in the postcolonial context by challenging narratives of modernity and any attempts to define the other. She suggests that postcolonial preaching is to “create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encountering God’s salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized.”<sup>3</sup> There are several key characteristics of the Third Space: consistency of multiple, fluid, porous, constantly shifting identities along with one’s translocality, openness to difference, mutual dialogue between hidden/marginalized voices and transformation, and thus living differently. In the field of homiletics, though it is relatively less attended, this Third Space has been proposed with different terms, such as Rebecca Chopp’s in-between space,<sup>4</sup> Justo González’s marginal space,<sup>5</sup> or most recently Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers’s liminal space. It should be especially noted that the liminal space is closely related to Kwok’s, since it is a space where the distinctions between center and margins are disrupted and a creative change/transformation takes place—usually impossible in the structured society.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the notion of the Third Space is one of the core concepts that will be developed and expanded in the future discussion of postcolonial homiletics.

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), particularly in chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup> For the definition of empire, see Sarah Travis’s essay above.

<sup>3</sup> Kwok, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 62–66, 107–115.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), chapter 1; Justo L. Gonzalez and Pablo A. Jiménez, *Pulpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>6</sup> See, Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), particularly chapter 7.

### C. Loss and Memory

One key thematic thread from the consultation on preaching and postcolonial theology is the notion of the connection of loss and memory. The role of memory has been regarded as crucial for the formation of individual and/or collective identities, even though they become more porous and shifting in postcolonial discourse. In relation to memory, Paul Connerton elucidates how the memory/identity of groups is conveyed and sustained through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices.<sup>7</sup> Both of them are inseparably related with each other, since commemorative ceremonies are embodied practices performed by the participants. Thus, memory is not only personal and cognitive but also socially habitual. However, a problem arises when memory is disrupted by colonialism. Willie James Jennings takes up and expands this notion and traces the history of colonialism/racialism, focusing on four historical personages and unearthing the interrelatedness of different losses: space, memory, language, and history, which provide the moral content of one's identity: "The loss indicates the destruction of the fine webs that held together memory, language, and place to moral action and ethical judgment."<sup>8</sup> As a result, as Travis and Valle rightly indicate, both the colonized and the colonizers are under the control of colonization and are segregated, competing with each other and commonly experiencing loss. In this sense, postcolonial preaching should illumine loss in order to restore memory for the sake of reviving one's individual and collective identity. For this task, Kwok suggests that the preacher should evoke memory of the past and inculcate new values and understanding, using creative forms of the common folk and popular religiosity.<sup>9</sup> Valle deals with how to reframe postcolonial preaching and worship by restoring and applying the lost memory/tradition of the pre-Columbian religion of the Taíno, in an effort to decolonize them from a Caribbean perspective. Although the thread of memory and loss is not totally new to homiletics, it is relatively undeveloped. Kwok's concern and Valle's ideas find echoes in John McClure's proposal of the need for "counter-memory" to encounter memory's others "by looking at the inscription of history on the marginalized body and reading backward to the countless lost events."<sup>10</sup> Not only on a methodological level but also on an ontological level, the notion of loss needs continued illumination in postcolonial homiletics.

### D. Performance

Many of the authors of the above essays expand the understanding of preaching beyond its conventional definition, which refers to only delivering a sermon on the pulpit, transmitting truth by means of logical persuasion. A shared understanding of preaching among many of these authors is that preaching is a communally performed event. Lis Valle places preaching in a liturgical setting where worshipers communally participate in a movement from tension to connectedness and journeying imaginatively from lament to celebration. Timothy Jones describes both Black preaching and Hispanic preaching as communal events that consist of interaction between preachers and listeners. Preaching as a communal event presupposes the understanding of preaching as performative action. In other words, "the sermon is not a sermon until it is actually preached."<sup>11</sup> Kwok integrates performative dimensions of preaching in her

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Kwok, 6.

<sup>10</sup> John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 42–43.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Jones, 5.

definition of postcolonial preaching as “conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space.”<sup>12</sup> In this perspective, preaching does not refer only to the utterance of the preacher, but includes preachers, hearers, the performative act of preaching, liturgical setting, and a faith community within a particular socio-political context. Postcolonial preaching as performance seeks to construct new realities by consciously performing possible new identities, which destabilize any narrowly defined identity politics.<sup>13</sup> If preaching is a communally performative act, the public gathering of the worshiping community itself can be a performative act of preaching for social and political change through repeated performances.

A postcolonial understanding of preaching as a communal and performative action challenges much North American white mainline homiletics to extend the scope of its work from a too-narrow focus on the activity of preachers. Homiletics need not be limited to the concerns of how and what to preach, but extended to the socio-political realms where the church takes its communal, performative act of preaching. Black preaching traditions provide rich resources in understanding of preaching as performance. In *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God*, Frank Thomas delineates the performative tradition of black preaching. A preacher performs tradition with a particular purpose and direction to accomplish some goal. No preacher as performer is an isolated agent, but always related to other elements such as music and liturgical contexts and tradition. Congregations’ feedback and improvisational response to the preacher are critical aspects of preaching.<sup>14</sup> In Thomas’ holistic understanding of black preaching from a performative perspective, preaching acts, preaching agents, hearers, and preaching contexts are essential parts of the preaching event as a whole and cannot be separated. Like Black preaching, a postcolonial understanding of preaching as performance not only expands the scope of homiletics, but also challenges it to use more diverse forms of preaching beyond the traditional monological lecture style and integrating more performative elements into preaching itself.

### E. Context

The emerging discussion of preaching and postcolonial theology also complexifies the thematic threads of context in contemporary North American homiletic theory. In her book, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Eunjoo Mary Kim traces an important arc for the discussion of context in the field. Kim points out that much discussion of context in the field of homiletics has been limited to what she calls “intra-contextual” focus, that is, that context refers to the immediate environs within a congregation as a kind of synchronic, closed entity (Tisdale, Nieman/Rogers).<sup>15</sup> Along with that, of course comes the problem of how context itself is described: is “context” a univocal reality? Kim’s transcontextual vision pushes back on both notions to render context with ever greater complexity and nuance. The impact for preaching is considerable. If context is a meeting place not just of a theological worldview of the preacher and one of the congregation, but a meeting in fact of multiple contextual realities and claims, the kind of conversation that preaching sponsors becomes much more open-ended and complex. It places, as Kim claims in her latest work, preaching in an inherently multicultural context.

Another thread of research around context embraces a more profoundly temporal and diachronic element into contextual reflection. In their book *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation*, David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert Kelly add “situational” features to talk

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<sup>12</sup> Kwok, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Kwok, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2013), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville, WJKP, 2010), XX.

about occasional preaching as a kind of *kairos* moment.<sup>16</sup> In his recent Princeton dissertation, “Preaching as Sabotage: Power, Practice, and Proclamation,” Adam Hearlson expands on this notion to describe contexts and contending “fields” where, following the work of both Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, preaching from the margins can become a kind of tactical moment of *kairos* in which persons come to speech as an act of resistance in practice.<sup>17</sup> The result is a way of mapping congregational contexts and systems of power, and in such a way that strategic, transformative engagement becomes possible for interrupting precisely the ways in which power can reproduce itself in such contexts.

In many ways a postcolonial view of context begins to hold these two aspects, the synchronic and the more diachronic view of context *together*. Here with postcolonial theology context is more richly synchronic in terms of its reality as a plurivocal, intercultural space. Instead of trying to engage hearers as exemplars of a univocal monoculture, it envisions the relationship of preachers and hearers in a much more dynamic way. Because of postcolonial theory’s attention to *power* and differentials, it becomes possible to unpack precisely those reproductive forces of power that over time re-inscribe monolithic and binary colonial identities. The result is a much more discerning and mixed way of perceiving cultures and identities at play in the preaching moment—and in way that joins together synchronic and diachronic views of contexts. At this point, postcolonial theology engages homiletic theory to weave both the synchronic and diachronic threads more deeply into its contextual work.

#### **F. Postcolonial Hermeneutics/Imagination**

The notion of the postcolonial imagination is important for Kwok’s vision of postcolonial theology and practice. This postcolonial imagination can enrich the texture of the already rich conversation around imagination in the field of homiletics. It invites persons to a kind of revisioning of reality and in three crucial dimensions: the historical, the dialogical, and the diasporic.<sup>18</sup>

*The Historical.* History embodies a perspectival memory that requires putting multiple elements together, a notion that Kwok compares to quilt making. These kinds of historical moves stand in contrast to power discourses which foreclose subjectivity for those lacking status and documents and largely ascribes to others roles of “victim” or “hero(ine).” The importance of the historical in postcolonial hermeneutics and the imagination is that as remembering “in public” it makes memory survivable. In this way history is not written by the winners.

*The Dialogical.* For Kwok dialogical imagination is important because of the different religious and cultural traditions in Asia and other parts of the world. Such a dialogical imagination is important not just for sponsoring dialogical hermeneutics of the likes of Kaufmann and Gadamer, but also to *resist* a desire for imagination that tries to see things whole: especially identities of cultural traditions—which only lead to reification and the collapse of difference. At the same time, the alienation of life problematizes all readings and makes the need for a dialogical imagination and hermeneutic all the stronger, especially in a way that accounts for power differences among dialogue partners.

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<sup>16</sup>David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert A. Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Adam Hearlson, “Preaching as Sabotage: Power, Practice, and Proclamation.” PhD Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> What follows is our thumbnail sketch of Kwok’s work in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005), chapter 1.

*The Diasporic.* Here the diasporic does not mean for Kwok an idealized, essentialized, or historically resolved sense, as with certain twentieth century interpretations of the Jewish diaspora, but in a sense both de-centered and multicentered through experiences of immigration and commuting between “home” and the “place of work” in Western metropolitan centers. This diasporic space is where the negotiation of multiple loyalties and identities takes place. For Kwok this means storytelling and weaving of traditions to work through an unfinished diasporic identity. What do “home” and “roots” mean given the diasporic imagination? For this reason, the diasporic sponsors a kind of *intercultural* discourse.

This threefold notion of the postcolonial imagination has already had a powerful impact on homiletics. With her new book, Sarah Travis has begun to explore its importance for communities in various realities of intertwined identities of the colonizers and the colonized.<sup>19</sup> Yet the reach extends further. At the level of preaching and the act of representation the need for a postcolonial imagination has become painfully clear. Justo and Catherine González have also pushed imagination to include the poor who are “not present.”<sup>20</sup> Most importantly, however, the notion of using imagination to *resist* seeing things whole represents a new challenge to a field long drawn to the category of imagination in preaching. For this reason alone, the postcolonial imagination will continue to occupy a more important position within the field going forward. It may even be pushing homiletics to develop a new kind of rhetoric or poetic of the plural and multivocal.

### G. Self-Reflexivity

Postcolonial reality is complex and ambiguous. There is no clear cut distinction between the former colonizer and the colonized in the postcolonial context. One can be both colonizer and colonized at the same time. Therefore, a critical self-reflexivity is essential for preachers in order to avoid unconsciously reproducing colonial discourse and serving the system of the empire through preaching. By means of self-reflexivity, a preacher can recognize “an invisible framework on which our lives are built and within which our identities are constructed,”<sup>21</sup> namely the empire, and examine one’s own connection with the empire. One of the important tasks of decolonizing preaching is helping those with relative power realize their own captivity to empire and need for liberation. For those without power, such a realization should help them to develop a self-awareness of the oppressive situation and how their minds and bodies have also been dominated by the empire.

In the *Liberating Pulpit*, Justo González criticizes the fact that liberal theologians and liberal churches do not recognize their own oppression because most of them see themselves as free despite being captive to socio-economic structures. Without recognizing their own captivity, González argues, they cannot understand liberation theology.<sup>22</sup> To be really free, recognizing one’s own captive status through critical self-reflectivity is essential.

In a similar sense, preachers should critically reflect on their own preaching practices—such as the use of images, symbols, and interpretation of the Scripture—for vestiges of colonialism and elements of empire. Jones, for one, provides Katie Cannon’s womanist critique of Black preaching as a postcolonial move of self-reflexivity in Black preaching, through which

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Justo L. González and Catherine G. González, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) 100.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Travis, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Justo González and Catherine González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1994), 25–26.

Cannon places the task of a self-reflective critique of preaching on hearers who have the ability to critique the use of the rhetoric in the sermon. The postcolonial task of self-reflexivity is not the solitary task of a preacher, but is a communal task. Thus, the community of faith as a self-reflexive hearing community critically engages with and participates in the preaching event.

The task of communal self-reflexivity in a postcolonial homiletic might be understood as the critical mode of congregation's participation in preaching, which can profitably be related to the idea of congregation's participation in preaching event in the new homiletic. For example, Fred Craddock contends that a faith community is not only a pastoral context, but also an active participant in a preaching event. Listeners do not passively hear and receive what the preacher proclaims at the pulpit. Rather they actively participate in the preaching event by filling in the details of images in the sermon and finishing an open-ended sermon.<sup>23</sup> For Lucy Rose, conversational preaching is a mode of conversation within the local community of faith. In conversational preaching, the preacher and the local community of faith gather symbolically at a round table, exploring together the Word of God for their lives and the life of the church and the world.<sup>24</sup> Through this ongoing communal conversation around the Word, the central conversations of the local church are shaped and reshaped. The local community of faith, including both the preacher and congregation members, communally and self-reflexively engages with diverse matters of faith and life in preaching event. In this sense, developing a way of nurturing the local community of faith that is capable of being self-critical and self-reflexive is a task of conversational preaching and invites weaving into the task of contemporary homiletic theory.

## Conclusion

We editors, as homileticians, have sought to weave the thematic threads of the Consultation on Preaching and Postcolonial Theology more carefully into the world of contemporary North American homiletic theory. We think the unique ways in which postcolonial theology has engaged the intercultural context of contemporary preaching offers new modes of conversation within homiletics and between homiletics and other fields. Because homiletics itself is already being shaped by many different postmodern currents, including postcolonial theory and theology, it is uniquely situated to take up the task of both weaving and making space in between for new ways of thinking about the practice of preaching for our time. Our hope as editors is that this consultation's conversation, and the weaving that emerged out of it, offers a deeper and more profound hope of making new spaces "in between," a means of perhaps decolonizing homiletics itself.

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<sup>23</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 53.

<sup>24</sup> Lucy Rose, *Sharing the Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 4.

David Schnasa Jacobsen. *Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 233 pages. \$22.

David Schnasa Jacobsen's *Mark* commentary is part of Fortress' Biblical Preaching Commentary series that successfully marries the goals of two different genres: traditional preaching commentaries that highlight themes of the particular books of the bible and lectionary resources that offer exegetical and homiletical insights. To preachers who ask whether this particular book, as part of the series, meets its goals, I respond with a resounding, "Yes!"

The structure and layout of the commentary are very amenable to the lifestyle of busy preachers. The introduction succinctly features exegetical information in academic rubrics found in many biblical commentaries such as author, place of Mark in the Gospel tradition, historical background, sources, provenance, and genre. This format is informative without being overwhelming. The book chapters represent different stages in Jesus' ministry such as "The Gospel's Promising Beginnings in Galilee (1:16–3:6)," "The Rocky Way—The Word of Promise and The Disciples Misunderstanding (6:6b–8:26)," and "An Apocalyptic Farewell Address (13:1-37)."

Other features of the commentary are brief introductions to each of the chapters that inform the readers of what to expect in Mark's narrative and *commentary within the commentary* (my characterization). *Commentary within the commentary* are text boxes that provide the readers with additional exegetical information relevant to the pericope being studied. For example in the chapter "Teaching and More Misunderstanding on The Way (9:14–10:52)," Jacobsen inserts boxes explaining Mark's use of the term *Gehenna* and Jewish beliefs and practices as it relates to divorce. Other rhetorical strategies featured include Mark's use of the term *immediately* to introduce a sense of urgency and Mark's continual use of the term *kai* to begin sentences. Though the information contained in the boxes is exegetical, it is presented in a very informal, narrative style.

One of the major strengths of this commentary is the identification and continuous highlighting of key themes and patterns that make Mark's gospel unique. For example, in the introduction, Jacobsen informs readers that Mark's narrative uses rhetorical patterns such as doublets (repeated stories) and intercalation (two stories told sequentially that mutually interpret each other). An example of intercalation is found in 6:6b-13 when Jesus sent the disciples out and 6:30 when they return. In between these pericope, John the Baptist is beheaded. Jacobsen contends that this structure (combined with Jesus' rejection in his home town in 6:1-6a) highlights the perils of discipleship.

One of the factors that Jacobsen highlights is the *apocalyptic mode* in which Mark writes his narrative. For example, in 1:21-28, Jesus demonstrates his authority over an unclean spirit that possessed a man in the synagogue by commanding the spirit to come out of him. Jacobsen contends that by performing the exorcism, Jesus is fighting an apocalyptic battle against forces that hold humanity, and the earth, in a form of slavery. However, Jesus wins the battle. Throughout the commentary, Jacobsen characterizes Jesus' healing as *reign-of-God ministry* that is tied to human need.

Throughout the commentary, Jacobsen strongly advises preachers to avoid anti-Semitism and the temptation to re-inscribe "ancient hatreds" as it relates to characterizing all Jews based on the actions of a few. In his very detailed commentary on the passion narrative in 14:1–15:47 (which includes analysis of the plot structure, narrative rhetoric, setting, and characters), Jacobsen contends that preachers may be able to avoid wholesale characterizations of Jews by



sharing the complexity of the roles of Jewish leaders in society and politics within their Roman context.

From the beginning to the end, Jacobsen offers suggestions of homiletical approaches that honor the biblical context. For example, in 3:20-35 when Jesus claimed that those who do the will of God are his brother, sister, and mother, Jacobsen posits that Mark is offering preachers an opportunity to reconceptualize family by discussing God's kingdom purposes at work in the lives of all of God's people. He advises preachers to treat the story of Bartimaeus (8:22-26) like a call story that invites further conversation about the difficulty of following Jesus.

My gentle critique of this volume is about the *commentary within the commentary*. Since the entire book provides readers with Jacobsen's very helpful and well-informed thoughts and opinions, providing exegetical information without additional commentary would allow readers to experience a nice change in approach and give them unencumbered access to exegetical material. Notwithstanding, this commentary is helpful for all preachers, but especially those who do not have the resources to purchase multiple volumes of biblical commentaries and other exegetical resources but want to develop biblically sound sermons.

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HyeRan Kim-Cragg and EunYoung Choi. *The Encounters: Retelling the Bible from Migration and Intercultural Perspectives*. Daejeon: Daejangan Publisher, 2013. 159 pages. \$13.

Intercultural and interracial global movements increasingly characterize today's human communities. In this context, we are challenged to confront and to evaluate critically such acute situations, which can be perceived as a neo-colonializing phenomenon that suppresses differences. For example, South Korea, the mother country of the two authors, Dr. Kim-Cragg and Dr. Choi, historically, was one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the world. Korean people had not experienced living with people of other ethnicities in their society. The phenomenon of multicultural families and the influx of Southeast Asian migrant workers, generated by the impact of economic globalization in South Korea, started in the late 1990s. Due to the lack of experience of living with people of different ethnicities, a series of human rights violations as well as ongoing incidents of discrimination has regrettably emerged as the source of major social problems in Korean society. Especially, sexual harassment of female migrant workers in the agricultural and industrial sectors is a major problem in South Korea as well as worldwide. These individuals, considered to be local victims, should also be recognized as global migrant slaves in the context of the economic globalization of the twenty-first century.

In this context, homiletics is challenged to shift its new humanizing direction against dehumanizing power to alternative biblical perspectives, respecting cultural diversity and differences in the text as well as in the larger globalized context. The two authors provide readers an "eye-opening contribution" (9). This very valuable resource supports the intercultural reality and its issues in light of biblical stories with the most common biblical interpretations such as "feminist biblical criticism," "literary narrative criticism," and "reader-response criticism." In this respect, the two authors direct their efforts toward filling the gap in the biblical and Christian education scholarship, while focusing on migration, intercultural and interracial issues related to women's lives in the global context.

This insightful text is divided into twelve chapters according to twelve biblical characters: Hagar (23–33), Tamar (34–45), Gershom (46–57), Rahab (58–67), Ruth and Naomi (68–81), Servant Girl (82–91), Elderly Woman in Nineveh (92–103), The Family of Jesus (104–114), the Syrophenician Woman (115–126), the Woman from Samaria (127–137), Priscilla (138–148), and Lydia (149–159). In each chapter, the invisible discriminatory experiences of women in biblical stories are recovered as the sources of the reality of migration and multiculturalism. The authors retell each biblical encounter in such a way that these well-known biblical figures become living bridges for women on the margins today. That is, each chapter deals mainly with female figures in the Bible who were marginalized in their respective societies by the patriarchal structures that dominated them, causing them to become migrant persons crossing national borders, much like thousands of women today.

*The Encounters* brings to our attention compelling situations of biblical women that are replicated in contemporary society. The authors have designed the text as a useful resource for preachers and Christian educators as well. Each chapter consists of four parts. In the first part, the focus is on the background of the given biblical text. In the second part, the additional scholarly references for deeper understanding of the text are supported. In the third part, the authors intentionally introduce "re-telling and re-interpreting the biblical stories with creativity and imagination" (17). By using the monologue style, readers experience an effective interpathic approach, looking at themselves through the eyes of others or strangers as well as learning about

“the reality of migration and multi/inter-cultural lives” (7, 12) found in the biblical world. In the final part, various open-ended questions promoting probing discussions are found. These questions can serve as mutually transformative dialogue tools directed toward a new reality of humanization for the global family to fully liberate individuals from forms of various discriminations in our current multi-cultural societies.

The creative endeavors of the authors promote awareness of the marginalized as others or strangers, living in inter-cultures within local and global societies. Such places, nevertheless, reflect God’s revelation, work, and presence, and challenge readers to look more deeply for indications of “God’s grace, God’s justice, and God’s love” (10) in the Bible. This book reminds readers that the important task for the preacher is to identify the margins of society globally as well as locally and to discern the presence and work of God everywhere, to make and keep human lives human. Overall, *The Encounters* is well worth reading and a significant resource for preaching and educating with a focus on intercultural understanding and the empowerment of women.

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Steve Brown. *How to Talk So People Will Listen*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014. 240 pages. \$13.99.

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have as human beings to convey what we think, feel, and believe. Words carry power and when they are used correctly they can motivate, inspire, challenge, encourage, cut down, build up, and so much more. But in today's culture there are "so many voices vying for attention—online, on TV, on electronic devices of every kind—it's harder than ever to be heard. But nothing cuts through the static like the spoken word" (back cover). That is what *How to Talk So People Will Listen* by Steve Brown is all about!

Brown originally published this book in 1993. This is a revised and expanded edition that includes helpful suggestions for navigating the shifting landscape of our digital communication age.

Rightfully, Brown begins the book with a chapter on the power of speech, moves into authority and roadblock issues, guides the reader into significant communication shifts, and ends with helpful aids for talking in ways that are inviting and helpful. The structure of the book is well thought out and moves from one concern to the next in a coherent manner.

Dealing with the power of words is imperative for anyone who speaks publicly. Preachers, teachers, leaders, and just about everyone can gain something from reading this book. The power of words means that the speaker must acknowledge the possibility that those words could either bless or destroy (13–17). Words help to define us and set up how people react to the speaker (17–18). The power of words has to be dealt with intentionally.

As homiletics professors, we often see the fear and intimidation factor of public speaking impacting the students we teach. Brown addresses this reality head on. Several things lead to this intimidation for any public speakers. They include: apprehension, hostility, position, expertise, and circumstance (Ch. 2). The logical and simple advice from the author, "Don't let others intimidate you." Easier said than done for many, but great advice nonetheless.

Brown advises speakers to keep things simple, which is helpful for all public and private speaking (58). He also offers advice about the roadblocks that can inhibit communication. These include: not saying what you mean, being insensitive to listeners, sending mixed messages, disregarding listeners' responses, and failing to define terms (Ch. 4). These are important things to note.

Advice for speaking to enhance their communication skills in this new age is the importance of being real, understanding the shifting realities of authority, and the importance of relationships and community (78–86).

Brown offers helpful insights about communication in this new digital and technological age that are critical for preachers, as well. These include: telling a story, avoiding sound bite mentality, providing the listener a takeaway, and avoiding hidden agendas (Ch. 7).

Chapters 8 and 9 provide practical rules for communication that delve into the necessary processes of crafting opportunities to communicate effectively. One of the issues I experienced negatively as a reader was the use of the term "weapon" in relation to winning an argument. That kind of aggressive and militaristic language typically turns me off.

Brown considers chapter ten the most important of the book for those desiring to speak effectively in public. In it, he lays out his main premise. For a speech or other public speaking event to be effective it must have a clear purpose, it must draw listeners into the hearing, it must be well organized, it must be tell a story, and it must matter to the listener (161–173).

Paying attention to your intended audience, understanding the subject about which you are speaking, and editing for clarity are insights any preacher or speaker needs to take into consideration (176–183). Moving into presentation and speaking what has been planned comes next and Brown does an admirable job in addressing the realities of public speaking and what the presenter needs to keep in mind regarding the needs of the listeners. Brown utilizes ten commandments for public speaking that are important (Ch. 12).

Some of the narrative insights that Brown provides are extremely helpful to preaching, but the book would be beneficial to anyone who needs practical help for improving their communication skills. The book is clear and coherent in ways that are accessible to the reader. The practical advice is simple to understand. The book is a good resource for anyone who wants to learn about public communications.

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Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds. *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. 332 pages. \$34.

As a newly minted pastor, I received a call from a growing mainline congregation. While on the surface this was happy news, in our day-to-day life, many saw growth as a problem: “I don’t know this church anymore!” “We’re growing too fast!” And so on. The senior minister had a stock reply for these complaints: “Yeah,” he would say, “these are problems, but they’re the *good* kind.” You might say the same thing about the field of practical theology: with its porous lines, its many conversation partners, its sometimes dizzying array of hermeneutical locations, suspicions, and commitments. It can sometimes seem like an adolescent, all legs and arms, betraying a beautiful sort of awkwardness. If we can rest with the sometimes doesn’t-quite-fit-here feeling of the field, what we may find is a good sort of problem, namely a heuristically rich form of growth.

Editors Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski wisely chose “openings” for the title of this edited volume of fifteen essays rather than “models” or “types” because they wanted to avoid “conceptual entities” abstracted from the “messiness and complexity of actual practice” (7). In this spirit, Richard Osmer suggests the metaphor of multiple, distinct, and intersecting trajectories within practical theology (69–71). Rather than the slow, slumbering crisis of unmistakable stagnation, the “openings” of this volume provide insight into vital as well as varied embodiments within the field of practical theology.

What sorts of openings? Some are vocational, fitting into the “clerical paradigm” of practical theology. Mikoski explains that while his years in seminary provided perspective and tools, it was the lived experience of pastoral ministry that retooled his theological imagination (169). Hosffman Ospino insists that ecclesial contexts cannot account for the whole work of practical theology; it remains a form of public theology insofar that it exists in the “lived experiences” of Latino/a peoples in the United States (240–1).

Some of the contributors share how the field of practical theology was, in a sense, blown wide open for them when they realized that all theology, including white theology, is contextual. Stephen Bevans recalls his bewildered reaction to a friend’s report that he had just “discovered” black theology through James Cone: “‘Black theology?’ I said, ‘There’s no such thing as Black theology! There’s only theology’—meaning, of course, the kind of theology I was learning as a seminary student in Rome” (45).

A generation later and Bevans’ sparkling incredulity has turned into the careful analysis of Courtney T. Goto. She underlines her identity as a third-generation Japanese American with deep roots in the United Methodist Church. Her study of a Japanese American Church in Sacramento, California, revealed a process of identity formation through play with visual art (32). According to Goto, Asian American practical theologians live in the “gaps” and amid the “ambiguities” of identity and experience (41). The work of practical theology is not so much a fixture but, according to Goto, a trajectory of the Spirit’s movement: “The creative work of Asian American practical theologies is never accomplished alone. Human creativity for justice and liberation participates in the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, which is both creative and redemptive. There is no project more sacred” (44).

While admittedly diverse, the editors see common values and elements shared among practical theologians. These qualities contribute to the template used by each author (historical context, orientation and key features, norms and authority, views of theory-practice relationship, among others). Cahalan and Mikoski invite readers to consider the most apt way of exploring its

contents. They recommend against reading the book from beginning to end (the contributions are organized alphabetically by title) but, instead, suggest alternative “Tables of Contents,” each following a different trajectory within the field, namely, methodological approaches, ecclesial tradition, ethnic or gender identity, and one that cuts across the gender/ethnicity category (8–10).

What are some ways you might use this book? Selected essays in a seminary level course could help students value, articulate, and deepen the integrative impulse resident in pastoral theology. As a whole, it would be highly useful in doctor of ministry as well as Ph.D. level courses. One question we might ask, in keeping with the way this work “opens” the field to its own richness: what would it look like for a volume to include practical theologians alongside and in conversation with sympathetic representatives of non-theological disciplines? Perhaps that is one more opening in a vital and growing field.

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Robert P. Hoch. *By the Rivers of Babylon: Blueprint for a Church in Exile*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. 160 pages. \$18.

In the book, the author takes the term exile as the major theological theme. For him, it is an ecclesiological crisis that the church does not consider exile “a real, material phenomenon in twenty-first-century communities” (7) and spiritualizes it by losing sight of its concrete realities in our society.

The author identifies the contemporary exiles as undocumented migrant workers and immigrants, the homeless, prostitutes, and First Nations Peoples, who are victims of the economic and political systems and cultural invasions in our globalized world. He witnesses to the realities of these exiles by visiting and interviewing the people in six exilic communities in the US—Postville, Iowa; the House of the Butterfly in Tucson, Arizona; the Arivaca Camp in Altar Valley, Arizona; a homeless shelter in Dubuque, Iowa; the Cherith Brook Catholic Worker House in Kansas City, Missouri; and a Nez Perce Presbyterian Camp retreat in Idaho. The substance of the book is the author’s practical theological reflection on the actual realities of these exilic communities, for the purpose of challenging today’s churches to “[see] Christ amid the marginalized peoples” (48) and calling it to reconsider its identity and mission “as exile, among exiles, and as antidote to exile” (137).

The first six chapters of the book begin with the description of the reality of each community. As an eye-witness, the author narrates what is going on there by sharing true stories he witnessed to, which are horrific and depressing. Readers may be shocked to learn that such dehumanized realities coexist in our so-called affluent, democratic, and egalitarian society and feel hopelessly deadlocked over how to respond to the reality of exile as a community of faith.

The author’s intention is, however, not merely to uncover the actual reality of exile but to provide the church with a theological norm of what ought to be going on in the church. As a way to search for clues for hope for the exilic communities, he interprets Jeremiah 29, the story of Ruth and Naomi, the Gospel of Matthew, and other passages in the Old and New Testaments from the perspective of exile. His mutually correlated hermeneutical approach between the text and the context invites readers to appreciate those texts in light of the promise and hope God has made for humanity. Based on new meanings created from the biblical texts, the author develops “a theology of return” (81) and “a theology of clothing and nakedness” (26) for the twenty-first-century exiles.

In addition to biblical interpretation, each chapter includes stories of good practices that Christian and humanitarian organizations have done in order to bring political, economic, and cultural justice into the communities of exile. Actions taken by Casa Mariposa (“Butterfly House”), a center advocating immigration reform as well as serving as temporary sanctuary for undocumented migrants, by Frontera de Cristo, a missional organization working on the border between the US and Mexico, and by Café Justo (“Just Coffee”), a coffee-roasting cooperative striving to bring justice to farmers, are just a few examples the author gave, from which the church may learn about how to respond to the reality of exile.

In Chapter Seven, the concluding remarks of the book, the author has a lengthy conversation with sets of questions about what the church should be and how it should live out for the exiles in solidarity in a concrete and practical manner. In terms of the pragmatic task, how to build solidarity with exilic communities is a crucial issue for the church. Perhaps, a pastor’s question the author quoted, “The congregation I serve seems far removed from the exilic communities addressed in *By the Rivers*. How can I help the congregation get physically close



enough to such borders to actually challenge them?” (156), is a most realistic concern for many churches in the US. As the author suggests, it would be wise for the pastor to begin with critical reflection on our routine actions as living among displaced peoples.

Yet, the real challenge of the book is whether the church really wants to be partners of the exiles and is willing to be more creative and imaginative in thinking of and acting on fresh new ideas for its mission for the exiles. Throughout the book, the author’s masterful literary skills and poetic imagery are powerful enough to evoke empathetic imagination from readers. Furthermore, his process of practical theological reflection effectively guides them to explore new theological directions for the church “as exile, among exiles, and as antidote to exile.” At this point, this book is a valuable resource for teaching and learning practical theology.

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Michael A. Brothers. *Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 189 pages. \$20.

I thought many times of Kahlil Gibran's oft quoted mantra from *The Prophet* of spaces in togetherness as I read Michael Brothers' latest work, *Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen*. This excellent work in the field of homiletics (one that dabbles in speech performance studies as well) explores the aesthetic of distance in preaching for the field of homiletics today.

Why do we need a greater understanding of distance for preaching today? To set the stage, Brothers opens his book by noting a shift in his classroom. At the beginning of his teaching career at the university Brothers observed that university communications students preferred distance between the speaker and themselves, reflected by responses such as "You were too close for comfort; you forced me to back away" (2). Meanwhile, his seminary students longed for more proximity and intimacy from their peers, reflected in comments such as "Reach out and talk to us!" or "You seemed distant" (2). But in his seminary classroom today, Brothers observes students putting up walls when student-preachers encroach too much in their personal space in the sermon. This reflects for Brothers the desire among today's ecclesial listeners for aesthetic distance in communication that university students in speech performance had already named. And so, Brothers asserts, a "change of hearing" has taken place once again in preaching.

The bridge between the two forays of distance in speech performance studies and distance in homiletics is the late Fred Craddock. Some of my favorite rhetorical work is early in the book as Brothers narrates the setting of Yale's campus in 1978 as Craddock delivered the Lyman Beecher lecture and formally introduced the concept of aesthetic distance in performance studies to the practice of preaching (9ff). After this creative setting of the stage, Brothers offers a brief but thorough introductory overview of speech performance studies for readers new to that field in general and aesthetic distance as a concept in speech performance in particular (Chapter Two).

Returning to homiletics, he turns to Craddock's adaptation of aesthetic distance in preaching (Chapter Three). Brothers, through Craddock, argues that listener participation in the event of the sermon ironically requires distance from the preacher—distance in her posture toward the text and context but also distance in her delivery—but this distance, strangely enough, requires the preacher to know her context. It is the dance between the shores of text, context, preacher, pulpit, and pew that creates the delicate balance of enough room for listeners to feel welcomed to enter into the sermonic event but not feel forced into that moment (too much proximity) nor feel as if the preacher is too clueless to offer any real welcome to those in the particular pew of a particular church (too much distance). This is how the Living Word is given room and space to transform congregations, collectively and as individuals: space in the church's togetherness.

Next, Brothers negotiates a hearing with Craddock's biggest critics, for his use of distance in particular: postliberal homiletics (Chapter Four). While Craddock found an aesthetic of distance as vital to his homiletic, homileticians Mark Ellingsen and Charles Campbell aim for aesthetic "absorption" in their homiletic, namely absorption into the world of the biblical text.

After a brief overview of postliberal theory and theology, Brothers places Craddock and professor of literature Louise Rosenblatt in dialogue with Ellingsen and Campbell. Brothers convincingly argues for the unworkability in performance of postliberal preaching from its

theory. The postliberal homiletic renders in preaching an unintentional distance between gospel and life as it is lived that postliberal preachers cannot bridge by absorption tactics. That is because, for postliberal preachers, the good news is in the text and the world of the text, not in this world. Listeners, Brothers claims, are not satisfied with being called to absorption away from this world each week and into the distant location of gospel in the text-world. A theory that does not take hearers in preaching seriously will not have the means to provide adequate guides to sermon performance. Such is the case for postliberal homiletics (136).

I found myself surprised to reach the conclusion and two sermon examples so suddenly. Perhaps this was an intentional move, one that reflects aesthetic distance for our field. This move allows Brothers to crack open the door for another project exploring distance in preaching through other avenues, such as virtual preaching or satellite churches. I would also love to have Brothers in conversation with Lance Pape's project from the same year, *The Scandal of Preaching* (2014) as it seeks to reclaim postliberal preaching for times such as these. Who is right in the end? Do we need distance or absorption in our preaching? How does Pape's Tillichian revision of Campbell's postliberal homiletic address Brothers' critique of the unworkability of Campbell and Ellingsen's theories in practice? Certainly articles will be written on such themes. Ultimately, Brothers' thorough research coupled with his cogent writing render this a project that students and teachers of preaching should add to their collections as well as all those working preachers out there who would like to breathe a bit of energy and creative space into their sermon preparation and delivery.

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Jennifer E. Copeland. *Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women's Voices for Christian Preaching*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. 150 pages. \$20.

Jennifer Copeland has written an engaging monograph that begins with the simple premise: sermons are different when women preach. That difference, she claims, is because the variables of register shift in numerous ways during that event. As the book sets out evidence to support her thesis' reality, it becomes a helpful tool for understanding women's voices in the pulpit.

Copeland opens this short volume with a brief history of women preaching, noting especially the regression of women from leadership in the life of the early church, a gradual exclusion beginning in the second century and eventually institutionalized with Constantine. In this post biblical system, women became what the church told them they were: "unworthy, weak, dangerous and deceptive, even while the experiences of their own lives continued to bear witness to a different reality" (14).

Fast forwarding to recent trends, Copeland laments that as women finally entered seminaries and became clergy, most homiletic literature failed to offer any substantive work related to women in the guild. Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, and Tom Long are chided for their failure to attend to women's enrichment of the discipline, thus contributing to ongoing androcentric assumptions about preaching. With aid of Rebecca Chopp's work, however, Copeland attempts to fill that lacuna and opens the homiletic conversation to include different voices and processes to describe God as she lays groundwork for a fresh look at meaning-making strategies for preachers and listeners.

Utilizing the linguistic concept of register, Copeland sets forth an analysis of preaching that recognizes women's theological and semantic contributions and examines how gender influences these meanings. Field (the sermon's *what* and *where*), tenor (the sermon's *who*) and mode (the sermon's *how*) are the determinants that shape meaning and provide the variables of register. Meaning comes to life, Copeland explains, by considering not only the words themselves but also the social context, relationship, and method. Changing a variable as significant as gender alters the sermon's subject before the preacher even begins to speak. And each register shift creates possibilities for more profound understandings and living, all of which were unknown when pulpits were limited to men.

Rooting her work in dialogue with theorists Christine Smith (resistance), Lucy Hogan (priority of relationship from the inside), Anna Carter Florence (priority of relationship from the margins), Mary Catherine Hilbert (proclamation as sacred imagination) and John McClure (deconstruction and othering), Copeland kick-starts a stimulating effort to "listen for registers" in the trajectories of current work. In the process, she exposes preconceptions about sermons when the preacher is a woman as she simultaneously explores grist for dialogue into new vistas of understanding.

Copeland's monograph is an essential contribution to homiletic literature, an engaging and thoughtful advancement of understanding what happens when a woman preaches. Her scholarship is at once accessible and theoretically rooted, while its practical ramifications for both preachers and listeners make it an ideal volume for seminarians, preachers, congregational leaders and all who believe that "More and different voices create a deeper appreciation of God's presence in our lives and a richer testimony of God's power in our world" (125). I anticipate requiring it for reading in graduate courses in homiletics and recommending it to experienced preachers.

This leads to one criticism of the book. The author misses an opportunity to broaden her audience, which is essentially limited to white mainline Protestants. There are a fair number of “others,” from evangelical and conservative churches for example, who, like their mainline colleagues of a generation ago, are more progressive than the congregations they lead. They, too, have consumed the homiletics of Craddock, Long, and Buttrick and engaged the work of Hogan, Florence, and the other theorists Copeland employs. These preachers and seminarians from conservative churches will welcome this volume to help them articulate their own experiences and prepare parishioners for the changes already afoot. These women and men would have felt embraced as welcomed readers if Copeland had simply acknowledged their existence. Instead, her references, statistics, and examples come from a limiting world. Indeed, Copeland’s work is an essential guide for the realities among us. But, these realities are not restricted to her target audience.

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J. Ellsworth Kalas. *Preaching in an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010. 167 pages. \$16.

A while back a few churches made news by building domes of impenetrability around their sanctuaries such that worshippers could not access the internet on their devices. This movement did not catch on; today most of us who preach have thrown up our hands and feebly hope that our listeners are at least accessing Scripture, taking notes, or doing something else remotely related to the sermon as they stare at their phones while we vie for their attention. But we suspect that in between those worthy endeavors, they are texting, updating their Facebook status, or checking the scores of a game. Distraction is not going away. It is a big, ugly rock in the road that we shall just have to steer around. Or is it? Could it be a diamond in the rough? Ellsworth Kalas, senior professor of homiletics at Asbury Theological Seminary, puts on a jeweler's loupe and peers at distraction's every facet, considering its every imperfection, but also pondering where the right cut could turn a blemish into an asset. Kalas wants preachers to be challenged but ultimately undaunted by distraction; he remains deeply confident that excellent preaching will continue to hold its own even in a crowded marketplace of competing voices—and apps.

He begins by admitting that his teenaged self was a distraction to his preacher, as was a bat flying through the sanctuary of his youth. Distraction takes many forms, and it is not a new phenomenon. While the main theme of the book is the challenge for preachers of the distracted nature of our listeners today (Chapters One and Two name those distractions in detail), Kalas wisely notes in Chapter Three that we as preachers are a distractible bunch as well. We get pulled off task during our own preparation, and even during our sermons themselves. Chapter Four returns to the problem of distracted listeners; it culminates in a poignant call to love those to whom we preach, extending them heaping helpings of patience and grace. This pastoral heart pervades Kalas' writing. One of the most challenging and surprising pieces of advice here comes out of Kalas' conviction that we must never view those we serve as distractions from our task. As a pastor, he did not even screen calls during his sermon prep time, and never regretted that choice. This runs counter to common wisdom in most homiletics courses, but I was challenged by the call to sacrificial love reflected in Kalas' practice.

Kalas' freshest thinking comes when he flips upside down the concept of distraction, in Chapters Five and Six. He notes that the most creative thinkers admit to being easily distracted people. They are capable of being fascinated by ideas, artwork, and experiences not directly related to their highly specialized careers. They are susceptible to distraction precisely because they are innately curious people, always exploring and growing. In one of many delightful glosses on Scripture, he notes that Moses "turned aside to look" at the burning bush, and that God's call to Moses came after the Lord saw that he did so (Exodus 3:3-4). This leads to a call to pastors to attend well to the beauty and ugliness on our own streets, to read broadly, and to live interesting lives. He flips the concept again when he urges that, rather than steeling ourselves by sheer force to be immune to distraction as sermon writers, pastors seek to be people who are distracted by the Word and by the mysterious presence of God—our attention is captured by it; we are driven off course by it; its power grips and holds us. I particularly appreciated his challenge that every sermon must be marked by a sense of wonder and awe at a fresh discovery and insight gained by the preacher that week.

The final chapters offer solid homiletical wisdom for any age: the tie-in to distraction seemed unnecessary at times, since his advice for crafting and delivering strong, interesting sermons would hold true whether or not listeners have Viber, Twitter, and WhatsApp churning away near their itchy fingertips. But the content is strong, for Kalas knows his stuff. He is truly one of the scribes Jesus urged his disciples to become, able to bring forth treasures old and new. He draws upon years of faithfully preaching and teaching the craft. I also appreciated the practical reflections in the sidebars from fellow pastors. I dare you: set down your phone, close your laptop, and focus intently on the wisdom found here.

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Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, ed. *From Words to Deeds: The Effectiveness of Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014. 252 pages. \$98.

In recent decades the guild of homiletics has done more to recognize the importance of cultural contexts for understanding preaching. It has become a commonplace that no preaching—and no talk about preaching—hovers above cultural particularity. Cultural contexts may be hybrid, plural, porous, contested, and complex. “Context” might not even be the right category under which to consider the importance of culture for preaching. But it is clear that culture matters.

The turn to culture gives descriptive studies of preaching new importance for the guild of homiletics. Fields like ethnography, sociology, anthropology, and historical studies all take on new significance as conversation partners. Scholars of minoritized groups have led the way in recognizing this significance. Breakthrough works from scholars like Henry Mitchell, Teresa Fry Brown, and Anna Carter Florence have expanded prevailing understandings of preaching in part by offering descriptions of the work of actual preachers. Postliberal scholars looking to Alasdair MacIntyre (on traditions) or George Lindbeck (on cultural-linguistic systems) also have reason to attend to historical and cultural studies. Homileticians of many different schools should be interested in reading and producing excellent anthropologies, ethnographies, and historical studies of preaching.

These developments give homileticians from many schools reason to be interested in *From Words to Deeds*, edited by Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli. The book collects thirteen essays on late medieval and early modern preaching in Europe. The essays grew out of a 2010 conference at the Università di Bologna on the ways in which preaching was and was not “effective” in these eras. While the list of contributors is international—with authors working in Finland, Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands—the essays are mostly in English. They focus especially on preaching by mendicant orders on the Italian peninsula.

The essays work to a high standard of historical scholarship and make some important contributions to our understanding of preaching in this time. Bert Roest’s essay on “Franciscan Preaching in Germany and the Low Countries,” for instance, corrects a caricature of mendicant preaching as neglecting doctrine that was passed down from Protestant and humanist sources to contemporary scholars. And Elisa Tosi Brandi does remarkable work in sifting through hagiographical accounts to give readers a better understanding of Chiara [Clare] of Rimini in relation to civil and ecclesial powers.

The significance of these essays reaches beyond historical understandings of the particular times and places on which they focus. They could also add historical depth to many conversations among homileticians with more contemporary interests. Muzzarelli’s introduction gives an interesting study of preaching and social change. Shunji Oguro’s essay on *reportationes* (written reports of sermons) and the process of internalization has implications both for pedagogy and for studies of listeners. Pietro Delcorno’s essay tracks back and forth between preaching and sacred drama in ways that could inform those interested in similar migrations today. Maria Ioriatti’s essay describes the use of images in the sermons of one Franciscan preacher. And Brandi’s analysis of the way that Chiara of Rimini clipped pincers to her tongue in an act of mortification that also authorized her preaching should enter the canon of stories that we tell in order to understand the ways women have found to preach even in the face of violent acts of repression.



The collection would make an even greater contribution if more of the essays focused in more sustained and sophisticated ways on “the nexus between words and deeds in the field of homiletics” (1), which is the stated topic of the volume. Some of the essays relate to this topic only indirectly. Those that do consider the topic tend to approach it with flat accounts of preachers’ intentions and what it would mean to be “effective.” Yoko Kimura, for instance, fills out a table of “The Results of Bernardino de Feltre’s Peace-Preaching” with numerous entries that describe the result as “Tranquility replaces social unrest” (174–75). But this description raises more questions than it answers. What was the nature of this tranquility? For whom did it count as tranquil? How did this kind of tranquility relate to the peace that the preacher was seeking? In the introduction to the book Muzzarelli invokes Ann Swidler’s notion of a cultural “tool kit” (11), and work by Swidler or any number of others could have sharpened the essays’ contributions to our understandings of preaching and social change. But the essays as they stand are already worthy of attention—even the attention of homileticians who do not have a specialist’s interest in mendicant preaching in the late medieval and early modern periods.

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Paul Scott Wilson. *Preaching as Poetry: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth in Every Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014. 157 pages. \$18.99.

Nowadays it is hard to imagine a preaching book not addressing postmodernism and its radical impact on society as a whole and the church in particular. The world has changed, rightly note the pundits. Only according to Paul Scott Wilson, so common is this message that perhaps it takes a more radical image to get the message across, namely poetry. Contrary to math, which is about logic and proofs, poetry is content with mystery and imagery. For example, consider Wilson's reference to Pontius Pilate who infamously asked, "What is truth?" Wilson shakes up that image—one of the marks of homiletical poetry—when he reminds us that these days Pilate doesn't just represent cynics who might stay away from church, or even skeptics who sit in the pews, but "Pilate is now enrolled as a student in the seminary, and is teaching some classes" (105).

Poetry and math are two ways of knowing, writes Wilson, the former more akin to developments in the New Homiletic. And while both are still needed, information as well as experiential (7, 15), he clearly lobbies on behalf of preachers as "God's poets-in-residence" (3). One hears resonances with Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet* (2008), which Wilson cites, as well as Walter Brueggemann's *Finally Comes the Poet* (1989). But Wilson's unique contribution to the subject comes as he chooses to address three classical virtues, around which the book is organized: beauty, goodness, and truth. This is also where some math enters the picture, in particular, the number three. Each of the three virtues spans three chapters (theory, homiletics, and practice). And each of the three virtues is also tied to one of the persons of the Trinity, as well as three seasons of the Christian year (Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost).

While this multi-layered organization of threes is somewhat hard to follow at times (another possible hallmark of postmodernism?), the contributions in each section are clear and helpful. Beauty, for example, is "the experience of God and God's purposes, the in-breaking of the future now" (7). This is what Wilson calls "beauty 2," an explicit connection with God as opposed to "beauty 1" and its more popular cultural notions (30–31). Preaching attuned to beauty 2 speaks about God in more experiential terms than abstractions (10), and may need to portray its opposite from time to time (20). A well-honed theme sentence is also the hallmark of a sermon's beauty, its elegant clarity (33–34).

Wilson defines goodness as "what is desired or of benefit," the "moral or ethical" (51). As with each of the virtues, postmodernism is not the problem, but rather modernism. The fact that goodness (as with beauty, he distinguishes between "goodness 1" and "goodness 2") is up for debate is a recognition of the complexities of life. Drawing on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida, Wilson notes that binaries often lead to privileging one thing over another, one group over another. For instance, "A man might preach about the equality of men and women, yet tell stories only of men" (56). Therefore, preachers should consider using more phrases such as "From my perspective," or "One way of thinking about this," acknowledging one perspective among many (61). Preachers must also think about four good practices (67–89): good news (a stress on God); good grammar (an elaboration of his earlier work on law and gospel, *The Four Pages of the Sermon* [1999]); good form (creative sermon shapes); and good acts (by which he means stories that evidence the gospel at work in people's daily lives).

Finally, Wilson points readers toward truth, by which he means that which is "real, authentic" (105). He names ten claims about truth in our time, including what Stephen Colbert coined "truthiness" (107–08). (Wilson's citing of Derrida and Colbert is a good example of the

book's eclectic nature.) Rather than choose between an authoritative "fixed worldview" and a "cynicism that dismisses meaning and truth," Wilson invites us to embrace mystery (113). He writes, "Anselm said theology is faith seeking understanding. Theopoetic sermons are faith seeking God" (115). This theopoetic approach, however, while offered from a position of honesty and integrity, does not guarantee results. In an age of indifference, Wilson notes that "even if preachers were to stand on their heads and juggle flaming torches on the pulpit, there is no guarantee it would attract those indifferent to the church" (132).

Perhaps the same can be said for preaching books on postmodernism. Is there really anything new to say? Should authors resort to sensationalism in order to guarantee a reading? The answer of course is no. As Wilson rightly reminds us, in theopoetics, sometimes the math is quite different:  $1 + 1 = 3$  (38–39). Will the world and church receive this message? Maybe, maybe not; but reconceived, these three virtues are what preachers offer (144).

Mike Graves, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO

Travis, Sarah. *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014. 168 pages. \$20.

Postcolonial theory is a relatively new addition to radical critical theory. Stemming from literary studies, this theory is now analyzing the postcolonial condition from different political, sociological and anthropological standpoints. Given its congruency with—and even contributions to—racial-ethnic, political, and Third-World theologies, it was a matter of time before someone would tackle the task of developing a postcolonial homiletic.

Sarah Travis, a Canadian scholar, is the author of this important contribution to the study of preaching, penning the first book dedicated solely to the development of a homiletic in a postcolonial key. *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* is the title of this volume, appearing in the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series.

The aim of the book is to foster a conversation between “colonized and colonizing persons” (6) in order to “recognize and interrupt colonizing discourses and to uncover embedded colonial/imperial assumptions that guide daily life” (4). The main idea is: “Preaching is a means of decolonizing relationships within the church and beyond the church. To preach the good news of God’s kingdom is to speak a resounding ‘no’ to discourses that seek to dominate, separate, and homogenize others” (5).

The book contains an introduction plus seven chapters divided in three parts. The first part is titled “The Omnipresence of Empire.” This section contains two chapters: “Coming to Terms with Empire” and “The Challenge of Preaching in the Midst of Empire.” Travis describes the effort of coming to terms with the colonial heritage of the church as the “most most heart-wrenching task” (7).

The second section of the book, titled “Developing an Alternative Discourse” also contains two chapters: “A Theological Response to Empire” and “Postcolonial Theory for Preachers.” In many ways, this section is the heart of the book, given that in the third chapter the author advances her main idea: “The Trinity, then, provides a theological foundation and practical instruction for the goal of decolonizing preaching” (8). The fourth chapter equips the reader to negotiate the complex terrain of postcolonial theory, introducing all the major theorists in a concise and understandable way.

The third and last part of the book, “A Toolbox for Decolonizing Preaching,” includes three chapters: “Preaching with a Postcolonial Imagination,” “Rereading Scripture: Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” and “Preaching in Postcolonial Embrace.” The last chapter functions as the conclusion for the whole book, reiterating Travis’ main idea.

In general, *Decolonizing Preaching* is a solid introduction to a very complex topic, a “must-read” for any scholar interested in preaching in the twenty-first century. In particular, it is a key resource for all racial-ethnic scholars in the field of homiletics living, teaching, and preaching in the United States and Canada.

The “elephant in the room” is that Travis is Anglo. The problem is that Travis constantly reminds the reader that she does not belong to any group traditionally identified as “colonized,” but that she is a descendant of the “colonizers.” At times, as when she describes her first trip to India, Travis even sounds apologetic, as if she had no right to explore postcolonial preaching.

I challenge her perspective by rejecting this binary approach to postcolonial theory. The fact is that the Americas, as a whole, have a colonial heritage. Even those nations who eventually rose to power, such as the United States and Canada, began their contemporary history as colonies of Great Britain. Canada, in particular, has had a long and complex colonial and

neocolonial relationship with England. Therefore, I challenge Travis' self-assessment and affirm that she is as "colonized" as any of us.

It is precisely that stress in the binary relationship between the colonized and the colonizer that leads the book to overlook an important trait of our postcolonial condition. The constant growth of racial-ethnic communities in Europe, the United States, and Canada is dramatically transforming the former colonial powers. Of course, those "minority communities" arrived to the so-called "First World" due to colonialism and imperialism. I think that this is a crucial topic for both the church and society at large in the twenty-first century.

Finally, the book has no sample sermons, developed or preached in a postcolonial key. The inclusion of some homiletic outlines and manuscripts is crucial to any book on homiletics, particularly to one that seeks to give voice to the voiceless.

In spite of these constructive criticisms, *Decolonizing Preaching* is a crucial contribution to contemporary homiletic theory. This is a book that you must acquire, read, and wrestle with right now.

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Trygve David Johnson. *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist: Metaphor, Identity, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. 220 pages. \$22.50.

Have you recently felt outdated in your preaching content and style at the twenty-first century pulpit? Have you felt the need to refresh your preaching practice in the era of image, sound, art, and creativity, not to mention the jaw-dropping dawn of iPhones, tablet computers, android, internet, multi-cineplex, and GoPro? Have you been looking for fine theological resources and homiletic-communicative lessons for that changed and still changing cultural environment? Then, here is a wonderful resource from Trygve David Johnson that any considerate preacher today might want to have on their sermon preparation desk. Johnson's writing demonstrates its superb theological thickness, cultural relevance, communicative tips, and homiletic application of most of those important arguments.

Johnson proposes *liturgical artist* as the preacher's fundamental metaphoric identity for a new era, which he argues synthesizes as well as moves beyond the conventional identities of Teacher and Herald. He finds the teacher identity as the Enlightenment-rationalistic product of the church based on St. Augustine's rhetorical approach to preaching, while the herald as the Barthian-revelatory approach to the Word of God and preaching ministry. Johnson apparently realizes significant drawbacks of these two traditional approaches to preaching for today's pulpit; the lack of imagination and creativity in the former and the lack of concern for the ever-changing human situation and experience in the latter. Also, for him, the absence of a communal sense of preaching and the preacher—that is, the preacher as the one who seeks truthful claims for the broken world *along with his or her fellow Christians*—is a grave problem for the multi-pluralistic society today. Thus, here comes the alternative identity of the preacher as liturgical artist as one possible solution for the current situation.

Jesus Christ himself as a model preacher, Johnson argues, is a vicarious liturgical artist found in the Bible. First and foremost, as a vicar or priest of God, Jesus not only brings the Word of God to humanity, but also offers human situations and experiences to God as a prayerful action. Also, as a liturgist, Jesus forms his message in the community, for the real sake of his people, and also among his hearers (e.g., by active mutual dialogues, especially the act of questioning and answering). This dialogical act of Jesus well reflects the meaning of the ancient Greek word *leitourgia* for liturgy, that is, the work by the people or the community. Finally, Jesus is a homiletic artist par excellence when he creatively uses earthly raw materials for his aesthetic and prophetic utterances (e.g., seeds, birds, rocks, camel, needle, sheep, coin, wedding, vineyard, and many more).

With the above argument in hand Johnson now invites preachers into the homiletical aesthetic praxis. This will be *praxis*, not simply practice. For without a deeper theological and methodological understanding of the preacher's identity and preaching practice, what happens with his proposal will be mere oratorical entertainment at the pulpit. The very thing Johnson hopes to happen is nothing but the preacher transformed via the new homiletic identity as liturgical artist, who for the best effectiveness of preaching ministry will make the dexterous use of earthly materials emerging from the postmodern artistry-saturated culture. It sounds hard, of course, yet will be very much worth trying for the sake of the gospel message today.

Johnson's neo-orthodox theological orientation limits his readership, for sure. Further, his largely Word/word-oriented approach to preaching alienates his argument from a broader performative or theatrical approach to preaching. Still, his ideas are highly valuable in the recovery of the artistic nature of preaching and its relevance to the Word of God, the preacher,

the audience, culture, and God the Trinity Itself. Indeed, the strength of the writing has a good potential to broaden his readership.

From the beginning, Johnson sets up his goal not as providing practical do's and don'ts for the artistic practice of preaching, but as proposing a critical homiletic identity of the preacher as liturgical artist. Each preacher deeply embedded with the renewed identity is to find his or her own local practices of the homiletic artistry in accordance with each different situation. At the end, I find his goal achieved satisfactorily thanks to his acute theological, biblical, liturgical, church-historical, and homiletic construction of the multivalent identity of the artistic preacher. His hard work definitely makes his writing one of the must-reads in this research area.

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Wei-Ping Lin. *Materializing Magic Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. 220 pages. \$39.95.

Supported by the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Harvard University, Wei-Ping Lin's *Materializing Magic Power* ethnographically profiles the material manifestations of divine power within modern popular religion in Taiwan. The purpose of the book is two-fold: to examine the development and cultural significance of divine power as it materializes in god statues and spirit mediums in villages, and to trace how migrant workers reconfigure the kinship ties and magic power of their traditional religion to negotiate the challenges of urban living.

Before delving into this program, however, Lin states in the introduction the questions driving the work: "What are the roles of god statues and spirit mediums in Chinese popular religion? What kinds of power do they create, and how do they reinforce each other? How can a study combining god statues, spirit mediums, and magic power improve our understanding of Chinese religion in particular, and religion in general?" (2). What differentiates Lin's approach is the unified treatment of both the material forms of divine power—god statues—as well as their efficacy through spirit mediums (shamans). Lin thus "analyzes the power of a deity from the perspective of materialization" by examining "the significance of materialization in terms of three interrelated aspects: its cultural mechanisms, social consequences, and material forms" (8).

In Part I, which includes the first three chapters, Lin elaborates the key concepts of "personification and localization" as the cultural mechanisms through which a god's power is established and a spirit medium works. Chapter one details this process, from choosing the deity, to carving its statue, to rituals for the spirit's entering. This process stabilizes the relationship and establishes bonds of mutual obligation between the gods and the people. Chapter two demonstrates how spirit mediums distinguish traditional Chinese religion from other transcendental religions (Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity) through its emphasis on the integration of people and place. The selection and development of the spirit medium makes this difference clear, not just by their existence but also through their role of extending the deity's powers and more deeply embedding the deity in the adherents' social world. Thus in the two forms—the god statue and the spirit medium—divine power has the durability and permanence of localization and the dynamism of personification. Chapter three deepens the analysis in the first two chapters by adding an historical lens and showing the development of the cultures in "Dialogues with the Past and Present."

Turning to part two, chapters four and five, Lin demonstrates how traditional folk religion reconfigures in a drastically different situation. Chapter four looks closely at the transformation of kinship ties under the stress of maintaining connection to and continuation of "hometown" religion. Whereas in the village everyone lived in close proximity, especially with family members, city living presents the challenge of communities that are not only more spread out but further rely more on kinship ties that are not reliant on biological connection. Hence chapter four is titled "Thicker than Blood." "Bereft of traditional social networks, therefore, on what basis is the power of urban shamanism constructed?" (105). Further, chapter five details the evolved role of the spirit medium in the urban context. Necessity is the mother of invention even in decisively understanding and communicating divine wisdom, and the urban spirit medium innovates new methods for quickly apprehending the divine will so as to accommodate more people and different lifestyles. Not only do family and kinship structures change in the urban context, but the configuration of the rituals and objects does as well. In both cases, however, the difference in the practices of popular religion in urban versus rural environments is not so much



the content of popular religion—the materialization of power through god statues and spirit mediums—but how the practices that engage magic power transform to meet the demands of the context.

Overall, Wei-Ping Lin adequately presents a careful study of modern rural and urban traditional religion in Taiwan, and all those interested in anthropological approaches to religion will find the clear prose and focused program illuminating. Only occasionally does Lin make explicit references to other religions, but the book could no doubt help greatly interreligious competence and engagement. The strongest appeal of this book will be for those interested in the relationship between contexts and expressions of worship and engaging with divine power. Those looking for a theological or comparative study, however, may be less interested in its more descriptive style, which can at times seem a little disconnected and reserved.

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Kimberly Bracken Long, ed. *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year B, Volume 2, Trinity Sunday Through Reign of Christ*. Louisville, KY: WJK, 2015. 300 pages. \$32.98.

The latest volume from the *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion* series completes liturgies made available for Year B. It also concludes the entire three-year cycle of prayers and poetry based upon the Revised Common Lectionary edited by Kimberly B. Long and published by Westminster John Knox. The introduction to *Liturgies for Year B, Volume 2* (an introduction appearing in the five other volumes but worth another look here) swiftly informs the reader that the series intends to supplement denominational resources and not to supplant them (ix). Methodist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, African American Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Lutheran authors form a primary ecumenical collective aiming for liturgical language that rings with clarity and expresses not only human work but also the Word of God (ix, xi). “Other contributors” are also listed and bring African-American, Latina, and Asian racial diversity. Liturgies do not include author attribution. It is therefore conceivable that multiple perspectives inform each page of prayer. Perhaps another iteration of a worship series by *Feasting on the Word* might advance liturgies composed in other languages (or even prayers, meditations, reflections, and questions from other religious traditions).

Like the second volumes for Year A and Year C that inject ordinary time (the liturgical season following Pentecost) with liturgical verve, the liturgical material in *Year B, Volume 2* comprises “Opening Words to Blessing—for every Sunday and holy day from Trinity Sunday through Reign of Christ (Year B),” a baptismal thanksgiving, prayers for celebration of “Communion, or Eucharist,” reflection questions based upon lectionary passages, and lectionary-based household prayers. The prayers may be adapted for personal, corporate, and congregational use for morning and evening devotions throughout a given week. An included CD-ROM presents an electronic version of the book. After registering contact information with Westminster John Knox, which may cause some readers to sigh, the liturgical content may be widely copied and pasted with the following reference: “Reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion*. Copyright 2015” (x).

Also similar to the second volumes of Year A and Year C, *Liturgies for Year B, Volume 2* offers for each Sunday and holy day semicontinuous and complementary liturgical “tracks” to account for the differing “Old Testament” and Psalm lections that appear alongside unchanging Epistle and Gospel readings. Semicontinuous liturgies “read continually through a book of Scripture from week to week.” Complementary liturgies expound upon “Old Testament” readings that complement the Gospel selections of the day (xi). The Vanderbilt University common lectionary website is also mentioned as a resource to help students understand liturgical intricacies—<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>. *Year B, Volume 2*, like its counterpart monographs, therefore has flexibility operating at many levels with regard to spiritual and practical dimensions of using the material for worship, aligning it with the liturgical calendar and related lections, and connecting the volume’s content to other portals of learning.

Without disclosing too much about the liturgical writing specific to *Year B, Volume 2*, the language has a strong “verticality” to it, even when it dives into the depths of human suffering. Consider the question for reflection from the semicontinuous liturgical offerings of Proper 8 (Sunday between June 26 and July 2 inclusive): “In this week’s readings, various people bring their suffering to God, through lament and the search of healing. How does Christ enable you—and how might you enable others—to be honest with God in doubt and pain?” (56). Candor

oriented heavenward toward God puts our earthly pain into relief. Some liturgical phrasing also has a New Age quality to it. The *Thanksgiving for Baptism* states, “Praise to you, O God, for the gift of water...for creating this blue orb and giving it to us as a home” (265). However one hears the meditations, they are current and name problems such as the dulling of attention from “too much Web surfing” (69). And with creative application, a household evening prayer like the one below might be shifted in register from a tone of calm to a vicarious and cynical cry of lament on behalf of the unarmed victims of racist violence:

God of the embracing darkness,  
thank you for dwelling in my heart.  
I was able to accomplish some things today and not others.  
Thank you for letting me rest in the promise  
That you are able to accomplish abundantly more in my life  
Than all I can ask or imagine.  
I will sleep in peace. Amen.

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Rebecca Moore. *Women in Christian Traditions*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 224 pages. \$17.

“Women have kept the faith alive” (17). This bold declaration stands at the center of Rebecca Moore’s text, in which she details the historical contributions of women to the development of the Christian religion, both as agents within a shared trajectory of the Christian church, and also as creators of unique histories. The author gives attention to women as individuals and as members of communities, who shape the Christian tradition in both major and less acknowledged ways.

Moore acknowledges the challenge of contributing to the body of extant studies of women in Christian history. She writes appreciatively of previous literature while also adding a distinct perspective to it that is almost entirely informed by feminist scholarship, though not entirely adoptive of its presuppositions (1). Moore’s study of women throughout the history of Christianity also draws from the Gospels and Paul, as well as Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and other major Christian thinkers up to the twenty-first century. Moore not only re-narrates with attention to women; concurrently, she reexamines historiographies that are exclusive of women. Moore’s integration of Protestant and Roman Catholic thought throughout her analysis is especially notable. And while her focus is upon Western Protestant Christianity, and primarily within the United States, she also analyzes global historical trajectories. Her method draws from contemporary sociological, anthropological, and archaeological groundings in order to best “[unearth] the story of women” (15).

Eve—the construction of the mythical first woman of the Garden of Eden and interpretations of her actions over time—serves as an entrée into Christian women’s history as Moore identifies her as foundational to both Christian soteriology and Christian subordination of women. Moore reclaims the pivotal leadership of women in the gospels and in the early church, and retells women’s modes of Christian resistance and faithfulness through martyrdom in the pre-Constantinian church, and later through ascetic practices. With the increasing institutionalization of the church, Moore shows how women’s exclusion from leadership led to the development of various communities and orders, including the Beguines (exclusively women) and the Lollards (both men and women). She points to how the Reformation shifted Christian conceptions of the ideal woman from the chaste virgin to the wife, an occurrence that feminist theologians considered more harmful than good. Attention is given to how this period in western Christianity was marred by the persecution of women engaging the supernatural, or who were suspected of such activities labeled as evil. Moore argues that during the nineteenth century, western Christianity’s shift to an emphasis on the Holy Spirit led to women’s return to prominent roles in the church, through increased sectarian movements, as well as local and global missions. This section of the book does particularly well in centering lesser known figures such as the first Native American saint, Kateri Tekakwitha, and African-American missionary Maria Fearing. Moore ends her text by providing insights into the contemporary roles and status of women in the church, with attention to how feminist activism has played a part in institutional advancement of women religious and how Christian feminist theorists are challenging Christianity through their analysis of an increasing globalized and economically disparate society (150). She notes that women continue to have quite a way to go in their incorporation into the full life of the church. Yet, within the academy, and various forms of activism and movements for peace, women leaders have emerged on an international scale.

Her sociological analysis of the influence of women within the church is of particular interest. She explains how admission to the Middle Ages' monasteries—products of “elite religion” (65, 75)—became for nuns a way of disowning their privileged class. Drawing from sociologist Rodney Stark, she also points out how Christian women who married pagan men played a particularly poignant role in the expansion of Christianity as they did not participate in infanticide as a non-Christian might. These women decenter the “chastity of wealthy women,” many of whom are saints and mystics often venerated in the Christian tradition. Moore re-inscribes “the marriage and motherhood of ordinary women” as pivotal for the Christianity’s proliferation (65).

Moore highlights both the notable strides and shortcomings of women in their historical journeys of Christian faithfulness. Her contribution stands out in the recovery of lesser-known histories that would be of particular value to readers who desire not only an overarching look into Christian histories, but a probing one as well. Preaching students interested in feminist theology and/or the vast accomplishments women in Christianity would appreciate this read.

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Matthew Avery Sutton. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015. 480 pages. \$26.33.

How evangelicals who were once considered outsiders to the project of U.S. nationalism and deficient in patriotic fervor became counted among the boldest of flag-wavers a century later is just one example of the historical evolutions that Sutton explores in what is among the best in recent monographs explaining the triumphal advance of conservative Protestant evangelicalism. Sutton's book joins top-shelf works like Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* (W.W. Norton, 2012), resisting the tendency of so many other scholars to locate evangelical political mobilization in the postwar years, or even later, in the 1970s, with the rise of the Christian Right, but rather much earlier. Like Dochuk, Sutton speaks not only to experts in the fields of U.S. history and religious studies, but also an educated popular audience, some of whom must still be asking, Where *did* these people come from? And educators, preachers, and students of worship will find his research illuminating for mapping one major trajectory of U.S. Christian identity.

Sutton invites readers inside a meticulously woven investigation of a loose movement of American Protestants he calls "radical evangelicals." For Sutton this category includes fundamentalists, Pentecostals, neo-evangelicals and other fellow travelers, northerners, southerners, and westerners. The radical evangelicals at the heart of his narrative are white men, and he says as much. Yet Sutton's discussion of African-American premillennialists is substantial, and he shows how their line of interpretation sometimes intersected but more often diverged from the movement's white leadership. While Sutton understands the nuances of difference between and among these various groups, he claims that a theological preoccupation with the imminent return of Jesus was much more consequential than what set them apart.

Sutton argues that premillennial apocalypticism with its fantasies of dispensations, rapture, and violent tribulation lies at the heart of so-called evangelicalism. If Sutton's focus is pragmatically narrow, his scope is impressively wide. This is a big book, but despite its heft, Sutton's encyclopedic research of manuscripts and published archives and crisp prose style captures the reader's attention and holds it. In eleven chronological chapters, Sutton takes us from the late nineteenth century to the present, guiding us through pivotal moments when prophecy belief spiked, compelling evangelicals toward greater cohesion and more political influence.

There's an old saying that prophecy believers keep the newspaper in one hand while they read the Bible in the other. The point is that apostles of premillennialism parse the meaning of obscure prophetic passages to make sense of the dizzying complexity of local, national, and geopolitical events. Sutton's historical survey shows this dexterity at work in many contexts, from its leaders' opposition to Jazz Age gender-bending, to their contempt for New Deal "socialism," to the redbaiting and anti-Soviet politics of the Cold War period, and beyond into the war on terror of our post 9/11 moment.

The central irony Sutton identifies is that of men and a few women (including Aimee Semple McPherson, the subject of an earlier book by Sutton) who are hell-bent on transforming a world they believe is soon ending. This determination leads to the political engagement that increasingly defined evangelicalism and propelled the movement from the margins of American culture and politics toward its center, and eventually, into the corridors of state power.

Sutton also reminds us of what we've always known about evangelicals—they (we?) are prolific communicators, whose use of printed matter and radio has been key to the dissemination of the premillennial gospel. Sutton doesn't extend his analysis of media into the eras of cable

television and new media, and that is one of the book's few shortcomings. Today we might say that radical evangelicals gaze at the ticker on Fox News, while reading Bibles on iPad apps and watching a live stream from Trinity Broadcasting Network's Jerusalem bureau.

Sutton's *American Apocalypse* is a superb work, for the power and clarity of its argument, the breadth and depth of the author's archival investigation, and the skill and sheen of his storytelling. He provides plenty of detail to explore where evangelicals were coming from. Yet *American Apocalypse* falls short of answering the all-important question, "Why?" Why is it that so many evangelical Christians in the United States have embraced the conviction—perhaps even taken delight in the notion—that the world stands on the brink of cataclysmic change through convulsive violence? To answer that question requires a riskier interpretive leap than Sutton's. No one work can supply all the answers since there are so many possible paths of analysis, but Sutton's *American Apocalypse* stands as an indispensable guide. Maybe readers should hold Sutton's work in one hand, and in the other, Jason Bivins' *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford, 2008). Read together, these books provide not only indispensable facts and historical narration, but also bold hunches that help explain why apocalyptic theologies attract so many in an age when democratic values everywhere are under attack.

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