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## **A Retirement Message from the Editor**

The journal *Homiletic* began as a project of the Academy of Homiletics in 1975, under the leadership of Barry Evans. In 1986, the journal moved to Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg, under the leadership of Richard Thulin, and in 2000, it moved to Perkins//SMU, under the leadership of John Holbert and Alyce McKenzie. I took over the editorship at Vanderbilt in 2008, and when Dale Andrews came to Vanderbilt Divinity School, he agreed to join me and co-edit the journal. This lasted for seven years, from 2011 until his untimely death in June of 2017.

The final print edition of *Homiletic* was the summer issue, 2008. The journal went online, fully juried and open access, with the winter issue, 2008. The online format permitted the journal to publish more scholarly essays and to publish special issues, such as our issues on African American preaching and on postcolonialism and preaching. The mission of the journal as an international publication has grown, and essays and reviews in the journal have received hundreds of thousands of downloads.

As editor, I have experienced the complete support of the Academy of Homiletics at every juncture as we have worked to bring our costs down and adjusted our business model. Vanderbilt Divinity School provided the journal with both a bibliographer and assistant editor for ten years, and continues to provide the journal with online technical and archival support. The journal is now well positioned to self-support and continue to thrive under the leadership of other scholars within our guild.

I could never have edited the journal without the managing editorial services of three of Vanderbilt Divinity School's most outstanding doctoral graduates: Rich Voelz, Sunggu Yang, and Aimee Moiso. During their years as doctoral students, they each coordinated the book review section, edited all essays for consistency of style, and prepared and published issues on our online platform and with ATLA. Aimee Moiso has also provided copy editing services over the past few years, which has saved the journal a considerable amount of money.

I began my editorial work for *Homiletic* many years ago as a review editor, editing a book review section then labelled "Philosophy and Communication." I know firsthand what it takes to organize and edit a review section for the journal. For this reason, I am deeply grateful to our review editors, all of whom have volunteered time and energy so that our book reviews are well-written and submitted on time. *Homiletic* is an important review journal and has become a significant part of our guild's self-reflective and scholarly advancement process.

My students will tell you that my greatest passion lies in reading, critiquing, and supporting scholarship in homiletics. Our discipline is woefully understudied, and I keep a running list of the many unresearched (or under-researched) elements of homiletics awaiting scholarly consideration. It has been a great delight to interact with scholars as they pursue publication in *Homiletic*. Without fail, these interactions have proved mutually beneficial and I will miss them more than any other aspect of my work on behalf of *Homiletic*.

I feel very good at this point about the scholarly future of our guild, and about *Homiletic*'s improved position in relation to that future. Our guild needs well-respected juried journals, and thanks to the efforts of those before me and those who have worked with me, *Homiletic* is now a significant and recognized scholarly publication. I know that the journal will continue this legacy wherever it is housed, and that the Academy of Homiletics will continue to support its mission. It is with deep gratitude that I retire from editing the journal and wish all the best to those who are next in line for this important work.

John S. McClure, Vanderbilt Divinity School

**Black Feminist Triptych**  
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**Abstract:** *Two driving features of Black feminism are care and collectivity. This article considers them as vectors for Christian preaching. I focus on a specific speech event that involves Alice Walker, Angela Davis, and June Jordan, and treat it as a case study for Black feminist preaching. Ultimately, I propose a triptych approach to preaching that entails layering sermon messages, accommodating dissonance, and foregrounding mutuality.*

On February 20, 1999, KPFA, a public radio station based in Berkeley, California, hosted a tribute for poet-activist June Jordan to celebrate the publication of her twenty-fifth book, *Affirmative Acts*. The event gathered a diverse group of friends, artists, writers, and community members in the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School auditorium for a service of tributes, readings, and music. Alice Walker was not able to attend the gathering but composed a letter to Jordan that Angela Davis read aloud. In this reading, the affection among the three women surfaces. Walker reflects on meeting Jordan in Jackson, Mississippi, during the early 1970s. “June became my friend at that time, and in that place of great danger and loneliness. I will never forget it.”<sup>1</sup> Her gratitude seems to swell as the letter unfolds, first for Jordan’s careful listening, and then for her witness to the world. “The greatness of June’s art lies, I believe, in her ability to put love into righteous action and energy for change into written words. June’s words have flame inside them. The flame of caring deeply, of offering love” (emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup> After describing Jordan as “a friend to Life” and “the best friend that Love ever had,” Walker closes by saying, “June, I embrace you through the arms of this woman who has meant so much, and means so much, to the ongoing growth of consciousness in the world” (emphasis in original).<sup>3</sup>

As part of the tribute, Davis also shared a brief note by Toni Morrison, read Jordan’s “Poem for South African Women,” and celebrated Jordan’s upcoming teaching in Natal. Yet rhetorically, Davis’s reading of Walker’s letter stands out because it is a collaborative utterance and because the sisterly relationship among the three emerges through it. This speech event functions as a verbal embrace. In this article, I treat that embrace as a prism for Black feminist preaching.<sup>4</sup> First, I reflect on the message given at the KPFA celebration as a source for

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Walker, “For June,” Alice Walker Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> I anchor this article in “Black feminism” because I see it as the most fitting term to describe the intellectual and activist pursuits of June Jordan, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker. They each use this term at varying points to describe their work—work that resists sexism, racism, classicism, heterosexism, and is concerned about human liberation around the globe rather than only in the United States. While Alice Walker originated the term “womanism,” she explains in a 1988 letter to Audre Lorde that though she prefers womanist, she still uses “Black feminist.” “It was never either/or; always both/and, and I had hoped this could be easily comprehended.” Alice Walker, Letter to Audre Lorde 6 July 1988, Alice Walker Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. June Jordan describes herself as a Black feminist. June Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (New York: Basic/Civitas, 2002), 259–265. Angela Davis has more ease with “feminism,” and is unwilling to cede the term to bourgeois, white women. She aligns herself with

homiletics, emphasizing its promise for thinking about Black feminist care and intimacy. Next, I discuss some of the rhetorical parallels in preaching, giving special attention to the significance of polyphony or multivocality. Then, I explore the possibilities that are opened with respect to sermon form and performance before homing in on two ethical commitments that guide preaching in this vein: collectivity and care.

This article contributes to a lively discussion on Black women's radical subjectivity and preaching.<sup>5</sup> In *Towards a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation*, Donna E. Allen presents a rubric for examining sermons by womanist preachers and unveiling the womanist ethos in performance and content.<sup>6</sup> More recently, in *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*, Kimberly P. Johnson seeks to “transform/adapt the tenets of womanist thought to make it rhetorically viable in the church” and explore the associated gains and losses.<sup>7</sup> Lisa L. Thompson examines the inventiveness Black women bring to the preaching venture in *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*.<sup>8</sup> I have a more modest and exploratory aim in this article. Focusing on a specific Black feminist speech event in a pluralist setting, I tease out relational implications for Christian preaching. Key in this analysis is the relationship between preaching and Black feminist care.

### How might Christian Preaching Participate in Black Feminist Care?

Black feminist care encompasses a broad array of public and private practices of succor and mutual encouragement that cultivate delight, creativity, and self-definition in Black women. This mode of caring favors a candid, unsentimental engagement with the coalescing effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, and experiences of migration on human experience. A pluralist, nondogmatic sensibility is also necessary since Christianity and colonialism have functioned in tandem. As Walker explains, “I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black women.”<sup>9</sup> Black feminist care provides critical insights for black women who preach and listen to sermons and for all who seek to “decolonize their spirits.”<sup>10</sup>

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anti-racist feminisms and anti-capitalist feminisms, including Black feminism. Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 41, 46–47; Angela Y. Davis, interview by D. Wendy Greene, *Freedom: The Struggle Continues*, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, June 19, 2020. In her introduction to *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips discusses the problem of parsing womanism and Black feminism for the Western taxonomy, describing the two as “sisters” whose relationship is best understood through a familial paradigm. Layli Phillips, ed., *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxii–xxxvi.

<sup>5</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas proffers four tenets of womanism: radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Donna E. Allen, *Towards a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation*, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Studies in Religion, Culture, and Social Development (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Kimberly P. Johnson, *The Womanist Preacher: Proclaiming Womanist Rhetoric from the Pulpit*, Rhetoric, Race, and Religion (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa L. Thompson, *Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Alice Walker, *Interviews with Black Writers*, ed., John O'Brien (New York: Liveright, 1973), 192.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Walker, “The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven is That You’ve Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lover’s Arms) Clear Seeing Inherited Religion and Reclaiming the Pagan Self,” *On the Issues: The Progressive Woman’s Quarterly* 6:2 (Spring 1997), 54.

Black feminism, like Christian preaching, is propelled by vibrant love. This love encompasses all of “livingkind,” a term Taliba Sikudhani Olugbala uses to describe the whole of Creation, animate and inanimate.<sup>11</sup> While intersectionality has been treated as the principal theoretical contribution of Black feminist thought, Jennifer Nash explains that its visionary conception of love should not be overlooked.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on Alice Walker’s description of womanism in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Nash sees love functioning as a theoretical paradigm as Walker describes a love for music, dance, the moon, the Spirit, food and roundness, struggle and Folk.<sup>13</sup> Walker makes it clear that this is not a timid or homophobic vision.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it fixed on romantic partners, family and friends, or the divine. Instead, love for oneself emanates outward in a spiral that connects the person to the community and the earth. This love is vigorous enough to drive speech, action, improvisation, and risk. It is not beholden to hierarchy or propriety. The commitment to love, to its mystical power and ethical demands, is an important bridge between Black feminist rhetoric and Christian preaching.

Alice Walker remembers being “kind of a little church mother in training” who was following in the footsteps of her own mother, Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker, a devout member of Wards Chapel AME Church in Eatonton, Georgia.<sup>15</sup> Years after leaving Georgia, Walker holds a deep affinity for the Wards Chapel sanctuary, describing it as the place “where I first, before birth, encountered my beloved community. (I heard singing!) The simplicity and sweetness of this structure, and the warmth of the human relationships fashioned within its walls and yard, have influenced every aspect of my life.”<sup>16</sup> The loving circle of relationships at Wards Chapel has an enduring impact even as Walker’s spirituality becomes Earth-centered.

Turning to February 20, 1999, the commitment to love is still evident. What Alice Walker offers to June Jordan through the person of Angela Davis is a layered tenderness. The best Christian theological comparisons are first to the sermon as *paraklesis*, an exhortation that encourages fidelity to Christian principles like love and courage, and second, to the sermon as *makarism*, a blessing that inspires gratitude and rejoicing.<sup>17</sup> In these forms, care is an essential constituent of the preacher’s message and a critical aspect of the message’s telos.

### Layering Sermonic Messages

How then, is care best communicated sermonically? Walker provides a clue in bringing Angela Davis into her message to June Jordan. The two “voices” generate an excess—an echoing or layering of the message that deepens its effect. In the Black church, I see a similar dynamic in Seven Last Words services held on Good Friday. In the better iterations of these, the seven sermons (each on selected words spoken by Jesus during the Passion), help listeners enter the depths of Jesus’ suffering. The crucifixion serves as the grounding focus, even though the preachers explore different texts. And, instead of competition among the preachers, there is a joint consciousness of the weight of the gospel and a sense that it takes all of them—indeed all of humankind and the creation itself—to proclaim the divine mysteries. The beauty in this

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<sup>11</sup> Layli Phillips, *Womanist Reader*, xxvi.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer C. Nash, “Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality,” *Meridians* 11:2 (2011): 9, <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.11.2.1>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi.

<sup>15</sup> Alice Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer’s Activism* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>17</sup> William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds., *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 434.

polyphony is more compelling than any single message. Preachers are revealed to be collaborators rather than soloists.

Another example of layered proclamation arises in Christian funerals. Often the liturgy includes a funeral sermon given by a clergy person as well as reflections shared by a few people who knew the deceased well. These reflections may draw directly or indirectly on sacred texts and offer multiple perspectives on the deceased's life. In any event, it is the sum of the messages (clergy and lay, funeral sermon and reflections) that yield the full portrait of the deceased and offer all who are gathered the comfort they seek. The word, offered through multiple layers, consoles the listeners and knits them together.

The Gospels themselves are held together in the biblical canon in a similar way, yielding a multi-angled story that people of faith take on and embody together.<sup>18</sup> Collectively, the Gospels have a “multifaceted, complex unity” and reveal the “polyphonous, even cacophonous, character of interpretation within the church.”<sup>19</sup> Sewn into a motley whole, the Gospels decenter Jesus because no singular angle on him stands alone.<sup>20</sup> No theory or community possesses the Resurrected One, and this miscellany of narratives enlivens the church. The multivocal Gospels underscore preaching's function as “a socializing force and a formative practice in a community.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Black feminism values the concerted venture, the work of the troupe, and the multivalent knowledge that emerges from different voices.

### Striving for Polyphony

The import of polyphony has been valued in mainline homiletics for decades now, especially as a means to correct the power imbalance that inures from having one person preach regularly over long periods of time. John McClure's *Roundtable Pulpit*, for example, seeks to elicit congregational insights about the text to aid the preacher's composition process and yield a more inclusive message.<sup>22</sup> McClure underscores the communal and theological rationales for drawing upon a range of voices. And, in *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, Lucy Atkinson Rose encourages preachers to see their sermons as contributions to an ongoing congregational conversation about faith among equals.<sup>23</sup> For Rose, fostering a sense of mutuality and equality among the listeners serves as the chief aim of preaching and envisioning the sermon as teaching, persuading, or changing listeners presents a hurdle to this process.<sup>24</sup> A sermon functions more like a poem in that neither preachers nor poets control the outcome of their messages.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 55.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. Campbell goes on to argue that the Gospels refuse “any single correct interpretation. Jesus simply cannot and will not become the possession of any interpretation, but continually interrupts and disrupts them all. The journey of the Christian community involves an ever-growing faithfulness to Jesus Christ, a continual wrestling with the narratives rendering his identity, but never a possessing or controlling of him. The fourfold gospel assures this kind of disequilibrium.” *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Marlene Lorenson wonders how roundtable dialogue can become polyphonic preaching. Marlene Ringgaard Lorenson, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 144.

<sup>23</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Rose also leans on Dietrich Ritschl, who compares preaching to gathering people. *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, citing Robert E. C. Browne, *The Ministry of the Word* (London: SCM, 1958).

Of course, due to the reliance on scripture, literature, history, and culture, all sermons carry a degree of polyphony, whether implicit or explicit.<sup>26</sup> Yet experientially, there is something powerful about having more than one preacher bear the good news in a single worship service. This is part of the reason why dialogue sermons had a burst of popularity during the latter part of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, these dialogue sermons often suffered in depth, or felt inordinately scripted, or ping-ponged the listener from one voice to another without fostering a sufficient connection with either (or any) of the preachers.

These barriers do not arise in the KPFA message and the problem is not simply resolved by having one audible speaker in Angela Davis. Greco-Roman epistolary theory is helpful in this case given the high regard attributed to the letter from a friend. In that context as well as this one, the letter from a friend is not merely paper and ink; it mediates the face, voice, and presence of the friend.<sup>27</sup> Much like a relic or love token, the letter is intended to make the author spiritually present. The reader, or in this case the audience, is given the opportunity to gaze into the author's soul.<sup>28</sup> This fuller understanding of the epistle is operative in the KPFA message, yielding a polyphonic message. Furthermore, instead of centering on a purely logical argument, Walker, Davis, and Jordan's voices cohere around an affective core. Mutuality is the through line that brings the voices together and draws the audience into their underlying justice-seeking ethos.

And, to be clear, June Jordan is not a passive recipient in the triad. The speech event itself is an indication that her previously shared words have been internalized and have become part of the inner landscapes of Alice Walker and Angela Davis. The two publicly proclaim their love for Jordan and encourage her to continue her work. In other words, their message builds on and feeds Jordan's prophetic voice. And, by witnessing this intimacy, the audience members are encouraged to take up the work of bearing witness in their own ways.<sup>29</sup> So, the tenderness of the message expands, and, in keeping with an ethic of Black feminist care, draws others into its stream.

### Rhetorical Triptych

Whether on the page or read aloud, June Jordan's writings draw readers into a rhythm. In a literal sense this rhythm undergirds her poetry and prose, but it might also be understood as the beat of the ineffable, as a rhythm that hints at cosmic wholeness or a rhythm that dances us into a realm of truth that cannot be articulated in language alone. This rhythm enchants Walker's tribute and Davis' embodiment and makes the KPFA message a triad. Three equally vibrant and distinct voices cohere.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, the verbal embrace at the KPFA celebration presents a case study for thinking about a trajectory of Black feminist preaching. I want to be clear in stating that mimicry—a message composed by one, delivered by another and addressed to a

<sup>26</sup> Bakhtin suggests thought itself is dialogical. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 120. Bakhtin also says, "The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion. To be means to communicate.*" Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 287–288.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Mary Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 48–49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Similarly, rather than being too directive, Eunjoo Mary Kim values letting the listeners connect the preacher's message to their own life experiences. Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 109–110.

<sup>30</sup> This threefold approach to voice might also be imagined as an iteration of trivocal preaching because the voices are "mutually influential" and "synthesized." Walker, Davis, and Jordan each speak as prophet, priest, and sage. Kenyatta Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 11.

third—is not what I have in mind, but the notion of *layering* messages is compelling. The collective sermon is an essential strategy for Black feminist preaching.

What might it mean to preach a sermon that flourishes alongside other sermons rather than alone? One possibility for a collaborative message involves exchanging a thirty-minute sermon that would ordinarily be preached by a single preacher for a thirty-minute tripartite message—three preachers who each offer homilies as part of a rhetorical triptych. The “panels” of the triptych could all be the same length or varying lengths. What is central here is not identical time blocks but a shared commitment to the contiguity of the overall message. Each individual message is, to draw on the etymology of triptych, a “ptychē,” meaning “fold” or “layer.”<sup>31</sup> While still addressed to the congregation, implicitly or explicitly the sister homilies reference one another. The interplay makes for a kaleidoscopic and coalitional vision of preaching.<sup>32</sup>

This approach reflects the humility of a Seven Last Words sermon or a funeral address due to its collaborative impetus. In practice, the triptych sermon is also nimble enough to accommodate a range of options. In churches that use a lectionary, the triptych sermon might center on a single sacred text to reveal its depth. The homilists might explore a given text through the lenses of *didache*, exhortation, and anamnesis so that each preacher is drawing on a distinct register.<sup>33</sup> The assigned lectionary readings for a given Sunday do not always have an obvious or compelling connection, but when they do, the homilists might each focus on a different text and even integrate a shared refrain.

In faith communities that do not use a lectionary, the three homilists might explore a specific theological concept like joy or offer responses to the same question about God or the life of faith. They might all consider an issue like racism or environmental devastation through oracles of judgement, lament, and hope, respectively.<sup>34</sup> Distilling the truth this way could help the congregation embrace its identity as a prophetic community. Since memoir and autobiography are primary modes of relaying Black women’s experience, a wisdom message might be explored jointly as testimony, teaching, and parable or koan. Alternatively, as part of an effort to honor lay voices, the genre boundaries around the conception of the homily might be relaxed to accommodate sequential messages in the form of a song, a sermon, and visual art. One of the key advantages of this approach lies in its accommodation for more liminal forms of proclamation alongside traditional scriptural exegesis. As may be clear, the driving understanding of revelation in a triptych sermon is dialogical. Revelation unfolds as the faith community questions, celebrates, and remembers God together.

It is important to note that novelty is not the aim here. What is pivotal is the polyphony. On a practical level, this approach requires collaborative effort on the part of the preachers and clarity about the seams that bring the three together. One dimension of the Holy Spirit’s work is drawing people together and uniting their wills for divine endeavors. So, an essential aspect of the sermon’s pneumatology involves discerning these seams with clarity and creativity but without rigidity. And, clearly a triptych sermon would have implications for the rest of the liturgy. Though it may scramble a liturgy’s reliance on a dominant voice, a triptych message

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<sup>31</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v., “triptych,” accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/triptych>.

<sup>32</sup> Shireen Roshanravan uses the kaleidoscope to describe the fusion of insights that emerge when three women’s perspectives are explored together. Shireen Roshanravan, “Motivating Coalition: Women of Color and Epistemic Disobedience,” *Hypatia* 29:1 (2014), 43, 49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12057>.

<sup>33</sup> Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia*, 433–434.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Ruthanna B. Hooke for this example.

could underscore the sermon as the acme in those traditions that understand preaching as the ascendant point in the service or just as easily imbed the preaching in those traditions that elevate the Eucharist or another aspect of worship. In any case, the triptych approach carries the potential of awakening collective consciousness and gelling the community.<sup>35</sup>

This is not to say that the approach is foolproof. One can imagine, for instance, homilists who seem to compete rather than collaborate, or a sham in which there only *appear* to be three voices because one person has clandestinely coopted the message. One can imagine a redundant trio that foregrounds the same kind of voice, like three high-octane extroverts. Genuine commitment to the communal ethos is crucial, as is respect for mutually agreed upon time limits. Since some faith communities have a limited number of willing preachers, this model may prove practical only on a very occasional basis. Yet, even if used infrequently, there is potential for expanding the congregation's conception of preaching so that it aligns more with that of a chorus than a solo venture. Preaching becomes a ministry of helping people reflect on Christian life together.<sup>36</sup> And, in keeping with Black feminist care, preaching functions as a means of layering messages of hope.

### **The Centrality of Collectivity**

One of the core premises of Black feminist care is a high respect for collectivity. This means concern for the wellbeing of the group rather than solely the individual. Collectivity grows out of the sense that African American women have a shared destiny and our survival depends in large part on vigilant care for one another. Creating and sustaining healthy communal networks is essential to thriving. Preaching addresses this aim when it uplifts the community while at the same time naming and disrupting the individualism infecting American culture.

Aesthetically, collectivity is illumined by Black women's quilting. Within the long and varied tradition of African American women's quilting, there is a history of juxtaposing vibrant patterns and allowing the clashes to speak. Dissonance has value.<sup>37</sup> There is a similar power in layering messages and letting the convergences speak without trying to resolve them. This dynamic might best be described as "plurilogue," a Bakhtinian term Ella Shohat uses to describe "a dissonant polyphony" that results from revealing contradictions among "different yet co-implicated constituencies and arenas of struggle."<sup>38</sup> Rather than covering over or smoothing out differences, plurilogue allows them to sit in the light. Along this line, Shireen Roshanravan sees plurilogue as a means of pursuing dissimilarities to disrupt the erasure of women's varied experiences and nurture coalitional consciousness.<sup>39</sup> And, by refusing to sand down the variation of women's experience, mutuality is fostered. Listeners develop and rely on "differential consciousness," the ability to link seemingly disparate parts into a whole.<sup>40</sup> "Difference," as Audre Lorde explains, "must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities

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<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the triptych sermon is consistent with other-wise preaching because it is a collaborative approach that "involves decisive, existential caring" within which the hegemonies of the world are put "under erasure." Liberating patterns for human relationship are developed and reclaimed. John S. McClure, *Otherwise Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 134–135. Yet, my analysis is informed largely by Bakhtinian dialogue.

<sup>36</sup> Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> In African American worship, the ring shout serves as an example of audible voices unrestrained by external orchestration. Emilie Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 72.

<sup>38</sup> Ella Shohat, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminisms in Transnational Age* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 2; Roshanravan, "Motivating Coalition," 42.

<sup>39</sup> Roshanravan, "Motivating Coalition," 42; Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 109.

<sup>40</sup> Roshanravan, "Motivating Coalition," 43, citing Chela Sandoval.

between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.”<sup>41</sup> This spark is essential because group identity erases and isolates as easily as it unifies.

Through word and performance, preaching enacts a belief about what authority is and how it is to be held.<sup>42</sup> Too often, this vision of authority is haunted by the specter of a singular male authority figure who holds power over listeners stemming from his charisma, institutional rank, and some degree of special knowledge about scripture or theology. Contemporary American culture and political contexts exacerbate this problem. Consciously or not, contemporary preaching participates in a rhetorical landscape that has been skewed by warped visions of power. And here, I am focusing less on the content of preaching and more on what is performed. Which norms of sermon performance, despite our best efforts, constitute tacit approval of the myth of individualism that terrorizes the current rhetorical landscape? How might preaching more effectively resist or dethrone twisted conceptions of power? Building appreciation for the kind of wisdom that arises when multiple voices weigh in seems foundational to answering these questions. The triptych sermon interrupts the patterns of talking at or past people that typify self-satisfied speech.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that there is no role for the solo preacher or that such preaching is *de facto* oppressive. Presumably, each preacher of the triptych sermon would speak as an individual and this is vital. Blackness has historically accompanied a struggle to be heard and seen in one’s complexity amid the forces of white reduction. Nor am I arguing that a trio of preachers magically resolves the problem. I am trying to trouble the easy relationship between preaching and individualism, to challenge the word that wants to stand alone and excel on the same terms as a political speech or scholarly lecture. This insistence—this preference for achieving and acquiring over relating—reveals the embedded whiteness in preaching. The triptych sermon, by contrast, refuses a master voice and involves distinct voices yearning toward communion.

### **The Contours of Care**

Ultimately, the triptych sermon model is not chiefly geared towards power-sharing; it centers on care. In the KPFA message, three Black women serve as witnesses for one another and invite an audience into the experience of care. This form of care makes invisible labor visible and affirms capaciousness and belovedness. In an American social context plagued by mundane violence, this form of care amounts to resistance and reveals the heroism demanded by everyday life.<sup>43</sup> Such care does not blossom in a vacuum. Audre Lorde underscores the importance of nurturing relationships among and between Black women:

We have the stories of Black women who healed each other’s wounds, raised each other’s children, fought each other’s battles, tilled each other’s earth, and eased each other’s passage into life and into death. . . . But connections between Black women are not automatic by virtue of our similarities, and the possibilities of genuine communication between us are not easily achieved.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1984), 111.

<sup>42</sup> Donyelle McCray, *The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher* (Lanham: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2019), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 121; Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 152–153.

Preaching together is a way to work toward that mutuality while building up the congregation. This preaching hastens the death of the ego (individual, social, and historical) and enacts healthy new possibilities for relating.<sup>45</sup>

Care is not static. It is helpful to note that the care I envision here is open and improvisational in nature. To go back to the KPFA celebration, the live moment of Angela Davis reading Alice Walker's words is an open moment. Walker's letter is not simply a finished product read aloud. Performance yields a happening. A new thing emerges in the performance that neither Alice Walker nor Angela Davis nor any of the listeners can anticipate. Lucy Rose explains this phenomenon, "Meaning, divorced from a fixed message, becomes multilayered and open. And the process of creating and interpreting becomes heuristic, yielding unexpected discoveries."<sup>46</sup> An element of improvisation is at work insofar as the impact of the message cannot be controlled. Similarly, in the triptych sermon, the preachers' synergy provides an inherent flux. This turbulence does not keep the larger message from being focused or impactful. Improvisation generates energy and immediacy.

As noted at the outset, the triptych sermon is just one of many possibilities for Black feminist preaching. Yet, it is a method that coheres with the church's peculiar call to mutuality. The church is formed by those who are called out of the idolatry of individualism into a life-giving relationship centered on the Trinity. And, in a historical moment when cooperation and equality are essential for human and planetary survival, patterns of "sacred" speech that objectify and dominate are profane. In the end, Christian practices do not simply express Christianity, they constitute Christianity.<sup>47</sup> Or, to draw on Fred Craddock, "The method is the message... *how* one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches."<sup>48</sup>

In her poem, "Calling on All Silent Minorities," June Jordan summons a community for a meeting at a tree that has not yet been planted.<sup>49</sup> By coming together, they will a new future into being. The triptych sermon is a similarly audacious gesture. It prizes collectivity and care over convention and practicality. It resists the individualism that dominates the contemporary American rhetorical landscape and privileges the kind of divine revelation that emerges in the interplay of voices. Rather than insisting on a thin unity, the triptych makes space for harmony and atonality. Drawing on Black feminist rhetoric, the triptych sermon is a helpful means of enacting a new and liberating future.

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<sup>45</sup> Suzi Gablik drawing on David Michael Levin. Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991; repr., New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 144.

<sup>46</sup> Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 113.

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 102.

<sup>48</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 44.

<sup>49</sup> June Jordan, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*, eds. Jan Heller Levi and Sara Miles (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon, 2005), 110.

## Preaching Justice through Art

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**Abstract:** *As the saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” However, the printed word—more specifically, scripture—has been the traditional base of the sermon. Through a personal experience reflection, this paper advocates using artwork as the foundational text for sermons, and presents an approach to art exegesis based on the practical method of art criticism. Employing art historian and educator Edmund Burke Feldman’s approach to art criticism, the authors present a step-by-step exegesis of an artwork that mirrors the exegesis of biblical texts, including selecting an artwork, exegeting the art, choosing a theme and sermon form, and developing an introduction and conclusion. The authors further illustrate that preachers can create sermons that are faithful to their personal theologies and faith traditions even when using art, rather than the Bible, as foundational texts.*

### Introduction

In February 2017, I<sup>1</sup> was among several people asked to give 5–7 minute talks at an event entitled “Re-Actions: Art, Advocacy, and Activism,” hosted by the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky (ACLU-KY). The purpose of the event was for a variety of local non-artists from different walks of life to share their reaction to art that addressed international social justice issues. In doing so, conversation and critique of art would take place among everyday people demonstrating the openness of art interpretation. What follows is an explication and reflective analysis of the homiletical experience of one preacher’s first foray into liberating the sermon from the exclusive domain of biblical texts.

The art was exhibited (and the event was to take place) at the 21c Museum Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky. This hotel has a unique concept in that it also houses a contemporary museum open 24 hours daily, making art available to all without barriers. The first part of the assignment was for each speaker to select one artwork that would be the focus of our talks. When walking through the museum a little more than a month before the event, there was one photograph that literally beckoned me—Mikhael Subotzky’s *Sunday Church Service, Beaufort West Prison*. When I selected the piece, I had no intention of preaching it. But from the moment I saw it, it became my text. What do preachers do when they encounter a text? They exegete it. Art criticism provided a foundation for my exegesis.

### Exegeting Art

Before surveying some of the basic tenets of art criticism, we should answer the question, “What is art?” Art includes paintings, sculptures, music, literature, dance, photography, animation, calligraphy, drawing, tapestry, needlepoint, stained glass, digital media, religious symbols and texts, assemblage, architecture, graffiti, and video. Many of these art forms were on display at the museum during my visit. Within those genres, what qualifies as “good” art is different for different people. The sources of art are as varied as the types; art is everywhere. Examples of sources are museums, galleries, schools, churches, mosques, private homes,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article personal pronouns refer to Debra J. Mumford.

universities, libraries, street corners, subway stations, social media platforms, books, television, and radio. When seeking to exegete art, preachers can draw inspiration from a wealth of resources.

We should also answer the question, “Why art?” Why should preachers consider using art as the text for their sermons? Simply put, art is powerful. Art displayed at 21c Louisville has shined artistic light on immigration, different forms of abuse, labor practices, and civil liberties. Art can make us laugh, cry, celebrate, and mourn. Art can inspire greatness or send us spiraling into hopelessness. Art can highlight the grace of God and critique the absence of the spirit of God. Art in the form of photography and video is used by advertisers to compel us to spend money we may or may not have to purchase products we may or may not need. In a world in which the average attention span fell from twelve seconds in 2000 to eight seconds in 2017, art can be a viable means of capturing and maintaining attention longer than textual or verbal communication alone.<sup>2</sup>

As it relates to exegeting art for preaching, there are undoubtedly many approaches that would be helpful. Edmund Feldman, professor emeritus of art at the University of Georgia, developed a practical approach to art criticism that will prove helpful for our exegetical process. Feldman’s approach has four steps: naming and describing the facts, analyzing the facts, interpreting the evidence, and judging the work.

In the first step, we are simply naming and describing what we see. We name the people, places, and objects we observe in the piece. The language we use at this point should be simple, unloaded, and as neutral as possible. Descriptions may include:

- lines (straight, curved, jagged, thick, thin, hard, soft, continuous or interrupted, etc.),
- shapes (square, triangular, or circular; flat, stout, solid, broken, concave, convex, stable or unstable, etc.),
- color and temperature (red, blue, yellow, green, hot, cold, complementary, analogous, primary, secondary, etc.),
- size and quantity (great, small, many, few, tall, short, wide, narrow, equal, uneven, heavy, weightless, massive, little, dominant, subordinate, swollen, shrunken, prominent, or inconspicuous),
- space and location (left, right, high, low, close, distant, above, beneath, first, last, central, peripheral, shallow, deep, empty, full, limited, boundless), and
- surface and texture (smooth, rough, coarse, fine, dry, wet, grainy, filmy, opaque, transparent, porous, or sealed).

Part of the naming process is gathering information provided by the host venue (in this case the museum) such as the title, name of the artist, geographical location of artist, medium, and date of the work. Feldman advises that when the title makes sense, use it for the interpretive process. When the title seems to contradict the visual facts of the piece, do not use it.

Naming and describing what we see takes time. This part of the process should not be rushed. We should stop to observe the piece using all our senses and cognitive abilities. Just as we do when interpreting biblical texts, it is important for us to approach the work without preconceptions so we can see it for what it is and not for what we think it should be. Naming and

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Garel, “The Power of Visual Content: Images Vs Text,” *eye Q* (2017), accessed September 20, 2018, <https://www.eyeqinsights.com/power-visual-content-images-vs-text/>.

describing the work can be impeded when we fail to see the work in its entirety and when we finish this part of the process too soon.<sup>3</sup>

Analyzing the facts is another way of saying we should take time to find relationships among and between all visual evidence we have gathered by observing closeness, contrast, similarity, sequence, rhythm, symmetry, balance, completeness, and closure. For this part of the process, Feldman contends that we should use the right side of our brains versus the left side of our brains, referring to the idea that right hemisphere of the brain is involved in imagination, visualization, holistic thinking, and creativity. In this manner, a color by itself may not be perceived as bold or angry. However, when that same color is combined with shape and size and seen with other colors, it can be perceived as bold, angry, or aggressive.<sup>4</sup>

The third step to Feldman's process is interpreting the evidence. In this step, we try to make sense of the partial meanings we discovered in the first two steps by formulating a critical hypothesis. We may need more information that we can gather by asking and finding answers to questions we form when looking at the work. Questions can include:

- Where is this happening?
- Who lives here? What do they do? Why do they do it?
- Was this place seen, remembered or invented?
- Are these events real or potentially real?
- Is this work about the artist's life?
- Is someone being denounced? Is the work competing with something we do not see?
- Is this a demonstration of skill or technique or process?
- Does the subject matter really matter?

The interpretive process should also include acknowledgement of feelings that the work invokes in us. Does the work invoke anger, sadness, happiness, calm, anxiety, or combativeness? We may also have impressions, memories, or associations that are a subliminal effort to connect with the work. When we look at a work, we may think that it "looks like," "feels like," or "reminds us of" something or someone that is familiar to us. For Feldman, a good interpretation is one that fits most of the facts together and has the following traits: completeness, persuasiveness, personal relevance, durability, emotional power, intellectual force, insight, visual responsiveness, and originality.

The last part of the art criticism process is judging the work. Feldman identified three grounds upon which art may be judged: formalism, expressivism, or instrumentalism. The formalist perspective perceives art to be good when various parts of the work cooperate, reinforce each other, and combine in perfect unity.<sup>5</sup> Every work of art is seen as a formal arrangement and represents the highest aesthetic value. At its core, formalism contends that we do not have to bring anything from life to interpret artwork, that we need no knowledge of the ideas, affairs, or emotions that served to inspire its creation. People seeking to critique formalist works just need an ability to see, feel, and appreciate the discriminating choices of themes, materials, and modes of expression used by formalist artists. Formalism's allegiance to artistic reality does not allow the observer to interpret the work through their own experiences, be they

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke Feldman, *Practical Art Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 28–29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

religious, political, or social. This line of thinking runs counter to the intention of the Re-Actions event and the organizers' viewpoint that every person comes to an artwork with a perspective that enriches rather than "taints" precisely because of the lived experiences that influence their judgement or interpretation.

When using an expressivist approach, artwork should be judged by its ability to convey emotions and ideas with power, honesty, and vitality. Expressivism is not concerned with purity of form or formal arrangements that represent particular aesthetic values. Rather, the expressivist critic makes a judgment based on the ability of the artwork to portray life just the way it is and to stir emotions by saying something new or important. The expressivist approach in this regard aligns with the ethos of 21c Museum Hotels as expressed on the company's website: "Art can anchor and energize a community, be used as an agent for positive change, be part of everyday life. Art can provide insights and start conversation."<sup>6</sup> The critic judges whether a work is relevant to the critic, to their audience, or to society in general. For expressivist critics, form is a means to an end, which is truth rather than beauty. Truthful expression is more important than goodness. Facts are more important than beauty. Expressivists value intellectual and moral values as much as they do aesthetic ones.

In the instrumentalist approach, the goodness of artwork is determined by whether it advances the agenda of a church, a government, a business, or a political party. Artwork can promote a religious doctrine, political ideology, or sell a product. Since the needs and interests of institutions are known in advance, it is not difficult to determine whether artwork fulfills its intended purpose. Instrumentalism only endorses formal values when those values support a higher purpose. Though instrumentalists do not critique art apart from its ideological, political, or economic purposes, they do appreciate the innate appeal of a range of visual forms.<sup>7</sup>

### Selecting the Art

Just as the preacher goes to the Bible or lectionary each week in search of a biblical text that they feel will meet the needs of the people to whom they will be preaching, similarly the preacher needs to find a work of art that will relate to and somehow meet the needs of a particular people in a particular time and place. My task was simplified when I was instructed to find a piece on display at 21c Louisville—a contemporary art museum and hotel founded by local philanthropists with the belief that art can provide insights into and conversations about contemporary issues.<sup>8</sup> The exhibit at the time was of contemporary art that reflected social justice issues around the world.

When I visited the museum, I wanted to find a piece that spoke to me. Of the dozens of artworks on display at the time by artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Kehinde Wiley, Mikhael Subotzky's *Sunday Church Service*, *Beaufort West Prison* spoke volumes. Perhaps it was the timing. I had read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* a few months before. America's incarceration policies and practices were on my mind. Of the many evocative, sermon-worthy pieces, I kept returning to *Sunday Church Service*.

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<sup>6</sup> "About 21c Museum Hotels," *21c Museum Hotels* (2018), accessed September 24 C.

<sup>7</sup> Feldman, *Practical Art Criticism*, 1994, 38–41.

<sup>8</sup> "About 21c Museum Hotels," *21c Museum Hotels* (2018), accessed September 24 <https://www.21cmuseumhotels.com/louisville/>.



Image used with the permission of Subotzky Studio, Johannesburg, South Africa.

### **Exegeting *Sunday Church Service, Beaufort West Prison***

This photograph readily lends itself to an expressivist approach. When I saw men of color, uniformly dressed, hands raised, worshipping in prison, I felt many emotions. I felt anger that the men were overwhelmingly men of color. I felt sadness about the contradiction between the beauty of worship and the ugliness of the worship space with its barred windows and peeling concrete walls. I felt sorrow about the hopefulness of the worship moment symbolized by the uplifted hands of each of the men in total surrender to the will of God, and the hopelessness of the social realities that may have led to their incarceration and that will undoubtedly continue to shape their realities if/when they are released. I wrestled with the contradiction between the brightness and joyfulness of the color of their orange jump suits and the darkness of their skin, which was analogous to their existential states. I was simultaneously heartened that they found God in that space and mad at God that such spaces continue to exist.

When I read the object label (the label next to art in museums that gives the name of the artist, title, and description of the work), my initial thoughts were borne out. This picture was one of Sunday worship in a prison. It was one of a series of photographs Mikhael Subotzky took in 2006 in the city of Beaufort West, South Africa. I believed that the photographer was offering a social critique that I wanted to delve into more deeply.

Next, I engaged in Feldman's naming and describing step. I decided I needed to capture all my thoughts and questions immediately. I took a picture of the photo with my phone and went to the restaurant in the hotel. I borrowed a pen. Like a business person with a burgeoning idea, I commandeered a few napkins and began to write down my thoughts and to capture all the questions that flooded my mind. I had questions about the context of the photograph and the men in it. Who were these men? Where in South Africa was Beaufort West prison, exactly? Who was Mikhael Subotzky? What compelled him to take the picture? What was his intent in publishing it? Why were these men worshipping? Whose God were they worshipping? Who was leading them in worship? How did these men come to be in prison? How long will they be there? What will life be like for them when they leave? Will the one leading them in worship be there for them when they leave? I had so many questions. Some of the answers I got from the object label. Some I got from the artist's website.

During the days and weeks leading up to the ACLU-KY event, I began exegeting the photograph, researching my questions and looking at the photo at least once a day to see what else I could uncover. As it happens when exegeting biblical texts, I did not seek or find answers to all my questions. However, I was able to find answers to some very important ones. I found that Mikhael Subotzky is a film, video, and photographic artist who was born in 1981 in Cape Town, South Africa. He currently lives and works in Johannesburg.<sup>9</sup> *Sunday Church Service, Beaufort West Prison* was part of a Subotzky's first collection of photographic work entitled *Die Vier Hoeke (The Four Corners)*. It was an in-depth study of the South African penal system. His intent was to highlight the contradictions between the public rhetoric of an apartheid-free South Africa and the imprisonment of men supposedly set free from racial oppression.

Beaufort West is a town of 37,000 in rural South Africa. Two-thirds of the adults in the town are unemployed. The murder rate is ten times the rate of New York and twenty times the rate of London. Unlike prisons in the United States that are often relegated to the outskirts of cities and towns, away from much of public view and leading to burdensome treks for families, Beaufort West Prison sits at the center of a traffic circle on South Africa's longest highway, which connects the northern and southern provinces. Millions of cars pass by the prison every year, normalizing its presence in the town. The centrality of the prison renders it inescapable. That is, part of the townspeople's lived experiences could include being incarcerated in their own neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

I felt that demographic information about the prison population in South Africa would be helpful for my interpretation. Since I would be presenting to people familiar with mass incarceration in the United States, comparing statistics of the two countries could be both enlightening and informative. In 2017, the total population of the Justice and Correctional Service Ministry in South Africa was 158,111. Two hundred eighty people per 100,000 were incarcerated. Female prisoners made up 2.6% of the total population. There were 243 prisons with an occupancy level of 136. At the end of 2016, 79.6% of the total prison population in South Africa was black, 18.2% was coloured, and 1.6% was white.<sup>11</sup> In comparison, in the United States in 2016, 2,121,600 people were incarcerated: 704,500 in local jails, 1,228,800 in state prisons, and 188,300 with the Federal Bureau of Corrections. Six hundred fifty-five people per 100,000 people were incarcerated. Females made up 9.8% of the total incarcerated population. The occupancy rate was 103.9% in 2014.<sup>12</sup> African Americans made up 13.4% of the total U.S. population but 37.9% of the prison population.

There are many different prison ministries offering services in South African prisons. For many of the prisoners, religion is something they adopt after being incarcerated to help them cope with imprisonment. Some prisoners attend worship because they are lonely and in need of community. Some see attending worship and faith in God as a means of getting their lives back

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<sup>9</sup> Mikhael Subotzky, *Mikhael Subotzky Archive*, 2015 ed. (Cape Town, South Africa: Mikhael Subotzky, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Ina Skosana & Ruth Hopkins G Makou, "Fact Sheet: The State of South Africa's Prisons," *Daily Maverick* (2017), accessed September 23, 2018, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-07-18-fact-sheet-the-state-of-south-africas-prisons/>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Prisoners in 2016*, by E. Ann Carson, Vol. NCJ 251149 pt. January 2018 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), 13.

on track. For those who have faith when they go to prison, their faith often becomes more intense and even more essential to their daily lives.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Choosing the Theme***

After exegeting the work, my prevailing thought was that though these men are highly visible in the picture because they are at the center of it and because they are wearing orange, the systems that maintain their incarceration and oppression seek to render them invisible, dispensable, and irrelevant. Therefore, I developed a theme for my sermon: People committed to justice must see all people as worthy of justice. The title was *A Strange Sort of Sanctuary*.

### ***Underlying Theology***

After gathering some exegetical information, it is important for the preacher to identify the theology that will inform their interpretation of the work. My theological underpinnings include the belief that all people are created in the image of God, though not all people reflect the image of God in their interactions with others. To be the image of God means being human. Being human means having the freedom: to be creative, to treat others humanely, and to oppose acts of inhumanity. Anyone who intentionally oppresses and marginalizes others ceases to be the image of God. God is not just a pious feeling in human hearts or a being who oversees the affairs of humans on earth. God is a spirit that is active in concrete historical situations of human existence. Experiencing the salvation of God is not just about confession and repentance of sin. Salvation means having a relationship with God that requires us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Loving our neighbors means not only praying for them and wishing the best for them but also being committed to working on their behalf to ensure they experience the goodness and justice of God embodied in the reign of God.<sup>14</sup> Repentance of sin requires confession of sin and a commitment to changing sinful behavior. Sincere repentance is rewarded with God's forgiveness and forgetfulness. God remembers our sins no more after repentance. The people of God should seek ways to embody God's forgiveness and forgetfulness in the ways we treat those who have paid their debt to society through our penal systems, which are punitive rather than restorative.

### **Sermon Form**

The next step in the process of preaching art is selecting an appropriate sermon form. Much has been written about the need for the form of the sermon to reflect the form of the text being interpreted. So, what does this mean for art in general and photography in particular? I wanted to allow my observations and questions about the photograph to serve as a guide throughout the sermon. Therefore, the form of the sermon was interrogative-expository. Often when we think of expository preaching, our thoughts focus solely on *form* rather than *content*. Many of us have experienced preaching in which the preacher reads a verse of scripture, explains its meaning, and then shares a story or illustration to reinforce the meaning they have just declared. Therefore, for many of us this verse-by-verse structure is what we have in mind when we think "expository preaching." However, after years of studying many forms of preaching in general and expository preaching in particular, I know that the term "expository" represents

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<sup>13</sup> Zoe Psiakis, "South African Prison Life: The Importance of Religion to Inmates and Ex-Offenders," *VU Break Through Blog* (2017), <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/universityfundingprograms/2017/10/south-african-prison-life-the-importance-of-religion-to-inmates-and-ex-offenders/>.

<sup>14</sup> Debra J. Mumford, *Envisioning the Reign of God: Preaching for Tomorrow* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2019), 204.

much more than form. Expository designates mode of origination. An expository sermon originates directly from the texts (usually biblical ones) through careful exegesis (often organically so) and explains the text's meaning and implications for faith and practice.

In addition, I did not believe this sermon would be best delivered as a narrative. A photograph as provocative as *Sunday Church Service* needed a delivery system that was equally provocative. The unique occasion, an evening of stimulating talks about activism and social justice using artwork as the point of departure, needed a delivery form that was equally as dynamic. I chose to deliver the sermon in free verse. Free verse is a type of poetry that does not adhere to any strict meter or have a set rhyme scheme. Lines can have any length. The poet (or preacher in this case) can insert line breaks in the middle of thoughts or in the middle of words. The number of stanzas is also the choice of the poet. The length of my stanzas varied from five lines to thirteen. In the first five stanzas, after the introduction, I noted what I saw when I looked deeply into the photograph. In the subsequent six stanzas, I highlighted questions raised for me when I studied the photograph intensely. Within the stanzas I used repetition and alliteration to punctuate my thoughts and questions.

### ***Development of Introduction and Conclusion***

When I delivered this sermon, the photograph was projected on a screen behind me. A display of the art is necessary for preaching so the congregation can experience the art as they experience the sermon. I introduced the sermon with the name of the artwork, the photographer, and the work's country of origin. From there I segued into what I saw in the piece. I ended the sermon with two different types of rhetorical repetition: *epimone* and *anaphora*. *Epimone* is the repetition of a phrase or question for emphasis. I repeated the phrase "If we can truly see" as a charge for the people to look beyond the picture of worship and into the penal system that keeps men like the ones in the image in captivity when they are inside and outside the prison. *Anaphora* is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of subsequent lines. I used repetition of phrases such as "past our experiences, past our biases, past our prejudices" as a "See what?" response to the "If we can truly see" *epimone*.

Preaching art has many of the same challenges as preaching biblical texts: finding the right text (artwork), exegesis, determining a theme, and developing effective introductions and conclusions. Determining the form of the sermon can be particularly challenging because different types of art can lend themselves to a range of possibilities. Feldman's approach to art criticism, namely expressivism, provided an appropriate framework for exegeting the complex and stimulating artwork exhibited at the museum. As expected by the event organizers, the exhibit evoked deep and stirring reactions from the speakers and attendees alike. For me, the experience reinforced the power of image for preaching. Though we most often use our words to create images, let us also occasionally allow images to inspire our words.

The 5–7 minute sermon is included below in its entirety.

### A Strange Sort of Sanctuary

In South African photographer  
Mikhael Subotzky's  
"Sunday Church Service, Beaufort West Prison"

I see...  
This is a strange sort of sanctuary.  
Men — in worship  
Hands raised in complete surrender to God.  
Men in worship — in prison  
Hands raised in worship after surrendering their freedom to the state.

When I see this picture, I see men who have been convicted,  
Found guilty in a court,  
Sentenced for their crimes,  
Showing their conviction for the one who created them,  
Who formed, and fashioned them in their mother's wombs  
In their creator's image.

When I see **this** picture,  
I see men of color who are marginalized,  
Who are under-educated,  
Who are under-employed,  
Who are underpaid,  
But overrepresented

When I see **this** picture  
I see men of color -  
Who are oppressed because of their color,  
Who are marginalized because of their color -  
Forced to wear colors that further mark them as "other."

When I see this picture  
I see containment.  
Barred windows,  
Concrete walls and concrete floors to keep in  
Those society deems too dangerous, too brown, too black to be out.

When I see this picture  
I have questions.  
Whose God are they worshipping?  
The God of their oppressors or the God of the oppressed?  
A God of liberation or a God of marginalization?  
A God who cares only about their souls,  
or a God who cares about their minds and bodies as well?

When I see this picture  
I have questions.  
Why are they allowed to worship?  
To forget their pasts, or cope with their present?  
To control their minds or transform their futures?  
To give them hope for this life or the life to come?

When I see this picture I have questions.  
Is apartheid truly over?  
Is discrimination by color, caste and ethnicity truly over?  
Or has it morphed into a new form  
Much like Jim Crow?

When I see this picture  
I am made to wonder  
Will the one up front who looks like them,  
Who is leading them.  
Who is beseeching them to love God,  
Be there for them, when their time for prison-worship is over?  
Will the one up front who looks like them,  
Who is leading them.  
Who is beseeching them to love God.  
Love them unconditionally when they are on the other side of the concrete walls?

When I see this picture  
I have more questions  
Will the state who dresses them and feeds them on the inside,  
Continue to dress them and feed them when they are on the outside?  
Or will these worshippers of God  
Be left to feed themselves?  
Will these worshippers of God  
Be left to dress themselves?  
Will these worshippers of God  
Be left on their own  
Without training, without skills, without hope for a tomorrow  
Any different than their yesterday?

Jesus said he was anointed to bring good news to the poor,  
To proclaim release to the captive,  
To let the oppressed go free.  
But, where is the good news for these brothers?  
Will they ever be released from captivity?  
Will they ever be anything but oppressed?  
Can these men ever be free?  
Maybe.

If — we can ever truly see  
    I mean not with open eyes,  
    But with open hearts,  
    With open minds  
If we can ever truly see,  
    past our experiences,  
    past our biases,  
    past our prejudices,  
If we can ever truly see  
    Beyond our politics,  
    Even beyond our religion.  
If we can truly see —  
See each of them very differently  
As the children of God they were created to be.<sup>15</sup>

### **Acknowledgements**

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<sup>15</sup> Videos of the sermon and other talks are available at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/ACLUofKY/videos/10154738381321072/>

**The Crisis of Preaching Politics:  
Homiletical Insights from the Young Karl Barth**

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**Abstract:** *Many contemporary preachers and homileticians address what they believe to be a “crisis” of preaching. Without denying these claims, this essay offers theological and homiletical insights from the young Karl Barth on what he believed to be a more fundamental and pervasive homiletical crisis subsuming all others. Just what this crisis was for Barth becomes clearer when we look to the sociopolitical commitments of two of Barth’s pastoral mentors: Friedrich Naumann and Christoph Blumhardt. Drawing from his theologico-political discernment leading up to the Great War, Barth offers us ways to challenge unjust and oppressive policies and systems through our preaching ministries today.*

*The gospel of Christ brings a saving future into the disastrous present,  
speaking of God in the face of godlessness, of our brotherhood in the face of enmity,  
and of the new creation in the face of a threatened earth.*  
– Jürgen Moltmann<sup>1</sup>

Óscar Romero, the Salvadoran Archbishop and martyr of the church, once declared, “The church that doesn’t provoke any crisis, a gospel that doesn’t unsettle, a word of God that doesn’t get under anyone’s skin, [and] touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed, what gospel is that? ... Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be harassed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties, do not light up the world they live in.”<sup>2</sup> The world needs preachers courageous enough to pick a fight. And yet, mere truculence leaves much to be desired. One of the salient crises of our time is that many preachers who go viral on YouTube or blanket the headlines of the *New York Times* pick the *wrong* fight.

Preachers who insist that the gospel of Jesus Christ necessitates Qur’an burning or denigrating the prophet Mohammed have picked the wrong fight. Preachers who promote further persecution of LGBTQ-identifying persons do not light up this world; in fact, they darken it considerably. Preachers who combat epistemological uncertainty with oppressive doctrines like biblical inerrancy have picked the wrong fight. And preachers who barrage congregants with a “name it and claim it” bromides aided by New Thought metaphysics and neo-gnostic ideologies provoke the wrong crisis.

This essay inquires into the so-called crises of contemporary preaching. Especially for preachers aiming to challenge unjust and oppressive policies and systems, proclamation that spans the historic gulf between the pulpit and the polis can be daunting. My hope is that through close attention to a young Swiss preacher seeking a word from God for the people of God amid sociopolitical and economic upheavals, preachers and homileticians today might discern a

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York & London: Harper & Row, 1977), 221.

<sup>2</sup> Óscar Romero, *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, trans. James R. Brockmen (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 64.

chastening word that orients our work and witness. Along the way, let us see if the “crisis” about which so many homileticians and preachers speak is actually worthy of the name.

### **The Contemporary Crises of Preaching**

The so-called “crisis of preaching” has received much recent attention in mainline, African American, and evangelical expressions of Christianity. Moreover, a spate of recent books have commended a dialogical homiletic as the way through the aporia produced by the contemporary political situation in America.<sup>3</sup> As William Brosend puts it: “The [homiletical] challenge is to foster in our preaching and ecclesial life more broadly a place where genuine dialogue might happen, the pulpit as a faithful alternative to the vituperative hysteria of pundits and prognosticators.”<sup>4</sup> Pastor Ginger Gaines-Cirelli says much the same thing:

I’ve been asked a lot lately how to preach on controversial, politically charged topics. The first response I share is that, if you are a pastor, the relationship with your congregation is the place to begin. If the people trust that you see, know, and love them, that you love God and seek God’s wisdom and way in your speaking and choosing, and that you are on a journey with God and with them in relationship, you have a good foundation to stand upon. From such a place of trusting relationship, preachers can risk taking a stand—or can at least share where they find themselves at a given moment.<sup>5</sup>

This bit of homiletical wisdom bears much in common with Leonora Tubbs Tisdale’s admonition that prophetic preaching requires a pastoral sensitivity.<sup>6</sup>

But it is not only mainline preachers who continue to grapple with preaching amid political crises. In his book *Crisis in the Village*, former Morehouse University president Robert Franklin writes that the “single greatest threat to the historical legacy and core values of the contemporary black church tradition is posed by what is known as the ‘prosperity gospel’ movement.”<sup>7</sup> He argues that this movement is symptomatic of a larger crisis that he labels a “mission drift,” in which African American congregations have assimilated into cultures that are hostile to marginalized people—such as the poor, the HIV-infected, homosexuals, and immigrants. Preaching is particularly culpable for this crisis because the poetic and prophetic potency of pulpit proclamation has fallen to crude displays of “Simon says” and moral courage has faltered before neoliberal philosophies and materialistic anthropologies. In short, Franklin declares, the Black church is in a state of crisis and preaching is utterly responsible.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, O. Wesley Allen Jr., *Preaching in an Era of Trump* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2017); Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Blue-Red Divide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); and Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, Jr. *The Sermon Without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015). In a distinct though overlapping vein, John McClure’s Habermasian inspired praxis of communicative action broadens the scope of conversation into the public square. See John S. McClure, *Speaking Together and with God: Liturgy and Communicative Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> William Brosend, *Preaching Truth in the Age of Alternative Facts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, *Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 90.

<sup>6</sup> See Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 112. See also Debra J. Mumford’s eye-opening book, *Exploring Prosperity Preaching: Biblical Health, Wealth, & Wisdom* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012).

Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, would agree with Franklin's homiletical indictment, but for completely different reasons. Mohler writes, "One of the hallmarks of our time is that we face a crisis of preaching. ...Much of what happens in pulpits across America today is not preaching, even though the preacher—and probably his congregation along with him—would claim that it is."<sup>8</sup> The "crisis" Mohler identifies has nothing to do with the needs of the marginalized, unbridled capitalism, or even environmental degradation. For Mohler, the crisis of preaching is that preachers are no longer preaching expository sermons. He rails against the turn to narrative or topical preaching for blunting the declarative force of scripture. Mohler argues that if preachers will but preach expository sermons—by which they *explain* the meaning and truthfulness of scripture—then the Bible itself will overcome its contemporary preaching crisis. Perhaps.

Barbara Brown Taylor views the crisis of preaching in a different light. For Taylor, the issue is neither sociological nor homiletical, but a *theological* misunderstanding that has led to the attenuated power of preaching. She laments that preaching is increasingly viewed as a "solo performance," wherein the preacher delivers some transcendent message lassoed on the plains of homiletical speculation.<sup>9</sup> Instead, she urges preachers and congregants to discover the work of God in their midst *through* the event of preaching. Ownership of the sermon belongs to the many—the gathered community of faith—and not the preacher, Taylor argues, one that is more interested in life than religion.<sup>10</sup>

I could go on and on with such examples. Homileticians and preachers alike are unified in their assessment that something is the matter with preaching in contemporary North American Christian contexts, but the truth is that there never has been a golden age of preaching. Homiletician Clyde Fant observed long ago that each generation of preachers tends to think they are the first to have been "chained to the rock of the pulpit and have their livers torn out by the giant birds of criticism, only to have them grow back before the next Sunday."<sup>11</sup> No generation of preachers is spared from certain challenges and concomitant criticism—especially when speaking out on issues that are politically divisive. It is our duty, Fant contends, to make sure preaching is in trouble for the right reasons.

I believe the crisis of preaching is endemic to the very nature of preaching, and I am not alone in this assessment. In his Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching delivered at Yale Divinity School in 1976, famed Baptist preacher Gardner Taylor confessed to "a gnawing uncertainty about the value and worth of preaching." His dubiousness was exacerbated by the fact that he was headed to preach in South Africa at the height of apartheid. Coming face-to-face with the beast of racial segregation and economic oppression, preaching seemed like such a "clumsy and unclear form of communication" to Taylor.<sup>12</sup> He arrived at the conclusion that preaching's crisis arises from the feebleness of the proclaimed Word: "How strange of God to make the uttered word so fragile and so tenuous, the principal carrier of so precious a cargo as that incalculable

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<sup>8</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Weekly Wrestling Match," in *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?* ed. Mike Graves (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, "The Weekly Wrestling Match," 173.

<sup>11</sup> Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 24. Fant argues that "no age seems so golden as in the afterglow of its sunset" and that preaching has suffered from a pervasive shortsightedness that tends toward a "cave mentality," which often produces nostalgia or untempered optimism (26–7).

<sup>12</sup> Gardner C. Taylor, *How Shall They Preach* (Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1977), 42.

love which God has intemporated [*sic*] and incarnated in Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>13</sup> To this, many contemporary homileticians would shout a hearty *Amen!*<sup>14</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann mirrors Taylor’s assessment: “As long as there is a prevailing impression that the sign is not the thing it stands for, [that] the name is not the thing, [that] the idea is not the deed, [and that] the dream is not the action, [that] ‘the true word (is) unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable,’ [then] Christian proclamation and liberating narration [are] impossible.”<sup>15</sup> It is this feebleness, this impossibility of preaching that I wish to reflect upon for the remainder of this essay. For when we approach the preaching task in light of its radical impossibility, we see that the political preaching crises articulated by so many are symptomatic assessments that bear witness to a deeper crisis piercing the very heart of Christian proclamation. In my conclusion, we will circle back to these contemporary crises, where we will be in a position to see them with fresh eyes. But for now, let us take a close look at the reflections of a renegade Swiss preacher who ministered in a situation very much like that facing twenty-first century America. This preacher’s name was Karl Barth, and his revolutionary reflections on the task of preaching and the role of the church in society offer a fresh perspective on the crisis of preaching politics.

### The True Crisis of Preaching

The young Karl Barth received his theological training at some of the premier European universities of his day, where he was deeply influenced by the central tenants of so-called “liberal Protestant theology.” The works of Schleiermacher, Troeltsch, Ritschl, and Harnack resonated deeply with Barth’s theological sensibilities, and his early essays and sermons reflect this commitment. Barth bore the mantle of liberalism proudly, and he made such an impression on his intellectual mentors that his professor Martin Rade made Barth editorial assistant for the most influential theological journal at the time: *Die Christliche Welt*. As Barth noted in a letter written many years later,

Everything which I saw and heard in those surroundings had such a self-evident splendor. This world, represented by so many clever and gifted people, went on its way in a manner so certain of itself, that I would have laughed at anyone who would have predicted to me at that time that my own future could lie in any other direction than in some kind of extension of the Marburger, and especially, the *Christliche Welt* theology...<sup>16</sup>

In 1911, Barth’s theological training was put to the test as he became the pastor of a tiny Reformed congregation in Safenwil, Switzerland. For the next ten years his rhythms befit those of a working preacher in a blue-collar parish. Right away Barth realized that his preaching could not remain distant from the sociopolitical struggles of his parishioners. All of Barth’s professors in Germany were liberal theologically, but conservative on social issues. In his sojourn in academia, the social democratic movement had swept through Switzerland, resulting in the widespread belief that the gospel demanded a rapprochement between the message of the

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *How Shall They Preach*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> See Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 207.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth to Johannes Rathje (Apr. 27, 1947) in Diether Koch, ed. *Karl Barth: Offene Briefe, 1945-68* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984), 120, cited in Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 38.

socialists and the gospel preached by the churches. Barth became particularly active in the trade-union movement,<sup>17</sup> and in December of 1911, Barth gave a lecture entitled “Jesus Christ and the Social Movement,” in which he drew a marked contrast between the failure of the church of the previous 1800 years to deal with social needs. He argued that true socialism was the true Christianity of his time.<sup>18</sup> It is clear from Barth’s letters and the tone set in his public lectures and sermons that the social dimension of the gospel presented his preaching with a crisis. A gospel that does not touch the real needs of the people cannot be good news, and Barth’s fervor for the socialist movement rose to such a pitch that five members of his church session resigned in protest and they threatened to remove him from his post as pastor.

A further homiletical crisis presented itself just three years into his pastoral call. In 1914, Barth was shocked to see that some of his former theology professors had signed the infamous “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three,” a proclamation endorsed by 93 prominent German scientists, scholars and artists, declaring their unequivocal support of German military actions in the early period of World War I.<sup>19</sup> In reflecting upon this event, Barth would later write:

One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counselors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19<sup>th</sup> century theology no longer held any future.<sup>20</sup>

Barth’s liberalism was already strained by the preaching task itself. The liberal theology that he had inherited could not open a viable path to gospel proclamation. In the preface to the second edition of his *Epistle to the Romans* (1922), Barth remarks,

I myself know what it means year in year out to mount the steps of the pulpit, conscious of the responsibility to understand and to interpret, and longing to fulfill it; and yet, utterly incapable, because at the University I had never been brought beyond that well-known “Awe in the presence of History” which means in the end no more than that all hope of engaging in the dignity of understanding and interpretation has been surrendered.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher,” in idem, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 263.

<sup>18</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth, *Karl Barth – Rudolph Bultmann: Letters, 1922–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 154.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth, “Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century,” in idem, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 9. Though I quote from the sixth edition of this text, the text remained the same after the second edition, which differs markedly from the first, after which Barth sensed the need for a “new edition in which the original has been so completely rewritten that no stone remains in its old place” (2). Further references to this work will be parenthetically cited as *R*.

His sermons in Safenwil bear the weight of a pastor struggling to resource his congregation for the socio-political turmoil they faced, while the “liberal” theological reservoir amassed during his education at Marburg, Tübingen, and Berlin seemed increasingly insufficient for the task. More than anything, I believe it was his dissatisfaction with his education to provide adequate theological resources for his preaching—coupled with the close, conscientious attention he paid to the biblical text for sermon preparation and teaching—that impelled Barth’s “Krisis theology.”<sup>22</sup> Barth later confessed that his theology had its roots in his ministry in Safenwil.<sup>23</sup>

For the young Karl Barth the crisis of preaching was twofold: he struggled against a theology aloof from the real world struggles of his parishioners, on the one hand, while he grappled with a theology subservient to the Chancellor rather than Jesus Christ. In a letter to his best friend and fellow pastor, Eduard Thurneysen, Barth writes, “One broods alternatively over the newspaper and the New Testament and actually sees fearfully little of the organic connection between the two worlds concerning which one should now be able to give a clear and powerful witness.”<sup>24</sup> As Barth began to question the philosophical assumptions inherent in his theology, his confidence wavered. The so-called *truths* of Christian theology he came to see as “nothing more than surface varnish” that occluded the true revelation of God to humankind.<sup>25</sup> Barth needed a better paradigm than those presented to him, and the quest for a solution to his homiletical crisis would radically alter the twentieth century.

### A Tale of Two Preachers

On the cusp of Barth’s socio-theological crisis, he came under the influence of two preachers: Friedrich Naumann and Christoph Blumhardt. A brief description of both of these men will be important in discerning the contours of Barth’s crisis and the path upon which he would later embark.

Naumann began his career as a pastor in Hamburg working in an inner-city mission church. Passionate about the rising socio-economic disparity between the working poor and their

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<sup>22</sup> See Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Briefwechsel, 1913-1921*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973), where Barth frequently comments to his fellow pastor the difficulties of the preaching task vis-à-vis his theological education. See also several recently translated sermons of Barth’s early preaching (1917–1920) published in Karl Barth and William H. Willimon, *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth: Fourteen Sermons with Commentary by William H. Willimon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). For a thorough treatment of Barth’s theology of *krisis* see Henri Bouillard, *Karl Barth: Genèse et Évolution de la Théologie Dialectique* (Paris: Aubier, 1957), 79–118. On “krisis theology” as a theological response to the Great War see Gary Dorrien, *Theology Without Weapons: The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 47–80. Nb., The degree to which Barth’s theology is a specimen of “krisis theology” is debated. In *Romans*, Barth offers a deeper critique than mere cultural response: “Wherever [people] pray and preach, wherever sacrifice is offered, wherever in the presence of God emotions are stirred and experiences occur—there, yes! Precisely there, the trespass abounds. Precisely there, the invisible truth that before God no flesh is righteous, which may perhaps have remained invisible *from Adam to Moses*, becomes visible. Precisely there, [people] encounter God; and there breaks forth the KRISIS of God, the sickness unto death” (R II, 186).

<sup>23</sup> See Karl Barth, *Letzte Zeugnisse* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1969), 19, cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Barth to Thurneysen (Nov. 11, 1918), in *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 45. Earlier in the letter, Barth writes, “Just up again after an attack of the grippe, we must now get quickly in touch in these extraordinary times. But what goes on round about us? *What* is there to say? One stands astonished, does he not, and can only state how the face of the world changes visibly: on *this* side of things. But the *other* side: the meaning and content, the actual trend of it all, the movements in the spiritual round that now take place, the doors of God that now open or close, the progress of standstill in the *eleutheria thes doxes ton teknon tou theu*? Who is there now with a comprehensive view was able to see to the very roots of world events in order to speak and act from that standpoint?”

<sup>25</sup> Barth, “Barth to Thurneysen (Sept. 4, 1914)” in *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 26.

industrial overlords (does this sound familiar?), he founded *Die Hilfe*, a weekly magazine providing support and political advocacy on behalf of the underclass. As time wore on, Naumann became convinced that a strong nation-state was a necessary condition for the possibility of seeing Jesus' vision for the poor actualized in the real world and thus he turned his attention to political life. In 1907 he was elected to the Reichstag. From 1905 to 1914 Naumann was a stentorian advocate for the German military buildup and a strong supporter of Wilhelm II. In 1914, at the threshold of WWI, Barth wrote a review on Naumann and his work in *Die Christliche Welt* in which he questioned the foundational assumptions of his former mentor. Barth wrote that the Christian is not to be tied to the powers and principalities of this world. We recognize the necessity of political compromise on behalf of justice and social progress, but we do so only in service of "something greater": "It is one thing to become accustomed to the world of relativities, finally becoming completely satisfied and...at home in them, as those who have no hope. It is another thing altogether, in the midst of this world of relativities, to be incessantly disquieted and full of longing after the better which will come, after the immediate goal of a human community of life beyond all temporal necessities."<sup>26</sup>

The other preacher who came to influence Barth during his time in the pastorate was the widely popular Pietist preacher from the Black Forest, Christoph Blumhardt. A bit more background is necessary to appreciate his influence. Christoph was the third son of Johan Blumhardt, a preacher in the village of Möttlingen, which lies on the outskirts of Stuttgart. The elder Blumhardt had a largely unimpressive ministry there; in fact his predecessor at the parish maintained that the people had been "preached to death,"<sup>27</sup> and sleeping in the church was a general practice. A turning point came in the elder Blumhardt's ministry when a twenty-four-year-old woman named Gottliebin Dittus came under his care. This woman was believed by all to be possessed by demonic powers. For two years Blumhardt wrangled in the Spirit with the powers of darkness and, during the Christmas season of 1843, the woman was miraculously cured. Blumhardt would later describe this season of his ministry as his "*Kampf*," and in particularly dramatic fashion, when the unclean spirit eventually departed it shouted, "*Jesus ist Sieger!*" (Jesus is Victor!) This became the battle cry for Blumhardt as well as his son, Christoph.

Word quickly spread about this miraculous display of spiritual power, and Blumhardt became a celebrity. People flocked to the sleepy town to receive healing. In fact, Blumhardt became so popular that after only a month the state church authorities banned healing and Blumhardt was forbidden to lay hands on any non-resident who came to the parish.<sup>28</sup> Eventually the municipal and ecclesial constraints became so restrictive that Blumhardt purchased a spa located near the town of Göppingen. The ministry complex was called Bad Boll, and its sulfur spring was originally constructed by Wilhelm I as a "Wunderbad" (wonder bath). If you've ever visited or heard of Heritage USA, the Christian theme park built and operated by Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker in the 1980s, you might have an idea of what Bad Boll was like.

The elder Blumhardt was a simple man and the notoriety was a hindrance to his lifestyle. In 1872, Johan's son, Christoph, began working in his father's ministry as a preacher and healer.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Barth, "Die Hilfe 1913," *Die Christliche Welt*, 28 (15 Aug. 1914), 776, cited in Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1905–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 109.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Zuendel, *Johann Christoph Blumhardt: Ein Lebensbild* (Basel Brunnen Verlag, 1924), 83.

<sup>28</sup> Leonhard Ragaz, *Der Kampf um das Reich Gottes in Blumhardt: Vater und Sohn—und weiter!* (Erlenbach-Zürich: Rotapfel-Verlag, 1922).

Christoph took immediately to the prestige and notoriety he had inherited. In fact, one of his commentators noted that Christoph strutted about the grounds with a “stateliness” that put him on par with the nobility who came to stay at his house as guests. His barns and park were a model of good management, and he rode around in an elegant coupe drawn by a fiery team of thoroughbreds driven by an imposing coachman.<sup>29</sup> If we adjust for time and cultural differences, the younger Blumhardt rode around in a chauffeured Bentley; imagine a carriage with gold spinners.

Sixteen years into this post-ministry empire, Christoph experienced a conversion of sorts when the last eyewitness to his father’s “Kampf” in Möttlingen died, and his preaching and healing ministry became focused on the righteousness of God. In a sermon preached in October of 1896, we see this shift in Blumhardt’s preaching that resulted in a rapid decline in his popularity. He proclaimed that the Kingdom of God cannot be reduced to Christendom or to miraculous signs of healing, but to the love of neighbor. He proclaims:

Love your neighbor! [*Liebe deinen Nächten!*] We must respect each other—the social groups, the nations, the sexes must respect one another. The husband must respect the wife, the high must respect the low, the governing must respect the governed. We will make more progress in that way than with all our Christianity. Today it serves no purpose to sit down in a pious gathering and put on a pious air. Today the call is: Get out into the world! [*hinaus in die Welt!*] Pay attention to the trumpet that is sounding in the world! That is piety [*das ist fromm!*]<sup>30</sup> (In the German text, Blumhardt includes over fifty exclamation points in this sermon!)

This conversion toward a social justice impetus informed by a radical theology of love as the centerpiece to the Kingdom of God would have a profound effect on Barth’s ministry. For Blumhardt, the social problems of his day were inextricably linked to deep Christian piety. It was this dialectic beyond subsumption that captured the young Karl Barth’s imagination. Allow me to illustrate. In a sermon preached on April 24, 1899, Blumhardt declared, “God wants to solve the social problems and that is why I am a socialist!”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in another address Blumhardt proclaims that the expressions of social democracy are commensurate with the confession that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>32</sup> In a letter sent to his friends explaining his new found orientation, Blumhardt describes the socialist movement as a sign of fire in the heavens announcing God’s judgment, and while help can come only from beyond the scope of human agency, the movement is seeking such help by “seeking the freedom of humanity by a bloodless revolution.”<sup>33</sup>

In an article published in the *Neuer Freier Aargauer*, Barth reflected on the life and influence of Naumann and Blumhardt on his own socio-theological development. In that article, Barth writes, “There is an uncomfortable moment when an upright man begins to reflect with both open eyes about religion and about life. Religion? Yes, what does religion mean and what help is it; what is the *truth* of religion when life with its ordinances and relationships, the whole

<sup>29</sup> Eberhard Zellweger, *Der jüngere Blumhardt : was verdanken wir ihm?* (Basel: H. Majer, 1945), 128–9.

<sup>30</sup> Christoph Blumhardt, *Ihr Menschen seid Gottes! : Predigten und Andachten aus den Jahren 1896 bis 1900*, vol. 3, ed. Robert Lejeune (Erlenbach-Zürich & Leipzig: Rotapfel-Verlag, 1936), 454.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 443–52.

raging course of the world as it is, so notoriously bypasses the love and righteousness of God, of which religion speaks?”<sup>34</sup>

With Nauman, Barth also wonders how it is possible that the godless social democrats understood God better than the church did. He asks, “Was it possible that the church needed to repent and turn to the God of the godless?” Barth’s frequently cited quotation about how to hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, and how the two are supposed to relate to each other, IS the crisis of preaching.<sup>35</sup>

In a letter Barth wrote in 1915, he notes that it was the need to preach each Sunday that forced him to solidify his position on the relationship between the Bible and the newspaper. He writes, “Above all, it has become increasingly clear to me that what we need is something beyond all morality and politics and ethics. These are constantly forced into compromises with reality and therefore have no saving power in themselves. This is true even of so-called Christian morality and so-called socialist politics.”<sup>36</sup>

Barth describes this time in his life between Naumann’s socialized Christianity and Blumhardt’s Christian socialism as that in which he “battered like a bumble-bee against all the closed windows.”<sup>37</sup> Barth wrote that he was “[c]onfronted by the choice between the visible and the invisible, between the possible and the impossible, with a heavy heart, but finally deliberately and resolutely, [Naumann] grasped the visible and the possible.”<sup>38</sup> Under Blumhardt’s influence, Barth came to see that God, not humanity, was the ultimate reality, the first certainty. The decision to begin with God as the starting point for social and theological engagement changed everything for Barth. The Kingdom of God had to be proclaimed as both present and future, breaking in upon contemporary life while meeting a resistance at every point in society and in the human spirit. Thus, for Barth, there could be no complacency, no rest, and no identification of it with the spiritual and cultural achievements of modernity. Life in the present had to be viewed as a time of tense liminality between the victory of Christ in his cross and resurrection and the coming victory when his sovereignty would be made complete.

The battle cry of the eschatologically invigorated social awareness was thus *warten und eilen*, wait and hasten!

In an article written just two months before the armistice agreement of the First World War, Barth wrote that Blumhardt’s work was, “the most direct and penetrating Word from God into the need of the world that the war years have produced so far.”<sup>39</sup> Blumhardt’s writing and preaching allowed Barth to “experience the echo” of the biblical texts.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Barth, “Past and Future: Friedrich Naumann and Christoph Blumhardt,” in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, vol. 1, ed. James M. Robinson, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 36.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Barth, “Interview von ‘Time’ (I),” *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 356. Or, as he put it elsewhere: “This Word concerns mankind in all times and places, the theologian in his own time and place, and the world in its occupation with the routine problems of the everyday. This Word challenges the world in which X, Y, and Z appear—with their own big words—to have the say and to determine the lot of all men and things as well as the lot of theologians. While the theologian reads the newspaper, he cannot forget that he has just read Isaiah 40 or John 1 or Romans 8. He, at any rate, cannot suppress the knowledge that the Word of God speaks not only of an infinitely deeper need but also of an infinitely higher promise than the sum total of all the needs and promises characteristic of his time and place.” Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Foley Grover (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 78.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Barth to W. Spoendlin, 4 January 1915, cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Barth, “Past and Future,” 39.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Barth, “Auf das Reich Gottes warten,” *Die freie Schweizer Arbeiter* 49 (15 September 1916).

What captivated Barth almost as much as the content of Blumhardt's work was the method of his argumentation: "Blumhardt always begins right away with God's presence, might, and purpose: he starts out from God; he does not begin by climbing upwards to Him by means of contemplation and deliberation. God is the end, and because we already know Him as the beginning, we may await His consummating acts."<sup>40</sup> Pleading, a "living waiting" on God for the world," is the "nerve center" of Blumhardt's theology.<sup>41</sup>

By 1918, the young Karl Barth had cast his lot decidedly with Blumhardt's vision for an eschatologically driven social ethic. In his famous Tambach lecture, entitled, "The Christian's Place in Society," Barth writes, "It is better for us to be conscious of our primary inadequacy than to surrender ourselves to a religious mood which, despite all our sincerity, might again veil from us the real situation."<sup>42</sup> This in no way implies a turning from the world toward some solipsistic utopia. Rather, the particular movements of God in lived reality are like a bird in flight—a snapshot or a picture of the bird does not do justice to its majestic movement. Following Blumhardt's charge to lean into the dialectical tension between waiting and hastening, Barth argues that the Christian is called to "participate" in the radical in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, which is never reducible to any social program or political policy. Our task is to enter the fray in a particular way, in the fear of the Lord. An eschatological hopefulness is, for the Christian in society, like a blanket pulled back over reality: "the living and divine element is always there; and this very committing of ourselves to God in the world is our power of not committing ourselves to the world without God."<sup>43</sup>

The true crisis of preaching arises from the etymology of the word crisis: decision. In light of the young Karl Barth's struggle to preach we see a decision that we who would bear the mantle of Christian ministry, too, must make. Our decision is not between biblical fidelity and social justice. That can never be a Christian choice. Rather, the decision we must make is to proclaim God's word such that every political ideology trembles in the wake of God's eschatological insurgence.<sup>44</sup> Will we, like Blumhardt, embrace the impossible, or like Naumann, settle for the possible? The preaching crisis itself is the crisis preaching produces in itself: the decision to proclaim "Jesus is victor," not as an end in itself, but as a catalyst for Christ-followers to live lives of radical impossibility.<sup>45</sup>

### **Conclusion: Embracing the Crisis of Preaching Politics**

While a student at Crozier Theological Seminary in 1948, the late great Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. argued that preaching ought to hold "duel processes" in creative tension. On the one hand, he contends that preaching must aim to affect the soul of individuals so that societies may be changed. On the other, he argues preaching ought to change the societies so that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Barth, "The Christian's Place in Society," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 285.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>44</sup> With gratitude, I borrow this language of insurgence from Brian K. Blount, *Invasion of the Dead: Preaching Resurrection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> See Jacob D. Myers, *Preaching Must Die! Troubling Homiletical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

the individual soul will have a change.<sup>46</sup> The young Rev. Barth and the young Rev. King would have had much to talk about.

Dr. King caught a vision and embodied a way of preaching *through* the crisis that the young Karl Barth also saw. In a Christmas sermon that Barth preached to his tiny parish in Safenwil, we find a radical hope that fuels social action. Barth proclaims that “hard and tense oppositions will not hold following the birth of the Christ child. The incarnation of God destroys a way of life in which “goodwill...never becomes act; nor [where] evil and dangerous conditions...are left as they are, with no attempt to change them; nor misery inside and outside, for which there is no redeeming word...” Following the bodily indwelling of God the “dark world” can no longer be dismissed “with a shrug of the shoulders...” When Christmas happens, Barth declares, “all that belongs to the past.”<sup>47</sup>

Several contemporary homileticians capture the all-encompassing impact of God’s radical in-breaking as the centerpiece of preaching that transcends the pulpit into the political sphere. Richard Voelz, for instance, avers, “When we proclaim a vision of the kingdom of God, we inherently proclaim a version of the public sphere that becomes entirely reordered from its present state and that offers a compelling invitation to live now into the shape of God’s future.”<sup>48</sup> Frank Thomas’s moral homiletical imagination leads preachers to preach “dangerous sermons.” Such sermons bypass the impasses between political parties. Rather, Thomas urges us to “preach the moral base of issues,” to cast a theological vision that subsumes mere politics.<sup>49</sup> These recent contributions contribute to a way of preaching politics without attempting to wriggle around the necessary crisis preaching provokes.

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Preaching Ministry,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Volume VI: Called to Serve, September 1948–March 1963*, ed. Clayborne Carson, et. al. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1992), 71–2, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Barth, “25. Dezember (Weihnacht): Lukas 2, 25–32,” in *Predigten 1918 (GA I.37)*, ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1999), 257.

<sup>48</sup> Richard W. Voelz, *Preaching to Teach: Inspire People to Think and Act* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 32.

<sup>49</sup> Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 90.

**The Personal Presence of the Preacher in Preaching:  
An Explorative Study on Self-Disclosure in Sermons at Pentecost**

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**Abstract:** *How does self-disclosure work in preaching? This study explores that question empirically, using a variety of data collection methods such as sermon analysis, focus groups, and interviews. Self-disclosure is an ambiguous concept in homiletical and theological literature, and it remains an ambiguous concept when considered from an empirical approach. Our focus is on how self-disclosure works brings to the fore three different homiletical processes: negotiating homiletical space, shaping the homiletical relationship, and performing self-disclosure. This study argues that researching implicit self-disclosure provides a better, though more complex, way of understanding the public presence of the preacher, than an analysis of the explicit use of the first pronoun “I” in preaching.*

### Introduction

In a recent study, Marinus Beute addressed the question of preacher self-image by asking, “Who am I as a preacher?”<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Hans-Christoph Piper and Hans van der Geest, explored how preachers’ personality traits influence concrete sermons.<sup>2</sup> However, the particular theoretical concept considered here is “self-disclosure.” How do preachers disclose themselves while preaching? Communication scholars have argued that no communication takes place without self-disclosure.<sup>3</sup> McClure explains self-disclosure in relation to cultural interest in authenticity, character, personality, and relationship in preaching.<sup>4</sup> References in a sermon to the preacher’s life and inner feelings (the use of “I” in the sermon) are indicators of self-disclosure.

In previous research, we discovered empirical indicators of self-disclosure. For instance, in a study on sermon reception, Pleizier found that listeners identify themselves with the sermon through the person of the preacher. The study showed that relational identification takes place when listeners recognize personal traits in the preacher, such as “being an example,” “showing perseverance,” “having a caring attitude,” or “demonstrating personal faith.”<sup>5</sup> Further, in an empirical study on preaching in Lent, Verweij discovered that self-disclosure functions as a “preaching resource” through which preachers can make the suffering of Jesus tangible.<sup>6</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> Marinus Beute, *Wie ben ik als ik preek? Bronnen en herbronning van het homiletisch zelfbeeld* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Hans van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit. The Impact of Personality in Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); Hans-Christoph Piper, *Predigtanalysen. Kommunikation und Kommunikationsstörungen in der Predigt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> F. Schulz von Thun, *Hoe bedoelt u? Een psychologische analyse van menselijke communicatie* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1982), 17–19.

<sup>4</sup> John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 122–124.

<sup>5</sup> Theo Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft: Eburon, 2010), 242–246.

<sup>6</sup> André Verweij, *Positioning Jesus’ Suffering. A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes* (Delft: Eburon, 2014), 175–193.

example, by relating the preacher's own experience of pain to the pain Jesus suffered, the preacher was able to present Jesus as standing next to us in our pain.

In this article, we build upon these earlier findings and focus upon the phenomenon of self-disclosure as it occurs in the preaching event. We ask how self-disclosure takes place by looking at real sermons and talking to preachers and listeners. How do preachers present themselves in their sermons and how do listeners respond? In this article we report from a small qualitative sample of four worship services that took place in one geographical area during the time of Pentecost. Pentecost shows how the Spirit involves human beings to make the communication of the gospel unique, embodied, and personal.

First, we provide a concise theoretical framework on the concept of self-disclosure. How does it function in current theories on communication and in homiletical literature? Next, we provide an outline of the empirical study. Then, the results of the analyses demonstrate how self-disclosure works in our sample of four Pentecost sermons. Finally, the article closes with a brief discussion and a concluding statement.

### **The Concept of “Self-Disclosure” in Homiletics**

Self-disclosure is an essential part of interpersonal communication because it represents “the cement that binds the bricks” in a relationship.<sup>7</sup> Hargie argues that without self-disclosure relational structures are inherently unstable and prone to collapse. Hence, the appropriate use of self-disclosure in communication is crucial to the development and maintenance of relationships, and this is especially true for long-term relationships.

Definitions of self-disclosure often restrict the field of study to what individuals verbally reveal about themselves. However, according to Hargie, self-disclosure includes nonverbal communication. He defines self-disclosure as “...the process whereby person A verbally and/or nonverbally communicates to person B some item of personal information that was previously unknown to B.”<sup>8</sup> Four categories of self-disclosure can be distinguished: observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs. In contrast, Tardy limits self-disclosure to verbal disclosures, although he does not require explicit markers such as the personal pronoun “I” or other self-referential language such as “my” or “mine” in order to consider something self-disclosure. He defines self-disclosure as “a verbal response unit which describes the subject in some way, tells something about the subject, or refers to some affect the subject experiences.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, Neff points to the criterium of intentionality. In his view, self-disclosure is “...the process of deliberately revealing information about oneself that is significant and that would not normally be known by others.” He adds that “the sender must communicate the information verbally” and “another person must be the intentional target.”<sup>10</sup>

In homiletical literature on self-disclosure, the personal pronoun “I” is often considered a criterion for identifying a statement as self-disclosure. For instance, Manfred Josuttis distinguishes between four uses of “I” in the pulpit: the verificational use (the experience of the preacher verifies the truth of scripture); the confessional use (the preacher is a witness of the divine promise); the biographical use (the complexity of life is demonstrated through the life of

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<sup>7</sup> Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Communication: Research, Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge 2017), 231–268.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>9</sup> Charles H. Tardy, “Self-disclosure: Objectives and Methods of Measurement,” *A Handbook for the Study of Human Communication: Methods and Instruments for Observing, Measuring, and Assessing Communication Processes*, ed. Charles H. Tardy (Norwood: Ablex, 1988), 331.

<sup>10</sup> Blake J. Neff, *A Pastor's Guide to Interpersonal Communication* (New York: Haworth, 2006), 45–46.

the preacher), and the exemplary use (the life of the preacher illustrates the message of the sermon).<sup>11</sup> Richard L. Thulin points to the ambiguity regarding the use of “I” in a sermon. On the one hand, the biographical use of “I” contributes to the authenticity and thus the authority of the preacher. On the other hand, however, the dangers of narcissism, privatism, and isolationism are never far away.<sup>12</sup> Manfred Josuttis discusses self-disclosure against the background of dialectical theology according to which an explicit presence of the preacher in preaching is considered to be suspicious. However, Josuttis argues that self-disclosure contributes to a democratic and dialogical understanding of preaching. He argues that the preacher should not be able to hide behind phrases like “God says” or “the Bible says,” and explains that through the “I” of the preacher the hearers are also entitled to an “I.”

However, self-disclosure takes place even without the explicit use of personal pronouns. In his study on the concept of “ethos” in preaching, Resner emphasizes that preachers cannot avoid self-expression in the pulpit.<sup>13</sup> Preachers make statements about themselves all the time by their choice of scriptural texts and illustrative stories, as well as by their personal appearance in the preaching event. Further, Lapsley states that “...the personality of the preacher will have an impact on the congregation, even though she or he, consciously or unconsciously, attempts to suppress it, or the effort of suppressing it will itself have impact upon it. Body language, inflection, tone, pitch, cadence all give it away.”<sup>14</sup> According to Lee Ramsey Jr., self-disclosure consists of “...those elements within the sermon style and substance that disclose the personhood of the preacher...for the purpose of elucidating the gospel.”<sup>15</sup>

Many of these insights from homiletical theory have been confirmed by empirical research. In their “Listening to Listeners” project, Mulligan and Allen found that hearers “...are engaged by sermons in which preachers refer to their own questions, struggles, insights, and joys...and reflect theologically on the meaning of their own experience as a lens through which to help the congregation encounter the gospel.”<sup>16</sup> Interviewees suggested that preachers should share their own vulnerability with the congregation, and Mulligan and Allen thus conclude that employing self-disclosure can help preachers to deliver more engaging sermons.

## Methodology

Preachers and listeners may reflect differently on the advantages and disadvantages of self-disclosure in preaching. This study does not start from a normative theological position, but rather proceeds from an open, descriptive research question: how does self-disclosure work in actual sermons?

However, the idea of the “actual sermon” is rather ambiguous. There are at least three different understandings of the actual sermon. First, the sermon as prepared by the preacher (in

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Josuttis, “Der Prediger in der Predigt. Sündiger Mensch oder mündiger Zeuge?” *Praxis des Evangeliums zwischen Politik und Religion. Grundprobleme der Praktischen Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1988), 91–94. Josuttis also mentions the representative and fictitious uses of “I,” but they do not concern self-disclosure on the part of the preacher.

<sup>12</sup> Richard L. Thulin, *The “I” of the Sermon. Autobiography in the Pulpit* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> André Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 160.

<sup>14</sup> James N. Lapsley, “Personality,” *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon, Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 372.

<sup>15</sup> G. Lee Ramsey Jr., “Self-disclosure,” *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 133.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Alice Mulligan, Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive. Lessons from Laity* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 25–33.

many instances the “product” or manuscript) is a source for studying the prepared sermon. Second, we can consider the situation of performance or the “preached sermon.” Yet, sources for the actual preached sermon are in themselves rather complex. For instance, visual recordings provide different access to the preaching event than transcripts of the spoken text. Finally, we can consider the “received” sermon. However, the received sermon as such does not exist. Wilfried Engemann coined the idea of “auredit,” the sermon that is “heard with the ear,” which is analogous to “manuscript,” meaning “written by hand.”<sup>17</sup> There are as many “auredits” as there are hearers. Based upon these distinctions, the self-disclosure of the preacher has three different aspects: the construction of the preacher’s “self” in the production of the sermon (the phase of preparation, resulting in a manuscript), the performance of the “self” in the actual preaching moment (the preached sermon, resulting in a transcript of the audio recording), and the reception of the preacher’s “self” (the heard sermon, resulting in an “auredit”).

In this study we collected material on each of the processes of production, performance, and reception. Interviews with preachers and examining sermon manuscripts provide two different entrances into the process of *producing* the sermon, transcripts of the actual preached sermon enable study of the *performance* of the sermon, and focus groups or interviews with listeners were used to reconstruct the process of *reception*.

We collected four sermons preached in local parishes of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands on Pentecost Sunday, May 20, 2018. The parishes are in large villages in the geographical area between Rotterdam and The Hague. Sermon A was preached by pastor “Carol,” Sermon B by pastor “Jack,” Sermon C by pastor “Harry,” and Sermon D by pastor “Arthur.”<sup>18</sup> Interviews were held with all four pastors. In addition, four members of Carol’s church were interviewed, two members of Jack’s church, three members of Harry’s church, and one member of Arthur’s church. The results of the sermon analysis and the interviews were compared separately for each pastor. Next, we compared the individual analyses. In three cases (pastors Carol, Jack, and Arthur) a manuscript of the sermon was available. However, pastor Harry does not use a manuscript, and so in his case only a transcript was available (made from the audio recording).

In order to analyze the data, coding procedures based upon grounded theory were used.<sup>19</sup> Coding in grounded theory aims to formulate new concepts. Therefore, the results of the analysis are a conceptualization of how self-disclosure in preaching works. The resulting concepts aim to contribute to homiletical theory. The following sections present three different aspects of self-disclosure that emerged during the process of coding. First, self-disclosure negotiates the homiletical space in both a challenging and an invitational way. Second, self-disclosure contributes to shaping the homiletical relationship during the preaching event. Finally, self-disclosure is a performative act. Preachers may use explicit self-disclosure in their sermon manuscripts, but in the end self-disclosure takes place during the actual performance. Together, these three aspects provide a preliminary answer to the question of how preacher self-disclosure takes place for both preachers and listeners in the preaching event.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilfried Engemann, *Homiletics: Principles and Patterns of Reasoning* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 10–13.

<sup>18</sup> The names are fictitious.

<sup>19</sup> Judith A. Holton, “The Coding Process and Its Challenges,” *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. Kathy Charmaz, Antony Bryant (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 265–289.

## Negotiating Homiletical Space

The preaching event creates a “homiletical space” in which the preacher and listeners can meet.<sup>20</sup> Preachers negotiate the homiletical space by using self-disclosure. When negotiating the homiletical space, they can use two different strategies: they can *challenge* the homiletical space by bringing in their own opinions and struggles, or they can *invite* listeners into the homiletical space through everyday life experiences.

### *Challenging the Homiletical Space Through the Preacher’s Opinions and Struggles*

Pastor Jack tells two personal stories at the beginning of his sermon. He starts with a story about a visit to the dentist. In the waiting room he picks up a magazine and reads an article about Pentecost. He is disappointed by the simplified way in which the story is told as the apostles receive flames on their heads and begin to speak foreign languages:

This is not what actually happened. The Bible isn’t a book of magic, where things happen that cannot happen. [...] The story of Pentecost isn’t some sort of spectacle.<sup>21</sup>

Parallel to the waiting room story, Jack tells a second story about his daughter. She is preparing to take a language exam and has to work hard for it:

Pentecost doesn’t mean you don’t have to learn anymore...the Spirit doesn’t take over our brains so that we can do things we normally can’t do. [...] Pentecost is about one language people are speaking, one fire that is burning.<sup>22</sup>

From here, pastor Jack further explains what the story of Pentecost means. He does this in a challenging way. The hearers are invited to enter a “Pentecost discussion” with two options: they can either agree with the preacher or leave the homiletical space. In this negotiation, there is little room for compromise. Jack’s view on Pentecost is one the hearers must “take or leave.” In the interview with hearers Winston and Josh, it is clear that they do not agree with the pastor’s interpretation of Pentecost. They claim room for their own views:

Winston: I’m sorry, but this is not the way I read the Bible. It hurts me when I hear this [...] we have to accept what is written.

Josh: It’s quite something for him to say: I am the preacher and I will tell you what this all means.<sup>23</sup>

Hearers Winston and Josh do not feel engaged by Jack’s stories. Here, self-disclosure does not bring them closer into the space of the sermon:

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<sup>20</sup> Compare Gaarden’s and Lorensen’s remarks about a “room, where the churchgoers...create new meaning and understanding. It is not a room that the listener or preacher can control or occupy, but a room in which both engage.” Marianne Gaarden, Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, “Listeners as Authors in Preaching: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives,” *Homiletic* 38 (2013): 28.

<sup>21</sup> Sermon B.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with hearers of pastor Jack, November 29, 2018. Names are fictitious.

Josh: I'm not really interested in the stories about the dentist and the exams of his daughter.

Winston: I found that part of the sermon rather vague...I didn't understand his intentions.<sup>24</sup>

Later, both listeners point out that they know pastor Jack quite well. Despite their differing opinions they find him an amiable, talented person. A clear distinction comes to light between how they honor Jack as a person but disagree with him about how the Bible should be interpreted.

What is happening in this “negotiation”? Jack enters the space of the sermon with two personal accounts in order to confront a traditional explanation of Pentecost. Listeners Winston and Josh sense that the preacher is making a theological point they do not agree with. For them, this makes his sermon less interesting. They break off the negotiation, and retreat from the homiletical space. From an “ethos” setting, they appreciate Jack as an admirable person with whom they also engage in congregational and village life. However, from a “logos” setting, they disagree with Jack on how to understand the Christian faith.<sup>25</sup> Which setting has more weight? Winston and Josh do not tolerate the pastor's opinions just because he is a respectable person. Their disapproval of Jack putting forward personal views increases the pressure on their feelings toward the pastor. The “logos” disagreement overshadows their “ethos” admiration. Thus, it seems that taking up self-disclosure in ways hearers do not find inviting decreases tolerance, not only of *what* is being said but also of *who* says it.

Pastor Harry also uses self-disclosure in a pronounced way. In the opening part of his sermon he tells about his struggles with the reading from Colossians 3:12–15. A popular Dutch translation says, “You must do good things.” Harry struggles to accept that he *must* do something, because the Christian message is about *accepting* the gifts of God. In another translation he reads about the clothes God *gives* his children. Here the idea of being “impelled” to do something is left out:

A burden fell from my heart [...] a whole new meaning appears. What we “must” do is given to us.<sup>26</sup>

A large part of the sermon consists of Harry's self-disclosure. The pastor's thoughts and questions are very present in the homiletical space. When asked about this, Harry says he has “received a call” to lead the congregation into the salvific world of the Bible. His struggles are intended to create an “opening” through which hearers can find a similar route:

I take the hearers by the hand on an experimental journey. [...] I am the one who has the privilege to take them along.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Empirical studies point out how hearers listen to sermons on different settings: “ethos,” the perception of the character of the preacher; “logos,” the perception of the ideas of the sermon; “pathos,” the perception of the feelings stirred by the sermon. Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship—Content—Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 1–17; Gerrit Immink, *Over God gesproken. Preken in theorie en praktijk* (Utrecht: Boekencentrum, 2018), 130–134.

<sup>26</sup> Sermon C.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with pastor Harry, July 24, 2018.

Hearer “Jean” says she feels inspired by how pastor Harry relates his struggles to the Bible. This is a crucial element of her “negotiation.” If self-disclosure is not related to the Bible, there is no use for it. However, in this case she gladly accepts the invitation:

He takes me along in the thoughts he presents, he shows me something of himself all along, the steps he takes. [...] I enjoy this...it really comes across.<sup>28</sup>

Hearer “Ann” is also engaged by Harry’s self-disclosure, although she is not interested in the pastor’s arguments. For her, it is important to hear about his relationship with God. This gives the sermon a “ring of authenticity” and proves the pastor is a person who loves God. Ann reveals her “negotiating stand”:

I hear he has a relationship with God, a love for God. For me, this is important...it gives the sermon a positive note.<sup>29</sup>

Both Jean and Ann feel invited to step into the homiletical space and encounter what is being said. They do not feel pushed away, but rather beckoned in. This illustrates Wilfried Engemann’s remark about how the congregation “...is enabled to compare the preacher’s testimony with their own experiences—of which they may only come aware through his testimony.”<sup>30</sup> The testimony of the preacher stimulates participation in the sermon. In this case, taking room creates room.

However, hearer “Lucy” finds it hard to identify with the self-disclosure. Why is Harry’s “struggle” so important? It takes time for her to find out what the problem is and what is at stake. Her negotiation with the pastor stumbles:

What is his line of thought? I don’t get it. I’m puzzled. Sometimes, when I think about it and understand it, then it’s OK, but it takes time.<sup>31</sup>

The pastor’s struggles do not “work” for Lucy as they do for Jean and Ann. The “I” of the preacher becomes an obstacle to entering the homiletical space and connecting to the message of the sermon. The room that pastor Harry takes leads to less room for herself. Thus, self-disclosure can also hinder the invitation to become part of the sermon.

The strategy of challenging the listeners puts the burden on the listener. The listener may get lost in the mutual use of homiletical space. A dominant preacher voice that puts the preacher’s experiences and opinions out in the open can easily put off listeners. Using personal experiences and including professional opinions in the sermon may help the preacher to illustrate certain truths in the gospel more clearly. However, it decreases the space available for the listener to become part of the sermon and to enter into the sermon, to think along with the sermon, or even to arrive at a contextual understanding or personal appropriation of the gospel.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with hearers of pastor Harry, October 4, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with hearers of pastor Harry.

*Inviting into the Homiletical Space Through Everyday Life Experiences*

While preaching, pastors may *challenge* the listeners to take part in the homiletical space. However, another strategy becomes evident when examining the use of self-disclosure by two other pastors: Carol and Arthur provide examples of a more *invitational* strategy.

Pastor Carol is uneasy about taking up too much room for herself. She is reluctant to make the preacher the center of attention, because this may exclude the listeners. However, *too little* self-disclosure may also exclude the listeners:

I notice people appreciate it when experiences they recognize are spoken about...when I say: this reminds me of something and I tell them a personal story.<sup>32</sup>

The moments when Carol does become personal are noticed by her hearers. They say it makes the sermon come closer; especially through *everyday life* examples. Carol creates a “balance”: (a) she uses a limited amount of personal space, leaving enough space to allow hearers to find room for themselves; (b) she combines a limited use of self-disclosure with a restriction to common, everyday life experiences. This “balancing” smooths the negotiation between hearers and the preacher. According to hearer “Mary,” Carol’s stories make the sermon more accessible. Lofty themes are connected to “normal life”:

Sometimes she tells us about her children. [...] I think she does this on purpose, to make things a bit more human [...] it works like a little bridge to normal life.<sup>33</sup>

Carol attempts to “bridge the gap” between the sermon and the world of the hearers. Her self-disclosure is an opportunity for hearers to enter the space of the sermon *from where they are*. They use the “little bridge” offered to them. In her sermon, Carol refers to a popular Dutch singer:

I was thinking about a song André Hazes sung, about a little boy. The boy is warned by his father about the grownup world. [...] It really touched me, how the childlike innocence of that boy is broken to prepare him for this harsh reality.<sup>34</sup>

Carol says that many people were speaking about the song during coffee after the service: “I liked that, because it shows they were touched by the song’s themes.”<sup>35</sup> The way the song touched Carol paves the way for the hearers to be touched themselves.

Pastor Arthur is also reluctant to take up too much room for himself in his sermons, although his congregation does appreciate such personal moments. Hearer “Justin” says he remembers a sermon in which Arthur became rather emotional:

He told us how he fails to remain close to God and have quiet time with the Lord. There are so many things I have to do, he said, bring the children to school, pick them up again [...] On moments like these, he preaches for himself, he was really frank.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with pastor Carol, September 13, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with hearers of pastor Carol, February 1, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Sermon A.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with pastor Carol.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with hearer of pastor Arthur, November 15, 2018.

Justin speaks positively about Arthur's sermons. What makes them engaging is how he relates the Bible to what people experience in daily life:

At Pentecost he brought a hair dryer into the pulpit, with a piece of paper, to show how the wind works. [...] I remember things like that [...] it brings the sermon closer, especially when he speaks about being a father for his children.<sup>37</sup>

In the interview, Arthur explains why he is hesitant about saying personal things. It is mainly due to the presence of his wife and children in church:

I wouldn't want my father to talk about me in church. That's why my stories are personal but in an indirect way [...] people will recognize the personal elements anyhow, for example when I talk about being a father.<sup>38</sup>

The hearers of Carol and Arthur point out that *reluctant* use of self-disclosure increases the involvement of the listeners.<sup>39</sup> It eases their "negotiation" and brings them closer to what the preacher aims to say. This is especially the case when self-disclosure relates to "daily life frailty," such as "things that occur in the family," "being a father or a mother," or "moments of personal weakness." Instead of putting forward theological viewpoints, Carol and Arthur use self-disclosure to *create a bond* between preacher and hearers. They thus echo Richard L. Thulin's remark about how the "I" of the sermon should aim to "envision friendship and companionship within the church community."<sup>40</sup>

Here it becomes clear that self-disclosure is not evaluated in terms of *how much* self-disclosure takes place, but rather by *how it is being used* by preachers. Carol and Arthur speak about everyday life to share common experiences; Jack uses personal stories to take a stand concerning Pentecost; Harry refers to his struggles in order to share an experience of the Bible with his hearers. The responses above show that self-disclosure can both challenge and invite listeners to become part of the homiletical space. It appears that the strategy of inviting listeners, by the preacher referring to common human experiences, facilitates listeners negotiating their own positions in the homiletical space.

### Shaping the Homiletical Relationship

Harry presents himself as a "guide" who leads his hearers; Jack "teaches" a new understanding of Pentecost; Arthur "shares" aspects of his spiritual life; Carol "draws near" to hearers in their everyday lives. While the self-disclosure of Harry and Jack moves in an *outward* direction toward the worlds of Bible and theology, the self-disclosure of Carol and Arthur focuses on *where hearers are now*: their life and faith experiences. In the "guide" and "teacher" images, Harry and Jack present themselves as "experts" who know what they are talking about. In contrast, Carol and Arthur reveal vulnerability and solidarity. Their self-disclosure touches hearers more directly and brings preacher and congregation together through shared life-experiences. Overall, it is clear that self-disclosure *shapes the homiletical relationship between*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with pastor Arthur, July 19, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> For involvement in the preaching event, see Pleizier, *Religious Involvement*, 185–187.

<sup>40</sup> Thulin, *The "I" of the Sermon*, 24.

*preacher and listeners.* Our study presents two different relationships: the pastor as a theological expert and the pastor as a fellow believer.

*The Pastor as a Theological Expert: Guiding and Teaching*

In his interview, pastor Harry says he always hopes an existential experience will enlighten him during his sermon preparation:

I don't always have such moments of inspiration. But when Pentecost comes, this is more important than ever, because now we are celebrating the Holy Spirit, and I am the one who stands before them.<sup>41</sup>

Harry says there is a relationship between the illumination of the preacher and the illumination of the hearers. The first leads to the second, according to Harry. It paves the way for the congregation to experience what the Bible intends. Harry thus takes up the role of a "guide" whom people can trust, and this shapes his relationship with the congregation. A guide knows where people are going and is an "expert" in his field. The preacher-guide takes up an exclusive position in which he stands as a "mediator" between the Bible and the hearers. Harry says, "It is not enough when I hand my hearers the articles of faith and all the other things the church believes in."<sup>42</sup> He believes that what really matters is attaining a living experience of the Bible, and he considers the preacher to be the linking piece that mediates this experience. Focusing on his mission as a preacher, Harry is aware of how important self-disclosure is to achieving this mission. Taking up the role of an "experiential guide" shapes his relationship with the hearers. For Harry, this approach is rooted in his theology of Pentecost and the way the Spirit works.

Pastor Jack also leads his hearers into an understanding of the Bible, although the way he realizes this differs from Harry. Jack creates a "classroom" setting. He takes up the role of a "teacher" who presents a theological view of Pentecost and challenges his "pupils" to learn and internalize this view. This "teacher-pupil" role-taking shapes the relationship between preacher and hearers:

I try to take make clear to the congregation a new understanding of the Bible. It's not easy to read the Bible in a new way [...] it is a long process. It's hard, because your mind, your thinking has to change.<sup>43</sup>

The pastor has been through this process himself: "It's been hard for me too." Jack's focus is on sharing insights and know-how *he has discovered for himself*. While Harry's mission focuses on "emotional" responses (guiding the hearers into a faith experience), Jack's teaching has a more "rational" aim: to persuade the hearers of a more literary understanding of the biblical stories.

However, Jack is not very optimistic about the results of his teaching. In his sermon, he spontaneously says, "It's about time we start learning this." In the interview, he reflects on this remark:

I've been a minister here for thirteen years. I've preached many Pentecost sermons. In every one of them I teach the congregation what this story is about [...] although I doubt

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with pastor Harry.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with pastor Jack.

whether the congregation understands it. But I'm convinced this is what I must tell them.<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning of the sermon, when Jack talks about the magazine in which the Pentecost story is shared, he feels that he must correct the story's flaws. His self-disclosure is an introduction to his own teaching about Pentecost. The traditional reading is challenged by a personally achieved "know-how" which he presents to the hearers. Jack sums up his position as follows:

This is something you will find in all my sermons, I am a teacher, not just a pastor...<sup>45</sup>

Jack's self-disclosure is part of his teaching project. Whether they appreciate it or not, the hearers are placed into a "pupil role," and they must listen to this teaching time and again. Since the teaching is independent of the hearers' appropriation, the "teacher-pupil" relationship remains a one-sided affair. Jack's sermon is more of a monologue than a dialogue. Although multiple hearer responses are known to the preacher, they do not become part of an "educative exchange."

Compared to Harry's role as "guide," Jack's *educative drive* has a more confrontational edge: "This is what I must tell them." While Harry assumes hearers will follow his struggling path into the world of the Bible, Jack is less optimistic about whether hearers apprehend his teaching. His interpretation of the Pentecost story remains distant to them even after years of preaching. His approach to teaching is reminiscent of the biblical idea of remembrance. Just as Pentecost is about remembering God's law, so preaching reminds us of God's acts through Scripture.

#### *The Pastor as Fellow Believer: Sharing Everyday Life and Faith*

Pastor Carol begins many of her sermons with "life incidents" she has experienced herself. Such introductions create an environment of "sharing" in the relationship with the congregation. Preparing for her Pentecost sermon, she recalls a conversation she heard on the radio:

With Pentecost coming up, I listened to a conversation on the radio with a minister in Amsterdam. I thought: how can I use this to talk about how Pentecost touches us today?<sup>46</sup>

Engaging with this conversation is Carol's way of entering the world of everyday life. It is notable that Carol does not feature as the "main character" during her sermon introduction. Rather, she is present as someone who listens and then shares what she has heard with the congregation. She takes up the role of *observer* and invites hearers to observe with her. This shapes their homiletical relationship.<sup>47</sup>

Later on, Carol does become the primary subject of her sermon when she talks about how she was moved by a popular Dutch singer's song: "The song really touched me." However, there

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Compare Long's remarks on the distinction between "personal experiences in which we are the primary subject and those in which we are the observer." Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 250–251.

too she moves on to “observe” the message of the song, pondering what the message could be. She thus becomes a “hearer” herself as she appears to sit next to the other hearers in the pew, on the lookout for the meaning of Pentecost in everyday life.

The song by André Hazes refers to the grownup “struggle for life,” which brings to a halt all “playing around,” typical of children. This is the real-life world Carol connects to. It shapes her relationship with her hearers into one of solidarity. Life itself, with its own excitement and questions, is in focus. Her self-disclosure does not aim to put forward specific theological viewpoints or biblical interpretations as in the guiding or teaching modes of self-disclosure. Rather, she creates a communion of shared life-experiences between herself and her hearers, and together they move toward a deeper level of engaging with life.

Pastor Arthur says he hesitates when it comes to sharing personal stories. He does not enjoy standing in the sermonic spotlight. Rather, he finds it embarrassing for his wife and children, who are also sitting in church. However, at times he does share personal stories, particularly now that he is a father of young children:

I don't often tell things about myself [...] but it's all right if you experience something that is related to the message of the sermon. [...] I sometimes say things about being a father of young children.<sup>48</sup>

Arthur utilizes a more “indirect” way of referring to himself. He mentions being a father in his sermon when he says:

If you have children, you will do anything to protect them... Nobody else may touch them. Because they are your children, you love them, that's how the heavenly Father loves you...<sup>49</sup>

When Arthur says, “If you have children,” he is convinced that most of his hearers know that he is also talking about himself. He is the pastor of a small congregation in which people know each other, and they know the pastor:

Having children...has changed my life, and here I say something about that in an indirect way.<sup>50</sup>

When Arthur compares how fathers love their children to how God loves his children, he is certain that hearers will recognize that he is also *speaking about himself*. Arthur is keen to share the common experience of fatherhood, although he knows it can be overshadowed by pain and grief. This *indirect sharing* shapes the homiletical relationship with the congregation.

In the hearer interview, Justin says people appreciate Arthur's personal stories, because they get to know their pastor's own faith-questions through them:

I remember...what Arthur said about his failing to take time for God in prayer [...] this was really emotional [...] and what he said about a faith-issue: I am not sure of this, he

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with pastor Arthur.

<sup>49</sup> Sermon D.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with pastor Arthur.

said, I doubt about this too. This is what our community appreciates. Things aren't always easy.<sup>51</sup>

Arthur's self-disclosure is similar to the way Carol creates forms of solidarity between pastor and hearers. He knows what being a father is like, he too has faith questions he cannot answer, and he also "fails" in his spiritual life. What characterizes Arthur's shaping of the homiletical relationship is that it not only reveals solidarity in everyday life, but also in a shared *life of faith*, such as practicing prayer and quiet time.

### **Performing Self-Disclosure in Preaching**

The Pentecost sermons reveal moments of self-disclosure. The pastors say "I" and they bring in a range of personal experiences with different goals and outcomes. They also speak about themselves *in the interviews*. They talk about sermon preparation, the mood they are in, the pitfalls they face in the pulpit, aspects of congregational life, how they view their hearers, why they preach the way they do, and aspects of personal biography. In their reflections on preaching, they add another dimension to self-disclosure in preaching: self-disclosure takes place in the actual performance; preachers perform self-disclosure. This section explains how *performing self-disclosure* in preaching emerges from the conversations with the preachers. Data from the interviews shed light on the more opaque, *implicit "I"* in the sermons.

#### *Becoming Personal: Toning Down Proclamation and Accelerating into an Experiential Style*

During the interview, pastor Carol is asked about the differences between the manuscript and the transcript of her Pentecost sermon. In fact, Carol discovers these differences for the first time during the interview. In the manuscript, she speaks about Pentecost in a "declarative" way:

This is the meaning of Pentecost today [...] it is a movement from God, who brings us in motion once again. Pentecost is a gift from God, his Spirit is handed out to us today.<sup>52</sup>

Spoken from the pulpit, the same passage, has a less declarative tone:

Maybe this touches the meaning of Pentecost today [...] I think it is a movement coming from God, who moves us. [...] Perhaps we can experience Pentecost as a gift from God.<sup>53</sup>

This is not only the case here; Carol uses a hesitant tone of voice on nine other occasions in her sermon performance. She uses phrases like: "I think," "perhaps," "maybe," and "we could." They are "added" by Carol to the manuscript, as if she is gearing down her proclamation during sermon performance. There is a difference in communication style between manuscript and transcript. The manuscript has a "herald" tone of voice, while the transcript reveals a "pastoral" voice.<sup>54</sup> Where does this come from?

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with hearer Justin.

<sup>52</sup> Manuscript sermon A.

<sup>53</sup> Transcript sermon A.

<sup>54</sup> Compare the first two images of the preacher, discussed by Long: the herald image emphasizes the connection between preaching and the direct address of God, while the pastor image focuses on the impact of the sermon on the hearer. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 19–39.

I don't do this on purpose. It just happens, because when I stand in the pulpit, with the people in front of me, I am still working on the sermon. [...] I think about what I say and proclaim it one more time. That leads me to saying "I" so often.<sup>55</sup>

With the hearers sitting in front of her, and while "thinking through" what she is proclaiming, Carol tends toward a more "pastoral" communication. She downplays her "herald" voice by adding "phrases of probability." The presence of the hearers has an impact on the performance of her message. Her communication style is adapted in order to connect to the hearers and make the sermon's message more accessible to them. While her "declarative" heart beats during sermon preparation, the moment she stands in the pulpit she feels, unconsciously, as though she has to hand out her message in a pastoral way, as a "proposal" to be considered, rather than a proclamation they must "take or leave."

The hearers of pastor Jack are critical of his interpretation of the Pentecost story. They feel that the "wonder of the Gospel" disappears due to his alleged rationalistic reading of the Bible text. However, there is one moment when listener Winston says he was positively moved by what the preacher said:

I was touched by the way he spoke about the Song of Songs, I really appreciated that part of the sermon.<sup>56</sup>

This is a rare moment, because in the rest of the interview Winston repeats that, although he appreciates Jack as a person, he does not agree with the preacher's theological views. However, in this instance he is "touched" by the preacher's words about the Song of Songs. In the interview, pastor Jack is asked why he refers to the Song of Songs:

The Song of Songs is special to me. When my wife and I got married, the minister read from the Song of Songs during the wedding service. We asked him to do this. [...] The Song of Songs really spoke to us that day.<sup>57</sup>

At other times Jack presents himself as a teacher, who instructs the congregation about how to understand Pentecost. However, when he refers to the Song of Songs at the end of the sermon a *new performance* emerges. "The beauty of love" receives center stage:

There is only one book in the Bible where we read this in full, and that is the Song of Songs, that beautiful song about love between two people [...] that feeling and longing, intimacy and passion. That's the feeling of Pentecost.<sup>58</sup>

The biographical elements in the interview clarify the sudden "pathos" setting of Jack's sermon performance: his rationalism is toned down and accelerates into a certain mystical-experiential style. The Song of Songs is bound to Jack's marriage, and it brings back memories. He speaks about this in lyrical terms. Without the knowledge from the interview, this background does not come to light. The interview with pastor Jack reveals that there is an opaque, *implicit* self-

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with pastor Carol.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with hearers of pastor Jack.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with pastor Jack.

<sup>58</sup> Sermon B.

disclosure at work during the performance, and this results in hearer Winston—and probably other hearers, too—being *moved by this passage*. This is true even if they do not agree with other parts of the sermon and even if they do not know the relevant biographical background of the preacher. The hidden biographical element inspires Jack to perform in a different mode and this makes it possible for him to build bridges to “critical” hearers.

*Performing the Self: the Biographical and the Constructed Self*

In Arthur’s interview he speaks about his background with the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, an experiential-orthodox church in the Netherlands. This is the church he grew up in and it has both a very different spiritual climate and even holds to different beliefs than the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, where he now serves as a pastor. Arthur says he is disappointed by the congregations in the area, including his own congregation. Many members of his community believe in God, but only in a practical way. The experience of faith in God, the longing for a personal relationship with God, is neglected:

Many people I meet just want to live a good life. Experiencing faith in an inner kind of way they find difficult. But it is important. I miss it. That’s why I finish with a personal appeal and ask, well congregation, how is your spiritual life?<sup>59</sup>

What Arthur says in the interview is confirmed by the final part of his sermon:

I hope you experience something of the work of the Spirit in your life. If you do not feel this way, pray for it. The Spirit wants to give you this security in your heart. I hope you recognize this, that you feel it, that you notice it.<sup>60</sup>

Arthur’s emotional “appeal to the listeners” in his performance comes from his spiritual roots. In his youth, nearly all sermons ended this way, and Arthur continues this practice in his own church. Here too, an *implicit* self-disclosure comes to light. Arthur’s biography, as referred to in the interview, clarifies why he ends his sermons the way he does.

In the interview with pastor Harry, he is asked why he begins his sermon by sharing about his struggles with the Bible text:

I have to serve the communication process in innovative ways. I am staging my own play. That’s why I make a caricature of myself. I exaggerate. This is not who I really am. I’m a clown. I take this freedom and use it, I behave a bit crazy, to connect with the people.<sup>61</sup>

Harry chooses a form of *self-caricature* in his performance. He does this “to serve the communication process.” His aim is to reach the hearers in the present day, and this is not easy. Therefore, he does not only present himself as a personal “guide” who leads hearers to an experience of the Bible. Rather, Harry is convinced that he has to take a further step and construct a caricature. He thus “exaggerates” his performance in order to reach his hearers. “Being himself” and “showing vulnerability” is not enough. The preacher climbs the stage to

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with pastor Arthur.

<sup>60</sup> Sermon D.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with pastor Harry.

perform in the role of a “clown,” a “caricature figure” who inflates the struggles and joys he presents in his sermon.

The interview sheds light on why Harry starts off his sermon the way he does. His struggles with the Bible text are “exaggerated” on purpose. Harry is convinced a “caricature communication style” is needed in contemporary culture. However, as hearer Lucy implies in her interview, such exaggeration also puts people off. She is not moved by “clown-like” performances. Authentic, down to earth performances speak to Lucy—and other hearers with her—in more helpful ways. Here some critical feedback emerges regarding constructing the self in the actual performance. The thoughts preachers have about themselves are always revealed explicitly, but also in more opaque, implicit ways, in sermon performance. The interviews with the hearers of the Pentecost sermons demonstrate that feedback on this performance could help preachers think through and adapt pulpit practices in order to connect with their congregations in more meaningful ways.

## Discussion

In empirical homiletics, the topic of self-disclosure has generally appeared as a by-product. Studies on sermon reception describe self-disclosure in relation to connecting with the listener.<sup>62</sup> In sermon analysis, self-disclosure appears as a source of sermon material.<sup>63</sup> However, in this article we focus on self-disclosure in the act of homiletical communication. Since the “self of the preacher” in homiletical communication is a complex phenomenon, this empirical study helps to unravel a few methodical complexities. In this study we combined multiple sources: focus groups with hearers, interviews with preachers, and the comparison of the manuscript of the sermon with the sermon’s transcript. During the project, particularly through conversations with hearers and the study of the actual transcript via audio files, we discovered that nonverbal communication between preacher and listener is an important source of self-disclosure. Wilfried Engemann warns that “. . .[r]educing the communication of the gospel to the spoken parts. . . creates an artificial tension between message and ritual and is uncalled for as it disregards the “bigger picture” and the processual character of the service as a whole.”<sup>64</sup> Research into nonverbal communication requires different methods of data collection and analysis. It thus strengthens the importance of empirical research in homiletics and the collection of multiple types of data. According to Engemann, preachers “. . .*always* speak as subjects, as individuals with particular personality structures.”<sup>65</sup> Our study aptly confirms this statement because it demonstrates that each preacher has a personal style of communication, reflects on it in relation to his or her (religious) biography and spirituality, and, in evaluating the sermon, listeners accept and take into account the preacher’s personality. We also found that nonverbal communication has roles that can only be studied through verbalizing the preaching experience, such as by interviews.

Engemann considers the personal in preaching from a normative point of view: a personal sermon requires self-perception as a basis for congruence, individuality as a basis for originality, and reference to experience as a basis of authenticity. Our research partly confirms and partly challenges these normative aspects. In the performance of self-disclosure, the listeners react to the exaggerated self of the preacher. Both congruence and authenticity are at stake when

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<sup>62</sup> Mulligan, Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive*, 25–33; Pleizier, *Religious Involvement*, 242–246.

<sup>63</sup> Verweij, *Positioning Jesus’ Suffering*, 175–193.

<sup>64</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 321.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

the preacher constructs a self-caricature. However, the caricature also touches on the public role that the preacher performs in the act of preaching. It points to the phenomenon that, in a public performance, certain personality traits become “bigger” or “smaller.” Furthermore, self-disclosure in preaching shapes the “homiletic relationship” between preacher and congregation. The congregation gets to know the preacher through preaching, and this generates a particular “personal” knowledge. The “homiletic relationship” is necessarily a relationship between one person (the preacher) and a group (the congregation). Preachers are aware of this special homiletic relationship, particularly when it comes to the presence of family (e.g., spouse and/or children) in the worship service. This is also the case for members of the congregation who meet the preacher for pastoral counselling. Therefore, the homiletic relationship remains a public relationship.

Sermon reception is often studied from an interpretative or constructivist perspective: listeners craft meaning or they construct interpretations. However, one of the findings in our study challenges this to some extent. In the space of the sermon, meanings are negotiated, rather than just constructed. Listeners engage with the meanings that the preacher puts forward in a creative and sometimes even challenging manner. In negotiating the homiletical space, preachers and listeners exchange religious values, understandings, and references. The study of self-disclosure highlights a significant pattern in homiletical communication. Around the person of the preacher, religious insights are shaped, maintained, discussed, and perhaps even transformed. Empirical research thus helps to strengthen the broader interpretative and constructionist frameworks. It provides a level of detail to the homiletic communication that is lost if scholarly reflection does not move beyond larger theoretical (or philosophical) frameworks.

## **Conclusions**

Through self-disclosure, listeners and preachers negotiate the homiletical space. When communicated in the sermon, personal stories and the opinions of the preacher provide a space for the listener to reflect on everyday life experiences, and challenge the space that is actually available for listeners. Self-disclosure is the center in which space is negotiated: if the preacher takes too much space, the listener does not experience invitation but instead adopts an attitude of defense.

Further, self-disclosure shapes the relationship between preacher and congregation in the act of preaching. We found two different preaching modes: a mode of guidance and a mode of solidarity. In a guiding (or teaching) mode, the preacher uses self-disclosure to show the hearers a way forward in life, a way the preacher has already taken. In such cases, the pastor is revealed as a theological expert. In the mode of solidarity, the preacher attempts to shape life experiences into the sermon in such a way that the listener is not put in the position of learner, but rather feels understood by the preacher. In this mode, the pastor communicates as a fellow believer.

Finally, self-disclosure takes place in the act of performance. Engagement with the audience can be explained by self-disclosure. For instance, pastor Carol wrote a rather declarative sermon manuscript, but her sermon transcript was actually much more personal and invitational. In the act of performance, she adapted her “self” to the congregation.

The study of self-disclosure thus helps to more clearly reveal the complex role of the preacher in the productive and receptive processes of the preaching event.

**With Jørn Utzon:  
Approaching and Preaching Architectural Texts**  
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**Abstract:** *Architecture is communication. It conveys human stories, feelings, philosophies, and cultural histories and interacts through them with viewers, occupants, artists, and surrounding communities. Architecture, whether explicitly religious or not, is spiritual, too. Embodying and manifesting spatial spirituality, it invokes in the mind of the appreciator awe, wonder, and contact with the transcendent. All this is possible because architecture is, to borrow Paul Tillich’s language, an art form carrying the ultimate concerns of human life. Recognizing the communicative, spiritual, and existential nature of architecture exemplified in Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera House, this article meets a need and demonstrates the potential for architectural preaching. Preaching can serve biblical texts efficiently—particularly architectural ones (e.g., Exodus 26 and Revelation 21)—by approaching them through an architectural hermeneutic and creatively presenting them with architectural imagination.*

### Approaching Architectural Texts for Preaching

*For [Abraham] looked forward to the city that has foundations,  
whose architect and builder is God.*  
— Hebrews 11:10

*...a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning  
(the “message” of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space.*  
— Ronald Barthes<sup>1</sup>

The Bible contains many architectural texts, recognized both literally and figuratively.<sup>2</sup> In either case, such texts speak about specific architecture or use explicit architectural imagination. For instance, in Exodus 26, YHWH God instructs Moses to build the tabernacle with meticulous details. The first portion of it reads as following: ...

Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be of the same size. Five curtains shall be joined to one another; and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another. You shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; and likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. You shall make fifty loops on the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Exemplar texts include, but are not limited to, Gen 11:4, Gen 6:14–16, Deut 22:8, Josh 8:31, 1 Kgs 6:1–10, 2 Chr 3:1–17, Ezra 3:7–13, Neh 3, Ps 118:22, Prov 24:3–4, Isa 54:11–12, Jer 22:13–14, Ezek 42:1–20, Ezek 43:10–17, Matt 21:42, Luke 6:48–49, 1 Cor 3:10–13, Eph 2:19–22, Heb 11:10, and Rev 21:9–22.

in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. You shall make fifty clasps of gold, and join the curtains to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be one whole (vv. 1–6).

Then, in 1 Chronicles 3, we meet Solomon who is beginning to build “the house of the LORD.” It records:

Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had designated, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. He began to build on the second day of the second month of the fourth year of his reign. These are Solomon’s measurements for building the house of God: the length, in cubits of the old standard, was sixty cubits, and the width twenty cubits. The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits long, across the width of the house; and its height was one hundred twenty cubits. He overlaid it on the inside with pure gold (vv. 1–4).

The above texts are architectural in a literal sense, but there are a good number of figurative ones in the Bible, like this one found in Revelation:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21:22–27).

Recognizing the presence of these and many other architectural texts in the Bible, my primary homiletic concern in this essay is how to best serve these texts by preaching them in a way that can maximize their architectural-literary qualities, or what I will call architectural spirituality. If we agree with Thomas Long, who contends that “the literary form and dynamics of a biblical text can and *should be* important factors” in constructing the sermonic message,<sup>3</sup> we should give our keen attention to the architectural-literary form, character, and dynamics of those texts. For Long, this is not only a simple matter of matching the sermon’s communicative mode with that of the text (so that the sermon may sound more like its associated text, which should in any case not be ignored), but more importantly a matter of serving the meaning of the text more faithfully and in a proper hermeneutical sense. Partnering with biblical scholars,<sup>4</sup> Long explains that the literary form of the text itself *is* the content of the text or at least a key part of the text’s

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 11. Italics inserted.

<sup>4</sup> For detailed discussions on the literary nature of the Bible, see Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David Jasper, *The New Testament and the Literary Imagination* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities: 1986); and Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

meaning.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we should be diligent and faithful in discerning the literary form of the text and adopting it into the construction of the sermon message, so the message aligns rightly with the text's meaning.<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of my essay, the fact that this kind of homiletic application is possible invites the preacher's architectural-literary reading of architectural texts (i.e., an architectural hermeneutic) and the adoption of their unique form, character, and dynamics into sermon construction.

This architectural-homiletic proposal is buttressed by one crucial character of architecture itself, namely that *architecture is communication*. Architecture tells stories, German architect Ole Scheeren notes.<sup>7</sup> And the stories are about humanity sharing the ultimate values of life—love, hope, faith, justice, loyalty, sincerity, honesty, peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, and more, including yearning for eternity (e.g., Gothic buildings<sup>8</sup>). Architecture always communicates these humane values and ethereal seeking through its shape, color, space, and materials. This makes the stories that architecture tells sacred.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, architecture is not far from preaching, in that the latter is fundamentally about the same aforementioned values of life, embedded with biblical and theological inputs. Therefore, it would be not an exaggeration to consider architecture an analogous form of preaching. Architecture can convey theology and it can speak theology into human hearts in the form of sacred story.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, it is not surprising that there is a great potential for communicative and spiritual collaboration between architecture and preaching (and, indeed, a need for it due to the large lack of architectural preaching<sup>11</sup>). That is, architectural preaching is possible and should be

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<sup>5</sup> Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms*, 12-17.

<sup>6</sup> In a similar sense, homileticians like William Willimon have already found that the “[sermon] form itself is the content.” Conjoining this argument (i.e., sermon form as the content) with Long’s (i.e., literary form of the text as the text’s meaning), we can securely claim that the sermon form should match the literary form of the text in order for the sermon to reflect the text’s meaning as truthfully as possible.

<sup>7</sup> Scheeren further articulates, “So I believe that architecture exceeds the domain of physical matter, of the built environment, but is really about how we want to live our lives, how we script our own stories and those of others.” Ole Scheeren, “Why Great Architecture Should Tell a Story,” accessed July 4, 2020, [https://www.ted.com/talks/ole\\_scheeren\\_why\\_great\\_architecture\\_should\\_tell\\_a\\_story#t-39126](https://www.ted.com/talks/ole_scheeren_why_great_architecture_should_tell_a_story#t-39126).

<sup>8</sup> Any fine Gothic cathedral is an utmost expression of corporeal beings seeking contact with the transcendent.

<sup>9</sup> Obviously, architectural storytelling is neither verbal nor written. It is more about spatial storytelling. Simply put, space tells a story. Spatial storytelling is multifaceted. Spatial storytelling involves 1) the life, philosophy, and unique design of the architect, 2) the peculiar shape, color, space, and materials of the architecture that spark the unlimited imagination of the viewer or the occupant, 3) the spatial impression upon visitors of the architecture (which could go beyond the original intention of the architect), 4) various utilitarian usages of the architecture by people or residents if the building is for residency, 5) the historical and cultural influence and imprint of the architecture indelibly engraved on its surroundings, and finally, 6) the encounter with the sacred or transcendent that the architecture invokes. All these stories live together in one architecture and generate the profound meaning—cultural, social, political, and spiritual—of the given space.

<sup>10</sup> Denis R. McNamara insightfully states, “Architecture is the built form of ideas, and church architecture is the built form of theology.” I would like to push McNamara’s insight a bit further, insisting that architecture in general—not only church architecture—conveys in itself a potential to demonstrate theology. Denis R. McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009), 3.

<sup>11</sup> I have found that architectural preaching, or more generally preaching on (overtly) architectural texts, is very rare. Above all, the Revised Common Lectionary does not include many architectural texts, such as Exod 26:1–6, 1 Chr 3:1–4, Ezek 42:1–20, and Rev 21:22–27. In the cases of sermons preached on architectural texts, they seldom deal with architectural specifics or aspects of the texts. Rather, sermons tend to *extract* mostly abstract theological or spiritual meanings from the texts. For instance, a couple of sermons on Rev 21:1–6 found on Day 1 ([www.day1.org](http://www.day1.org)) hardly touch on the architectural form, character, and dynamics of the text. The sermons are excellent as they stand, but the messages or meanings of the sermons could be more aligned with the text’s unique dynamics and ethos (which Long and others would cheerfully root for) if the sermons were more architecturally oriented.

welcomed. Again, there are numerous passages carrying architectural references throughout the Bible that invite architecture-sensitive homiletical discourses (note that we are limiting the scope of the discussion to preaching on architectural texts only). Although perhaps a new consideration, this architectural approach should feel familiar and even essential, as architectural awareness is almost universal to most living human beings, for without exception we all inhabit architectural space every day for living, leisure, or work. Furthermore, certain architectural entities are specifically for religious use (e.g., cathedrals, churches, temples, etc.), which easily enables us to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of architecture.

What I present below is the collaborative potential between architecture and preaching. My architectural homiletic case is built from a foundational aesthetic and hermeneutical exploration of the Sydney Opera House (the House, hereafter), which was designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon. The House is one good instance of architecture telling and embodying multiple, meaningful human stories and invoking the transcendent. After building further on the aesthetic, spiritual, and hermeneutical aspects of architecture, I will propose one creative way of constructing architectural sermons on architectural texts, based on Rev 21:1–4, 9–14, 22–27.

## Wonders of the House

*[The House is] an image of great beauty...  
a symbol for not only a city, but a whole country and continent.  
— The Pritzker Prize Jury Citation, 2003<sup>12</sup>*

The architectural wonders and beauty of the House has captured people's hearts and imagination ever since its completion in 1973. Therefore, it was no surprise when Utzon, the primary architect, won the prestigious Pritzker Prize in 2003 (while he was still alive, which has happened only twice in history). Eventually, the House was named a UNESCO world heritage site in 2006. More than eight million people from around the world visit the House each year.

The alluring wonders of the House are at least fourfold. The first wonder comes from a seeming architectural impossibility made possible: the House's peculiar structure or shape, along with the transcendental nuance it generates. The three-dimensional, gigantic shell roof (or roofs made of shell-type panels) was not only one of the most original in architectural history, but one of the hardest to achieve. Utzon and his team spent years on the final design and making the shell roof after the foundational construction had been completed.<sup>13</sup> After twelve different iterations were considered, including parabolic and ellipsoid methods, finally the so-called "spherical solution" came to light. In an unprecedented trial, they decided to derive the gigantic shell roofs from the surface of a sphere, which solved most of the architectural, mathematical, and financial problems involved:

By any standard it was a beautiful solution to crucial problems: it elevated the architecture beyond a mere style—in this case that of shells—into a more permanent idea, one inherent in the universal geometry of the sphere.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The citation is available at <https://www.pritzkerprize.com/laureates/2003> (accessed July 4, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> For the architectural competition, Utzon only submitted his basic sketch of the House. All the details, including those of the shell roof, came along later as the construction moved on. It took six years to lay down the podium or foundation, after which the roof was made (1957–1963).

<sup>14</sup> Sydney Opera House homepage, "The Spherical Solution," accessed July 4, 2020, <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/our-story/sydney-opera-house-history/spherical-solution.html>.

The universal nature of the construction is remarkable and unmistakable throughout the House (that is, viewed from any and all directions), which creates a feel of a miniature cosmos with the blue sea and sky surrounding it.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the expressionist tone of the House adds a significant architectural spirituality—defined as the presence of and contact with the transcendent sparked by the physical-material building—to the overall impression of the House.<sup>16</sup> It is obvious that the impossible made possible—like creation *ex nihilo*—along with its cosmological-spiritual feel, is a key source of the wonders and transcendental awe of the House. Appropriately, during the opening ceremony Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” was performed by the full orchestra and choir, which sang:

Joy, beautiful spark of Divinity,  
Daughter of Elysium,  
We enter, drunk with fire,  
Heavenly One, thy sanctuary!

The second wonder comes from the House’s beauty created in *living space*—a space full of natural life. Occupying the whole of Bennelong Point on Sydney Harbor, the House with its shell-shaped patterns is a fitting match for the maritime environment. In the viewer’s mind, the House creates the illusion that it may have erupted deep from the blue sea at some point in natural history. It is an illusion that the House—a product of cold concrete and steel—looks like a living creature, breathing and floating through the seas. Especially, the huge shell-shape roof is powerful enough to suggest that if the House were a living creature, it would still be growing or expanding.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the tiles covering the shell roofs are designed to contrast with the deep blue of Sydney Harbor and the clear blue of the Australian sky. The tiles are just glossy enough, but do not cause glare.<sup>18</sup> In that way, once again, the House becomes a “living” part of its entire environment. Regarding the House’s lively merging with the nature, American architect

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<sup>15</sup> Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa recognizes this general cosmological nature of architecture in saying, “All great artistic works are complete universes and microcosmic representations of the world. They are pieces of magic that manage to contain everything in a singular mental and experiential image.” Juhani Pallasmaa, “Artistic Generosity, Humility and Expression,” in *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture, and Design*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 25.

<sup>16</sup> For Paul Tillich, expressionist arts can be considered religious arts even when their overt themes are not religious. This is mainly because, he thought, art with such particular styles and motives best manifests the deep concerns of humanity. All may not agree with Tillich’s particular take on expressionism, but it is evident that many expressionist arts from Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and others (even though most of them would have hesitated to label themselves as expressionists) engage with what is happening deep in human psychology. Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, eds. Jane Dillenberger and John Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 127–38.

<sup>17</sup> Utzon himself coined the term *additive architecture* for this kind of natural, life-reflecting construction. In an essay titled, “The Innermost Being of Architecture,” he states, “Something of the naturalness found in the growth principle in nature ought to be a fundamental idea in works of architecture.” Jørn Utzon, *Jørn Utzon Logbook Vol. V*, (Hellerup [Denmark]: Edition Bløndal, 2009), 6.

<sup>18</sup> For this effect, Utzon created unique tiles, now called the Sydney Tile, mimicking the texture of Japanese ceramic bowls that demonstrate a subtle coarseness caused by a granular texture in the clay from a small percentage of crushed stone. In total, 1,056,006 tiles were placed on the entire roof. For more information, visit <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/our-story/sydney-opera-house-history/spherical-solution.html> (accessed July 4, 2020).

Louis Kahn once commented, “The sun did not know how beautiful its light was, until it was reflected off this building.”<sup>19</sup>

Third, the House’s dynamic interaction with the human viewer or the House user (or the artistic performer) is the culmination of its wonders and awe. Not only does the House boast harmony with the nature that surrounds it, also it mutually exchanges emotive and intellectual impressions or expressions with inspired viewers. In other words, moved and motivated by the splendor of the House, viewers or the House users contribute significantly to the life and beauty of the House in return. Cristina Garduno Freeman articulates how this has happened throughout past decades:

The manifestation of the story of this building in the form of a book, a collaborative web page, an opera and a guided tour indicates that the practice of telling, and by extension all the practices identified in the schema set out there, are not limited to specific forms of culture, or individuals, groups, commercial organizations or institutions...together they offer a new way of understanding the iconic value and cultural significance of the Sydney Opera House.<sup>20</sup>

In an architecturally technical sense, this dynamic interaction between the House and its users is boosted largely by the multiple performance venues that the House offers. The House is not just for traditional opera as the House’s formal name (The “Opera” House) may suggest. The House also hosts plays, musicals, dance, comedy, classical music, films, the circus, magic shows, cabaret, and much more (e.g., engagement and wedding ceremonies). Altogether, more than three thousand performances take place throughout the year, attended by many of its eight million annual visitors. Thus, the House as a physical structure alone—however grand it may be—is not the only generator of the zestful life around it. Rather, the people and the live artistic performances in the House greatly promote the spirited life and beauty of the House. Thus, tributes to the House, such as the following, are not surprising:

My wife and I were married and held our reception at the Opera House, so many years ago...My soul as others has found a place to sing in this magical space...My father worked on the building.<sup>21</sup>

Last but not least, the House can be approached from all directions, which allows for the viewer’s autonomous appreciation and interaction with it. Around the House, there is no definitive front, back, or dividing walls, even though there is an “official” entrance. One can simply stand or sit on any place around the House and enjoy the harbor view, the blue sky, the House itself, the food court, serene meditation, photography, or outdoor performance art. One can even enjoy the House from the sea via yacht and take pleasure in seeing a different angle of the big shells. One may want to visit the House at different times of the year or day. As the shells are designed to reflect the natural sunlight, one can appreciate different light tones and moods of the shells at different times of the day, especially the ethereal, colorful moments of sunrise and sunset. In that sense, the House kindly invites one’s unique aesthetic interpretation of it, the detailed content of which is widely open-ended and possible from different standpoints and

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Geraldine Brooks, “Unfinished Business,” *The New Yorker*, October 17, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Cristina Garduno Freeman, *Participatory Culture and the Social Value of an Architectural Icon: Sydney Opera House* (London: Routledge, 2019), 99.

<sup>21</sup> From writing pieces of Steve McCarthy, Diane McQueen, and Linda Briggs in *Participatory Culture*, 162.

during different times of the year. Basically, one can *own* his or her unique impression, expression, and interpretation of the House.<sup>22</sup> All in all, the House is not simply a physical concrete building, but has become what Patrick Dillon calls “a poem” that the appreciator plays with joyfully and is transformed by in a holistic way.<sup>23</sup> Hence, people were happy to leave another set of tributes to Utzon and the House, collected upon his death:

I always feel revived and inspired by sharing the experience in such a wonderful building.  
It lifts my spirits and inspires me every single time.  
that inevitably lifts the spirit and inspires wonder  
The power to move, change and inspire,  
masterpiece will continue to inspire great artists, visitors, employees, and residents.<sup>24</sup>

### Spirituality of Space

*...the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church  
a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries.*  
— Pope Benedict XVI<sup>25</sup>

After the Exodus from Egypt, when the Israelites were still curious about YHWH’s identity (Who is this God? How does one worship the I-AM-WHO-I-AM God?), God instructs Moses with “the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture” (Exod 25:9). As a result, the sanctuary is built by artisans as a portable and unique dwelling place of YHWH among the people. Centuries later, per God’s architectural plan and command, David and Solomon build a permanent temple in Jerusalem, for which God gives the Israelites the right to call the temple “the house of the Lord” and “the house of God” (1 Chr 28:20–21). In the New Testament, the infant baby Jesus is presented in the Jerusalem temple according to the customs. Later, the boy Jesus and his family make an annual pilgrimage to the temple for the festival of Passover (Luke 2). In Acts 2, Peter and John go up to the temple for the hour of prayer regularly. In sum, throughout the Bible, people needed and built and sacred spaces for rituals and worship.

Likewise, since the Judeo-Christian era, through the Middle Ages and Modern time and up to the present moment, people go to sacred spaces—be it a synagogue, temple, cathedral, church, gathering place, house church, or more recently, an online, virtual church—to worship

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<sup>22</sup> Pallasmaa explains how this open-ended appreciation can or should happen in architectural encounter: “Skillfully designed buildings are usually expected to direct and channel the occupant’s experiences, feelings and thoughts. In my view, this attitude is a fundamentally wrong understanding; *architecture offers an open field of possibilities, and it stimulates and emancipates perceptions, associations, feelings, and thoughts. A meaningful building does not argue or propose anything; it inspires us to see, sense and think ourselves.* A great architectural work sharpens our senses, opens our perceptions and makes us receptive to the realities of the world. The reality of the work also inspires us to dream. It helps us to see a fine view of garden, feel the silent persistence of a tree, or the presence of the other, but it does not indoctrinate or bind us” (italics inserted). Pallasmaa, “Artistic Generosity,” 30.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Dillon with illustrations from Stephen Biesty, *The Story of Buildings: From the Pyramids to the Sydney Opera House and Beyond* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>24</sup> These are select lines from numerous tributes to Utzon and the House, quoted anonymously in Freeman, *Participatory Culture*, 165. As the lines appear in a poetic format in the original source, some capitalizations (in that source) are omitted. See the book for many other similar tributes.

<sup>25</sup> Available at [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html) (accessed July 4, 2020).

and indulge in the presence of the Divine. All these attest that we need designated spaces of prayer and worship. Sacred space *matters* in religious life.

Catholic architect and theologian Denis R. McNamara articulates why sacred space matters in the Christian life. For him, “a church is a sacramental building,” which is “meant to be an image of heaven in order to fulfill and express its own nature.”<sup>26</sup> The sacramentality of church architecture is made possible largely by its beauty that is “the compelling power of the Truth.”<sup>27</sup> He thus concludes unapologetically, “A beautiful church is the very image of heaven itself made known in material form.”<sup>28</sup> For him, sacred space really matters. In a Christian church, the revelation of the Divine can happen in that space, the Truth of Christ is delivered through the space, and the transformation of human hearts is possible by dwelling deeply in the space. It would even be safe to state that no truth is revealed or possible without space.

The above example of the House alludes to the possibility of the Divine’s presence or the feel of the transcendent in non-religious architecture, too. The impossible-made-possible nature of the House, and the cosmic symbolism of its shape, color, and material all contribute to the realization of the wonders and mystery of the world, which is not far from the Christian experience of the Divine in the sacred place. If all this spiritual character of the House leads to lifting our spirits and personal inspiration for so many people—that is, “inspiration to be a better person”<sup>29</sup>—then secular *architecture matters in religious life* as significantly as church buildings.

What is special about architecture as a remarkable spiritual artifact—compared to other art forms—is first its practical and multidimensional experience of the Divine, and second, the Divine’s active interaction with nature and humanity at large. According to American Architect Louis Sullivan’s well-known maxim, “Form ever follows function.”<sup>30</sup> Most architecture, if not all, has a practical function or purpose, more or less. For instance, cathedrals are for worship, and the House is for artistic performances or enjoyment. Hence, the Divine encounter in the building can be as much practical as purposeful. In the three-dimensional space, one can practice silent prayer while sitting or standing, surrounded by aesthetically-reflected lights on the walls, or one can walk around the structure in appreciation and gratitude of cosmic beauty and demonstrated creativity, or one may want to sing or dance on the empty floor, deeply involved in the spatial mysteries of the architecture.

The practical aspect of architecture and the potential ritualistic activities in it can lead to significant consideration of the Divine’s *active interaction* with the neighboring natural environment and local communities. No building stands alone. Whether the House or the Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany,<sup>31</sup> all are surrounded by nature and civil society and interact with them. This essentially means that the architectural-revelatory event of the Divine deeply concerns issues, problems, and well-being of nature and wider human civilization. A fine

<sup>26</sup> McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture*, vii.

<sup>27</sup> McNamara, 1–2. McNamara acutely realizes the confusion and suspicion around the term beauty in today’s world. But he still wants to provide and use his carefully coined phenomenological definition of it. “Beauty is,” he states, “nothing less than the revelation of the ontological reality of a thing, the expression in material form of the inner most heart of the very identity of its being.”

<sup>28</sup> McNamara, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “Inspiration to be a better person” appears as one of notable themes in tributes to Utzon and the House, collected upon his death. Freeman, *Participatory Culture*, 165. Those tributes include, “Jørn Utzon inspired me as a child,” “I am inspired by his creative vision and integrity,” “The power to move, change and inspire,” “[The House] changed so many lives, inspired so many individuals and brought joy and happiness,” and the like.

<sup>30</sup> Louis H. Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered,” *Lippincott's Magazine* (March 1896): 403–09.

<sup>31</sup> The famous Disney castle is said to be modelled after this German architecture.

example is the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL, informally known as the National Lynching Memorial, which was built by Michael Murphy and his team in consultation with Bryan Stevenson, the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. In his inspiring TED talk, “Architecture That’s Built to Heal,” Murphy explores the civic and spiritual role that architecture can play in the surrounding community—both locally and nationally—toward transcendental healing and reconciliation.<sup>32</sup> In a Tillichian sense, then, architecture can take on ultimate concerns of the human world and the natural environment (e.g., natural preservation<sup>33</sup>) and provide wisdom and force that can be utilized for their betterment.<sup>34</sup> In that way, it is no exaggeration to say that architecture as an art form and spiritual practice has salvific power.<sup>35</sup> We, the appreciators, performers, and architectural builders, should be wise and diligent to use the power of salvation very well.

### **Toward Architectural Preaching**

We now turn to the constructive discussion of architectural preaching. We could tackle many homiletic-theoretical tasks based on the above discussion. But in the present writing only two things will be pondered at length: an architectural hermeneutic and the architectural composition of a sermon.

#### **A. An Architectural Hermeneutic**

##### *Five Principles*

Before practicing architectural preaching, the preacher should first become an architectural hermeneut or interpreter; that is, the preacher becomes an architect of an imagined sermonic space, who designs from an embedded hermeneutical guide. This sermonic space rises from the preacher’s architectural hermeneutical reading of the scriptural text, especially architectural texts such as Exod 26 and 1 Chr 28. Thus, in her study the preacher will initially explore the architectural text as a sacred space of meanings or transcendental experiences, and later in the sermon guide people into and through the same textual space for similar divine encounters. This architectural reading of the text is possible when: 1) the text’s content itself is architectural, and 2) after the preacher perceives the text as “not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space.”<sup>36</sup> Simply put, the architectural text itself can be a space of multilayered meanings and divine encounters that invites the preacher’s and the listener’s hermeneutical and transformative “walking.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Murphy’s TED talk, “Architecture That’s Built to Heal,” accessed July 4, 2020,

[https://www.ted.com/talks/michael\\_murphy\\_architecture\\_that\\_s\\_built\\_to\\_heal?language=en#t-919058](https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_murphy_architecture_that_s_built_to_heal?language=en#t-919058).

<sup>33</sup> For instance, in their book Donald Watson and Michele Adams discuss the creative architectural design that prevents severe flooding and provides more sustainable, regenerative, and resilient natural and living places. Donald Watson and Michele Adams, *Design for Flooding: Architecture, Landscape, and Urban Design for Resilience to Climate Change* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, 188-89.

<sup>35</sup> I agree with J. W. De Gruchy on the salvific power of the arts. De Gruchy contends that truth and goodness alone are not sufficient “to convince and therefore to save,” but that the aesthetical rendering of truth and goodness is required for the full salvific action of the Divine. J. W. De Gruchy, “Holy Beauty: A Reformed Perspective on Aesthetics within a World of Ugly Injustice,” in *Reformed Theology for the Third Christian Millennium*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 15.

<sup>36</sup> Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 146.

<sup>37</sup> Architecture exactly does this—offers multiple meaning and transformative experiences. See footnote 22.

A structural reading of the text, or structural criticism, may provide an interpretive springboard for the making of the architectural hermeneutic, as the former attempts to dig up the deep or underlying structure of the text upon which the text is “built” like a house.<sup>38</sup> Ronald Allen catches the core of structural criticism as the following: “Every text is composed of discrete units, often called ‘lexies.’ A lexie is a single unit of thought or action which makes sense by itself, without reference to other discrete elements. Structural criticism centers on the analysis of the interaction of the lexies which comprise the text.”<sup>39</sup>

Based on his understanding of structuralism, Allen proposes key questions, responses to which the preacher may utilize as the sermon content and structure:

1. What are the basic units of the text?
2. What is the situation at the beginning of text?
3. What is the situation at the end of the text?
4. What is the basic opposition underlying the text?
5. Do elements of the text evoke larger structures which have a role in the text?
6. What transformations take place as the text moves from beginning to end?
7. How does the underlying opposition and its resolution suggest structure and content for the sermon?<sup>40</sup>

Incorporating the architectural-hermeneutical inquiry with the above questions, we can propose the following five core principles (and their associated interpretive questions) of an architectural, interpretive exploration of the text.

1. Multidimensional-spatial exploration of the text: What are the basic spatial units of the text? Where are the architectural entrance and exit points in the text? What spatial point(s) is(are) at the center?
2. Aesthetic-transcendental exploration of the text: What poetic construction of the text is seen? What are the architectural artistic details of the text? What is the theological or spiritual nature of the transcendental wonder provoked in the architectural composition of the text?
3. Performative-interactional exploration of the text: What are the potential, autonomous, interpretive interactions of the reader with spaces in the text, if in her imagination the reader walks through them? Specifically, what performative reactions could be invoked in those spaces (e.g., kneeling in prayer, raising hands in praise, standing still in meditation, dancing around on the floor, respectfully touching walls, serious visual-observational study of the space, etc.)?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ronald J. Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 71–72.

<sup>39</sup> Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation*, 72.

<sup>40</sup> Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation*, 76–77. Allen adopts French Structuralist Lévi-Strauss’s concept of binary opposition as a key component of textual, structural interpretation, especially in texts where a mythic character appears as a serious agonist.

<sup>41</sup> Pallasmaa, again in his imaginative language, articulates how architecture could interact with an appreciator, stating, “In addition to an ‘aesthetic withdrawal’ and ‘politeness,’ I have spoken of an ‘architectural courtesy’ referring to the way a sensuous building offers gentle and subconscious gestures for the pleasure of the occupant: a door handle offers itself courteously to the approaching hand, the first step of a stairway appears exactly at the moment you wish to proceed upstairs, and the window is exactly where you wish to look out. The building is in full resonance with your body, movements and desires.” Pallasmaa, “Artistic Generosity,” 31.

4. Exploration of oppositional or binary dimensions of the text: Are there any structural symmetries or oppositions<sup>42</sup> found in the spatial units of the text? What do the symmetries or oppositions look like? How do they hold themselves together in one text?
5. Eco-interactional exploration of the text: If any, what ecological interactions do the space units of the text have? How do they interact? What purpose do their interactions have in relation to other explorations—multidimensional-spatial, aesthetic-transcendental, performative-interactional, and oppositional or binary—of the text?

*An Example*

With the five principles, architectural texts can be explored thoroughly or even “physically” because they contain clear, spatial, aesthetic, or performative language or sense. Provided below is an example of the architectural hermeneutical reading of Rev 21:1–4, 9–14, 22–27.<sup>43</sup>

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away” (vv. 1–4).

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (vv. 9–14).

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light,

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<sup>42</sup> Most traditional buildings are built based on structural symmetries (e.g., rectangular floor plans of cathedrals). In today’s postmodern era, however, this is not necessarily so. Buildings may have oppositional, ambivalent, or spiral structures, as vividly shown in the examples of *Sydney’s Opera House* (Australia), *Guggenheim Museum Bilbao* (Spain), *The Groninger Museum* (Netherlands), *Turning Torso* (Sweden) and *Dancing House* (Czech).

<sup>43</sup> I chose three pericopes from the same chapter for a homiletic purpose. Combined together, they convey strong potential to make one preaching passage, and thus a fine architectural sermon.

and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (vv. 22–27).

1. Multidimensional-spatial exploration of the text

- Basic spatial units of the text: There are at least five basic spatial units in this text—a high, great mountain where the holy city sits; the holy city of Jerusalem as a whole (a view from the distance), coming down from out of heaven; a high wall with twelve gates; twelve foundations; a quick view of the inside.
- Architectural entrance and exit points in the text: There is no clear entrance or exit point described. However, the text states that there are three gates on each side of four walls.
- What spatial points are at the center? Overall impressions of the holy city from both outside and inside are the two observational gravitation poles of the text. The splendor of the entire city, accompanied by the consoling prophecy from the throne of the Lamb and the glory of the Almighty inside the architecture, capture the entire psychology of John the Seer with tremendous awe and wonder.

2. Aesthetic-transcendental exploration of the text

- Poetic construction of the text: The totality of the passage reads poetically. The impressionist nature of the passage arouses deep emotions and intuitive thoughts in the mind of the reader. The actual poem or singing in vv. 3–4 (“See, the home of God ...”) is an aesthetic gem of the passage.
- Architectural artistic details of the text: The content of vv. 9–14 conveys some—not really precise, however—details of the holy city that have biblical-historical meanings (e.g., “...on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites”), and some in vv. 22–27 as well (i.e., “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it...Its gates will never be shut by day”).
- Theological or spiritual nature of the transcendental wonder provoked in the architectural composition of the text: The whole text seems to fully correspond to what Finnish architect Alvar Aalto acknowledges regarding architectural idealism: “Architecture has an ulterior motif...the idea of creating paradise. That is the only purpose of our buildings...Every building, every architectural product that is its symbol, is intended to show that we wish to build a paradise on earth for [humanity].”<sup>44</sup>

3. Performative-interactive exploration of the text: Potential autonomous interpretive interactions of the reader with the spaces in focus (any specific performative reactions): A carefully-imagined walk with a sense of *mysterium tremendum et fasinans*<sup>45</sup> seems sure to happen. Like Isaiah, who was awed and humbled in his own vision (Isaiah 6), John the

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<sup>44</sup> From his lecture at the jubilee meeting of the Southern Sweden Master Builders’ Society in Malmö, 1957, quoted in Göran Schildt, ed., *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words* (Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company, 1997), 215.

<sup>45</sup> For Otto, *mysterium tremendum et fasinans* refers to the “determinate affective state” of human mind or feeling gripped or stirred by that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures. Otto, *The Idea*, 12–40.

Seer in this passage is in a similar spiritual rapture. The reader is invited to walk with the Seer, first from a distance and then finally inside of the holy city, seeing the full glory and complete purity of God's place. This walk seems to be a pilgrim's destined journey into the promised land.<sup>46</sup> Walking into the holy city, the pilgrim reader may want to make a verbal confession, like Isaiah shouting out "Woe to me!" because, as the Seer describes, "Nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood."<sup>47</sup>

4. Exploration of oppositional or binary dimensions of the text: Any structural symmetries or oppositions found in the spatial units of the text: A clear-cut symmetry of the entire spatial structure is described; twelve gates around the holy city (three on each direction) and twelve foundations that support the surrounding wall. There is one opposition found at the end of the text, not structural but ethical-spiritual, enhanced by the architectural structure: "But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood..." (v. 27).
5. If any, eco-interactional exploration of the text: There are several interactional references between nature and the holy city. To begin with, the text states that "the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" because a new heaven and a new earth have been created. The holy city comes out of the new heaven (vv. 1–2). The holy city itself now sits on "a great, high mountain," and has "the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal" (vv. 10–11; see vv. 18–21 for other glittering jewel references). Lastly, the passage notes that "the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (v. 23). All these eco-interactional references illustrate or promote the unique and ultimate glory and supremacy of God. God doesn't seem to negate the natural world itself, but rather sublimates all natural elements, which God originally created, into God's perfection. This is affirmed aesthetically and eschatologically in the following chapter (Rev 22:1–5).<sup>48</sup> To reiterate, there is a new heaven and a new earth in place of the first ones, and there is the radiance of God in place of jewels, and finally the light of God in place of sun and moon. Therefore, a considerable hidden purpose of eco-interactional

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<sup>46</sup> In Hebrews 11, Abraham and Sarah, along with other ancestors of faith, are said to have seen the promised land and welcomed it only from a distance, "admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth." In other words, on earth they journeyed toward their promised land as pilgrims. For Dee Dyas, the Abrahamic story is a strongly symbolic, theological presentation of humanity's lifetime pilgrimage to what God has prepared beyond human history. Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700–1500* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 15–16.

<sup>47</sup> This portion of the text well aligns with what Pallasmaa wants to say regarding the ethical consciousness that architecture evokes. He notes, "I wish to argue firmly that the ethical potential and task of architecture resides in its very capacity to transcend naïve realism and instrumentality, to dream of a better and more sensitive and sensuous world, and to facilitate the emergence of this world in the realm of the real. Architectural reason and sensitivity, sincerity and beauty surely resonates with ethical idealism. Beauty itself evokes the existential core of being and it is a harbinger of eternal life... For aesthetics is the mother of ethics." Pallasmaa, "Artistic Generosity," 34.

<sup>48</sup> The passage reads, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

references seems to be the demonstration of apotheosis of God's continued creation or transformation of the cosmos toward God's ultimate glory.

This artistic-performative exegetical example uses all five principles of architectural-interpretive exploration. For other texts, the preacher may only need to apply 3 or 4 principles for each text's different configuration. This is fine and acceptable as long as the interpretive exploration is thorough and meaning-generating. Moving forward to sermon composition, a conventional historical-critical study of the text is recommended at this point, (only) after the architectural-aesthetic exploration.<sup>49</sup> The two combined together will make the encounter and study of the text deeper, more accurate, and full of the Divine mystery.

## B. Architectural Composition of the Sermon

The remaining question is: How does one compose a sermon based on the architectural encounter of a passage? As an answer, existing sermon composition methods are not desirable for the proposed architectural preaching. Most of them perceive the sermon construction as a logically-flowing essay composition, from sermon introduction to conclusion, with one central idea or focus as an all-encompassing thread.<sup>50</sup> These methods—though they have their own great methodological merits for other forms of the sermon—do not consider or allow room for spatial or architectural explorations of the text, which are key in architectural sermon composition. Alyce M. McKenzie's *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners* seems to offer a good exit or progressive development from those previous methods. Her method regards each meaning block (typically paragraphs) of the sermon as a "scene," and thus the sermon moves forward scene by scene, biblical or cultural, imaginatively created by the preacher.<sup>51</sup> In that sense, sermon flow is not literary-linear, but rather pictorial-episodic. Architectural composition of the sermon pushes McKenzie's method a bit further. Architectural sermon writing considers each meaning block "a space" where each unique, yet interlocking, divine encounter happens. Each sermonic space is patterned after spatial units of the text, which are founded during the architectural interpretive exploration.<sup>52</sup> For this purpose, architectural

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<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere I insist that the artistic exploration or study of the text be conducted first, before the formal historical-critical exegesis of the text. This order guarantees the text is "speaking to" the reader first, rather than the reader objectifying the text as a literary material to dissect. Sunggu Yang, "Homiletical Aesthetics: A Paradigmatic Proposal for a Holistic Experience of Preaching," *Theology Today* 73, no. 4 (2017): 364–77; esp., 372. Decades ago, Ronald Allen acknowledged the problem of the conventional homiletic interpretation of the text, stating that "much traditional exegesis is one dimensional. It focuses on the rational element in the text and attempts to answer questions like 'What did this text mean in its ancient context?' Even synchronic exegesis tends to be highly analytical and to discuss the text as if it were an inert object of research." For him "a major purpose of exegesis" is "to let us enter the world of the text on its own terms." Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation*, 108.

<sup>50</sup> For a thorough survey of many different forms or patterns of the sermon, refer to O. Wesley Allen, *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) and Ronald James Allen, *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> See Alyce M. McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), chap. 2.

<sup>52</sup> This architectural-homiletic proposal of mine is not totally new, obviously. In the recent past, there have been some precursors in architectural or spatial considerations for preaching to whom I owe greatly for my own construct. Briefly, David Buttrick's homiletic terminology and strategy (i.e., "moves" and "structures" of the sermon), when applied aptly, would generate a feel of spatial-conscious movement in the mind of the preacher (as well as that of the listener, explicitly or implicitly). Paul Scott Wilson emphasizes filmic movement from "page" to "page" along with the filmic three dimensional-sensory (or "visualizing" in his language) composition of each "page." Thomas Long

preaching re-conceptualizes the sermonic introduction and conclusion as a sermon “entrance” and sermon “back door” (or “side door”). Thus, through the entirety of the sermon, the preacher and the listener—guided by the preacher—enter together into the sermonic architecture, move through various spaces of meanings and divine encounters, and eventually exit through the back door or side door again to the world where they came from.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, proposing a central idea and composing the sermon around it would not be a useful methodological device in architectural preaching. The end goal of architectural preaching is to take the listeners themselves on a guided autonomous walk through the sermonic architecture and indulge their deepest selves into the grandeur matrix of various meanings— theological, spiritual, biblical, cultural, and many other ways.<sup>54</sup> As a result, the listeners will have a unique encounter with God and thus formulate a unique sermon message *for themselves*, either individually or collectively.

Below is an abbreviated sermon composition outline based on the architectural reading of the text, Rev 21:1–4, 9–14, 22–27.

- Sermon Entrance

Imagine with me that you are standing before and seeing the holy city with John the Seer. What thoughts arise in your mind? What feelings bubble in your hearts and deep psychology? Do you want to step inside the city or are you hesitant to act? In either case, what most prompts you to step inside or hesitate do to so? Well, let’s not think or hesitate too much. For the invitation is wide open, and you seem to be so welcome. At the least, John the Seer is already inside and he’s waving for you to come in!

- Space F (front)<sup>55</sup>

Before going in, let’s take a closer look at the outside of the holy city that John the Seer describes. In your imagination, do you also see what I’m seeing? The magnificent wall, the great twelve gates, and the unfathomable twelve foundations! Yet what most captures my attention are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on the gates, and the names of the apostles on the foundations. Those dear names, the faithful ancestors and teachers of Christ—just thinking of their lives, faith journeys, and struggles gives me

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calls the summary sentence of the exegeted text or the key sermon topic “focus” as if the preacher looks at the spatial core of the text. Last but not least, Fred B. Craddock encourages preachers to recognize the “depth, and height, and breadth” of biblical texts or stories, and avoids seeing them as “little, old, flat, one-dimensional, simple, clever, tricky, little things.” This multi-dimensional recognition of the text should be reflected in the design and content of the sermon. In a metaphoric or literary sense, all these architectural or spatial approaches to the text and sermon form are beneficial by their own merits. My unique contribution is built upon the useful precedents, the development of straightforward interdisciplinary potential between architecture and preaching, and the more direct use of architectural spirituality, wisdom, and communicative insights in preaching. See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), chaps. 2–5 and 21–25; Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 16; Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 126–27; and Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching*, eds. Lee Sparks and Kathryn Hayes Sparks (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011), 45.

<sup>53</sup> Or we may want to exit through sermon entrance again at the end. In this case, the sermon content may adopt a circular movement.

<sup>54</sup> Refer to footnote 14 for how this autonomous appreciation and meaning-finding happens in architectural encounter.

<sup>55</sup> I do not want to use the designation of Space A, B, C, D, E, etc., as they still reflect a sense of literary-linear order, which architectural preaching wants to avoid.

some courage and confidence again to still stand as a Christian in this violent and hungry world. How about you?

- Space R (right)  
Now, in our imagination, as we walk deeper inside of the holy city, I wonder if you remember the consoling voice we just heard when vv. 3–4 was read. The text says the voice was from the throne of God. In your imagination (now you’re inside the city!), can you see the throne of God? We may not see it, as the holy city is dazzling-full of God’s glory. Whether we see it or not, I am fully grasped by the deep caring presence of God all around the city. Indeed, it seems like we are not just inside a physical building, but really *inside the heart and mind of God!* As Jesus says somewhere else,<sup>56</sup> it seems like God is within me (through architecture), and I within God, inseparable and unmovable!<sup>57</sup>
- Space L (left)  
Dear friends, as truly as we now find ourselves sitting inside our own church building this morning, we may, right now, like John the Seer, be sitting inside God’s heart and mind; yes, right now! Of course, it would be a bit daunting to recognize ourselves (right now!) sitting inside God’s presence. If you’re like me or Isaiah in Isaiah 6, in this place you must have already encountered the experience of *mysterium tremendum et fascians*—the holy mystery that both excites you and humbles you to the point of uttering in shock, “Woe to me. I’m such a sinner! I haven’t been faithful to the justice cause of the world...”
- Space B (back)  
So, you might want to hide or exit immediately? Please, not too fast. The text indicates that once you’re in, you’re in. It says that “nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood...” (v. 27). So, we should be joyful and glad as we’re in already.
- Space O (over)<sup>58</sup>
- Sermon Backdoor  
However, it’s time to come back from our imagination, as John the Seer would have made his way back to his daily life in Patmos after the awe-filled vision event. It is surely not the ultimate goal for us to stay in the city, however great, dreamy, and comfy it is! Like the Seer, we need to exit the holy city and climb down the mountain into our daily

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<sup>56</sup> In his farewell address to his disciples recorded in the Gospel of John, Jesus utters, “You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you... On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:17b–20).

<sup>57</sup> Pallasmaa, in his sophisticated language, articulates how the boundary between the external space or building and one’s mind can be softened, if not disappear entirely. He writes, “As we settle in a space, we similarly allow the boundary between ourselves and the space to soften and become sensitized. The external space and the internal space, the physical and the mental, real and imaginary constitute an indivisible continuum, a singularity.” In a similar vein, poet Noel Arnaud states, “I am the space where I am.” In our architectural-mystical case above, the boundary between ourselves and the holy city or God’s *mysterium* presence disappears. Pallasmaa, “Artistic Generosity,” 25. Noel Arnaud as quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maira Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 137.

<sup>58</sup> There could be more content for sermon composition after Spaces F, R, L, and B. The preacher, depending on the text, inspiration, and sermon length, may want to create Spaces O (over), C (center), and U (underground), etc.

world again, which still groans under poverty, injustice, corruption, natural disasters, and many more evil realities. We, the disciples of Christ, are now expected to console, comfort, and transform as we saw and remember the perfect glory and consolation of God. We are—as we’re commissioned, I believe—to begin to build the same holy city, here and now, on earth, immediately, though it won’t be perfect. We will be co-creators and co-architects with God of that new world. We are not perfect; probably sinful. But God will help. God will lead us. So, let’s be ready with our own design and tools. I have some interior design in mind. What do you have?

## Conclusion

As Brandon Clifford encourages, we can think of architecture not as “an end product [building project], but as a performance from conception to completion.”<sup>59</sup> Then, we can conceptualize architectural preaching as a performative-interpretive observation on, and walk through, the text. *The text perceived as architecture* is not an end, a cold product. Rather, the text still breathes its life and embraces the divine presence, further revealing “the mysteries, complexities, and unpredictabilities of the world and human life.”<sup>60</sup> The preacher is to walk into the text, breathe with it, and encounter multiple mysteries, meanings of life, and the Divine’s presence engraved in many imagined architectural spaces of the text. Then the only remaining task of the preacher is, kindly and gently and with prophetic authority, to guide the listeners around and into the same architectural text. They themselves will find the patient God awaiting them for transformative moments of life, which will lead to their ultimate “human dignity and freedom,”<sup>61</sup> and that of the whole world. God will do God’s part, and the listeners certainly will do their part. Let it be so.

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<sup>59</sup> Brandon Clifford, “Architectural secrets of the World’s Ancient Wonders,” accessed July 4, 2020, [https://www.ted.com/talks/brandon\\_clifford\\_architectural\\_secrets\\_of\\_the\\_world\\_s\\_ancient\\_wonders?language=en#t-205129](https://www.ted.com/talks/brandon_clifford_architectural_secrets_of_the_world_s_ancient_wonders?language=en#t-205129).

<sup>60</sup> Pallasmaa, “Artistic Generosity,” 35.

<sup>61</sup> Pallasmaa, 35.

Ronald J. Allen. *I Will Tell You the Mystery: A Commentary for Preaching from the Book of Revelation*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019. 229 pages. \$32.

Revelation is one most of the challenging letters in the Second Testament for preachers and congregations alike (xvii). *I Will Tell You the Mystery: A Commentary for Preaching from the Book of Revelation* provides preachers with a concise verse-by-verse commentary that flows through the vein of process theology. Allen “seeks to help preachers recognize what the book of Revelation (with its apocalyptic theology) invited people in antiquity to believe and do; to bring that viewpoint into conversation with contemporary revisionary theology; and to help preachers help their congregations identify what it can genuinely believe and confidently do” (x). Interpretations of Revelation that contain apocalyptic imagery, condemnation to eternal torment, and the eschatology of final judgment can be hard to reconcile for progressive and liberal mainline Protestant congregations. This commentary opens the door for preachers to dance with Revelation all over again, and to see with fresh eyes.

The potency of this commentary is found in the “Introduction for Preachers.” In this section, Allen gives preachers a fresh hermeneutical lens for understanding the context that informs Revelation. First, he argues that Revelation is a letter situated in the context of Empire, and that the letter’s intent is to show believers how to live in the midst of Empire. Allen’s work is timely, and frames Empire for preachers living in the context of twenty-first century, post-2016 America. Second, Allen names his own social location as an interpreter, and acknowledges that this commentary is filtered through the experience of a middle-class, middle-aged, white, male, mainline Protestant Christian who identifies with process theology. His perspective may not be consistent with traditional commentaries on Revelation.

Allen invites readers to view Revelation as a book of images that repeat the same scene over and over again (xviii). The first chapter, “Revealing the Ruler of Rulers,” seeks to communicate that the authority of Revelation “comes from God” (1). Here, Allen provides an invitation to fresh understandings of the nature of God and the work of Jesus. Chapters 2 and 3, under the theme “Revealing the Rulers and Ambiguities,” assert that the seven congregations represent the multiplicity of *conditions* impacting congregations in Asia Minor, as opposed to actual congregations (20). Chapters 4 and 5 of are captured under the theme, “Revealing the Power of God.” What takes place in the throne room and the response to the Lamb are meant to demonstrate what life was like in the Mediterranean Empire, and how one is invited to trust in God. The subsequent chapters take the reader on a step-by-step, chapter-by-chapter journey towards a New Heaven and a New Earth: a world that has a brand new beginning, whose systems, structures, ideas, and institutions are rooted in God’s extravagant love, and which is informed by a community of mutuality—that is, free of hierarchy, competition, transactional relationships, and retribution.

This is a refreshing resource that guides twenty-first century preachers living in contexts ravaged by COVID-19, and in a world that is slowly awakening to the pre-existing pandemics of injustice, to think about what it means to be faithful, and how they can imagine the possibilities of a new beginning. This commentary also opens possibilities for homileticians and biblical scholars to consider what it would look like to produce a commentary informed by their social location and situated in our twenty-first century context. What would it look like to have a single verse-by-verse commentary interpreted from the social location of Black women, persons who are differently-abled, immigrants, and other people groups?

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Chanequa Walker-Barnes. *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. xxii + 258 pages. \$25.

In five chapters, *I Bring the Voices of My People* exposes fallacies regarding surface-level racial reconciliation and simplistic solutions for systemic racial injustice within the context of a theological understanding of God's self-disclosure and Christian response. As a public theologian and an extensively-trained clinical psychologist, Walker-Barnes provides an in-depth argument for holistic approaches towards building a more just society and the role of the church in such processes. The author draws from critical race theory to challenge the following three assumptions about race: 1) race as a social construct and therefore not real; 2) racism derives from division rather than power dynamics, positions of privilege, and access to the means to improve social, political, and economic standing; and 3) interpersonal contacts lead to reconciliation (23). Walker-Barnes devotes much of the book to dispelling simplistic explanations regarding the evils of racism, sexism, and forms of intersectionality. The author confirms and recontextualizes the scholarship of social psychologist Gordon Allport regarding the "contact hypothesis," with the perspective of several decades of legal and practical desegregation and taking into consideration the potency of hegemonic dominance, which controls human behavior through ideas and information along with structural power. Such structures reproduce racism as they adapt to legislative changes and permeate cultural norms.

According to Walker-Barnes, broad institutional socialization of more privileged groups, which fail to recognize racism and its various manifestations, is deeply embedded in the fabric of the post-Civil Rights Movement where American society lies. As a result of such a mindset, racism becomes connotatively reduced to isolated incidents and individual encounters, rather than being systemic in nature. Despite narrow definitions of the colonial era, ranging from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth century, the gospel in a Western social context struggles against the long lifespan of colonialism, which extends into the twenty-first century. Just as W.E.B. DuBois coined the expression "double consciousness" in his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, Walker-Barnes applies the context to the practice of the Christian life through a distorted Christological vantage point, where unmindful racial minorities, and especially Black Americans, may subconsciously see the Jesus of the Gospels through the eyes of others.

The author builds on a generation of womanist and feminist theologians and intersectionality scholarship. Early in the book, Walker-Barnes draws from the scholarship of sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to address theological themes about the human condition in terms of group interactions, gendered racism, and racialized sexism. The author's strongest critique of Christian racial reconciliation as part of a social movement lies in the collective intent of advocates to address racism while evading broad moral injury related to whiteness: "With their symmetrical treatment approach to race relations, many racial reconciliation efforts have advocated a mutual and equal obligations perspective, which assumes that white people and people of color are equally responsible for the sins of racial divisions" (114). Such treatment draws from the frame of "collective guilt" and functions as what twentieth-century social theorists Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza called "techniques of neutralization."

*I Bring the Voices of My People* has a broad intended audience, which includes scholars of the social and behavioral sciences, practical theologians, activists, and especially lay readers who seek to challenge assumptions regarding intergroup relationships, the role and function of white supremacy, and Christian racial reconciliation. The book's greatest strength rests in its

explicit account of what forgiveness and reconciliation truly entail, through the exposure of the subtleties of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva originally termed “color-blind racism,” gender-neutral sexism, colorism within the context of the politics of beauty, and expressing biblical justice in twenty-first century concrete terms rather than broad abstractions. Readers will most benefit from Walker-Barnes’ scholarship through attempting to understand the perspective of those outside one’s group. Readers will become awakened to the impact patriarchal privilege has on everyday life, and will seek to understand how racial minorities have been silenced in multiple ways. Towards the end of the book, Walker-Barnes transitions toward addressing aspects of liturgical expression and the inclination for a significant portion of churches to neglect lamentations from the oppressed: “U.S. church services are dominated by triumphalist praise and worship. While victory and triumph are important themes in the Christian tradition, they are incomplete without also giving expression to the grief, pain, and anger that arise from protracted suffering” (214). The timeliness of *I Bring the Voices of My People* rests in local and global reckoning with systems of injustice, the breaking of traditions of silencing, and a confrontation with the truth about the human condition, the role of privilege, and victimhood.

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Jason C. Boyd. *The Naked Preacher: Action Research and a Practice of Preaching*. London: SCM Press, 2018. 240 pages. \$21.65.

*The Naked Preacher* emerges from Jason C. Boyd's post-graduate research inquiry, "What is going on when I preach a sermon?" Boyd examines the question via action research, practical theology, and Ignatian spirituality in self-reflexive collaboration with congregation members in a communicative space.

Other books have made significant contributions to congregational studies, local theology, conversational preaching, and communicative ethics; Boyd's particular contribution brings together methodologies of action research (democratic and dialogical style research emphasizing collaboration and self-reflexive critical awareness) with external "deeds" of lived theology, as well as internal development guided by Ignatian spiritual practice. This book is not a "how to" for practitioners who want to "collaborate with others to gain insight into their practices" (xiv), however; rather, it is a journey through Boyd's own processes of theoretical and practical discovery—including vulnerable insights from the successes and deficiencies of his research approaches and his interactions with congregation members.

The Introduction acquaints the reader with the concept of the "naked preacher"—which, fortunately, is not about the absence of clerical attire in the pulpit but is rather an acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities of preachers willing to see themselves reflected in the eyes of their parishioners and do the difficult work of self-analysis in collaboration with others.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of action research that explains what it is, which is a difficult task given the ambiguities and cyclical/evolutionary nature of action research. Boyd defends it as a credible form of research to scholars who may object to what they perceive as a lapse of scientific objectivity into "unreliable" subjectivity. Chapter 2 creates a bridge between action research and practical theology, negotiating the boundaries between the two and showing how action research can keep preaching and theology honest, creating a "habitus" of faith that is conscious of the potential gap between "belief" and "practice."

Chapter 3 describes the initiation process of Boyd's research, including the opening of a communicative space called "Word Café," how he orients himself and congregation members who want to participate in the research, the choices he made in terms of participants and questions, how he negotiated the ongoing tension of the insider/outsider dynamic and power relations, and other practical elements of beginning a collaborative research conversation. Chapter 4 primarily focuses on Boyd's dialogical approach to the Bible and the theology of the "word." In this chapter, Boyd uses the Lucan account of the road to Emmaus as a site from which to speak to issues of action/reflection as single praxis, the physical nature of knowing, hospitality in a communicative space, the authority of experience, de-familiarization and reflection as potentially transformative, and the importance of women's voices.

Chapter 5 encourages the practice of attentiveness, highlighting biblical examples of seeing vs. looking and hearing vs. listening. This chapter also places the concepts of "visibility" and "nakedness" in conjunction with one another in the context of dialogue, and shares some of Boyd's personal experience with the levels of self-reflection triggered by congregational observations of his preaching habits. Chapter 6 touches on the positionality of the preacher, power dynamics, guarding spaces for traditionally marginalized voices, internal struggles of being vulnerably "visible" as preacher/researcher to perceptions and feedback from the congregation, and the necessity of profound awareness. Chapter 7 provides examples of interactions that took place in the research process, and concludes the book with an "un-

conclusion,” emphasizing the ongoing, evolving, and unfinished nature of this kind of research, as well as its potential for future inquiries beyond preaching.

On the one hand, this book is a bit messy—which Boyd admits from the outset—perhaps necessarily so because it follows his journey with action research, which is itself a “messy business” (32). However, the detailed introduction of multiple new scholars and ideas in each chapter made for laborious reading in some sections. The book is heavy on theory and could perhaps have benefitted from balancing theory with more real-life practical examples of how the theories played out. On the other hand, Boyd ultimately fulfills his contract with the readers to bring them along on his research journey. His modeling of vulnerable and deeply self-reflexive collaborative work toward advancing his growth as a preacher and researcher is refreshingly honest and admirable.

While the book is called *The Naked Preacher*, preaching is not necessarily the central focus. The intersection of action research, practical theology, and Ignatian spirituality could be a generative site for collaborative research in fields beyond homiletics. This book will be of interest primarily to homileticians and others with a predilection toward research in congregational contexts, and to any brave preachers who are researchers at heart and who are willing to preach... well, “naked.”

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Michael J. Hyde. *The Interruption That We Are: The Health of the Lived Body, Narrative, and Public Moral Argument*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018. 212 pages. \$49.99.

Interruption is often perceived as an irritation that interferes with an individual's routine and can lead to anxiety or frustration. However, interruption could play a positive role in stimulating an individual or a community to engage in deep reflection, asking, "What is really going on?" and "What can we do to improve our situation?" In *The Interruption That We Are*, Michael J. Hyde argues that interruption is the foundation of progress. Hyde contends that interruption creatively forms a narrative of the lived body for the purpose of engaging a wider audience in public moral argument. The author asserts that interruption is a natural part of human existence and that competency in rhetoric is required to reveal the truth behind what we see. Interruption calls for us "to be open-minded, virtuous, dignified, and skilled in having a truthful way with words" (8).

Hyde's theory of interruption engages with scientific, biblical, and philosophical perspectives. In the later chapters of the book, he reflects on the theory in relation to concrete examples concerning people with disability or illness. In the first chapter, "The First Interruption," he contends that both the biblical and scientific views of the beginning of the world are grounded in interruption. The Bible begins with God interrupting a state of nothingness by bringing about a state of somethingness (20). Hyde argues that interruption is the very nature of God who "calls for acknowledgement throughout the Bible" (20). Scientific theory also points to the world beginning with the interruption of the big bang and suggests that interruption is a key part of the evolution of DNA from the monocellular cell.

In the second chapter, "Existence and the Self," Hyde describes Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger's arguments on how human beings can be authentic by answering their existential questions. Kierkegaard's society in Denmark was immersed in Christendom with its clergy enculturated with "eloquent babbling or talkativeness" (39), and he argued that everyone was tasked to contemplate the presence of God through their own existence. Kierkegaard's influence contributed to Heidegger's consideration of the avoidance of conformity in wider and popular thoughts and talk, which he termed "idle talk." In *Being and Time* Heidegger suggested that being is the place in which Being discloses itself and is open to and engages the "dynamic function of the interruption that we are" (52).

In the third chapter, "Existence and the Other," Hyde evaluates ethical concerns relating to the interruption that we are by discussing the work of Emmanuel Levinas. As the individual is surrounded by others, Levinas believes that the individual is exposed to the presence of otherness, or as he terms it, the "face." The face speaks to people by not only generating a "call of conscience," but also demanding an ethical response from them even before they assert their freedom not to respond (69). In other words, human existence is bound by its moral obligation to be concerned about the wellbeing of others to the point that this movement between self and others is not reciprocal. One finds the one's existence by serving others, not the other way around (71).

From the fourth to the seventh chapter, Hyde introduces several applied examples of the theory that he sets out in the earlier chapters. In Chapter 4, "The Right Word," Hyde discusses the case of Charles Siebert whose heart problem led him to resist the reductionism of regarding the human heart as merely a "pump." Chapter 5, "The Self as Other, the Other as Self," describes the struggle between Harriet McBryde Johnson, who was born with a degenerative neuromuscular disease, and Peter Singer, who advocated euthanasia for utilitarian purposes. The

interaction of Johnson and Singer in searching for an appropriate terminology led to acknowledgment and transformation. In Chapter 6, “A Good Showing of a Bad Situation,” Hyde points to how Brittany Maynard and Kara Tippetts had differing responses to impending death from cancer. Finally, Chapter 7, “Our Posthuman Future,” discusses Francis Collins’s work on human DNA and its implications for posthumans engineered to diminish the interruption that we are while pursuing perfection.

Hyde is aiming for an interdisciplinary method with a balance between religion, science, and philosophy, but some of his biblical interpretation might be questioned. For example, Hyde considers Jesus’ statement, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). Hyde asserts that ambiguity in Jesus’s words serves the purpose of eliciting “discussion, debate, and the practice of rhetoric” (21). However, as a Christian influenced by Wesley’s theology, I believe that the perfectionist impulse in Jesus’s words mainly means that we become perfect in our love for God and neighbors, as God is perfect in love.

Overall, Hyde’s work is timely and important in a period when we are all experiencing the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has caused the suspension of in-person gatherings, depression and anxiety, job losses, and the deaths of family members and friends. We are interrupted by climate change, racial tension, and divisive and violent rhetoric in political administrations. Hyde’s phenomenological reflection stimulates preachers in particular to be more competent in our rhetorical response to contemporary circumstances by seeking meaning and calling for action.

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Matthew D. Kim. *A Little Book for New Preachers: How and Why to Study Homiletics*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. 126 pages. \$12.

In *A Little Book for New Preachers*, Matthew D. Kim gives a broad overview of the study of preaching and its practice. The book is divided into three sections: "Why Study Preaching?" "Characteristics of Faithful Preaching," and "Characteristics of Faithful Preachers."

In the first section, "Why Study Preaching?" Kim laments the common experience that many homileticians and preachers relate to: namely, engaging in this discipline that is often maligned by culture at large and underappreciated in theological education. He makes a case that preaching is still central to the life of the church because people still "hunger for faithful exposition of Scripture" (26). Furthermore, he argues that preaching should not be a peripheral discipline in theological education because it is "the very capstone and consummation of all other theological disciplines" (29). Kim goes on to name some of the burdens and joys of preaching and then briefly explores the legacy of preaching handed on to preachers of every generation: the legacy of God's word, the legacy of heralds, and the legacy of tradition. New and experienced preachers alike will recognize this legacy as both a burden and a joy. Section one ends with a discussion around the goal of preaching, which is to make disciples who are obedient to God, Christlike, and whose love is transformed and directed to God.

Section 2, "The Characteristics of Faithful Preaching," expounds on the following characteristics that work together to form a sermon: faithful interpretation, faithful cultural exegesis, and faithful application. Regarding faithful biblical interpretation, Kim argues in favor of a five-step, authorial-cultural model of hermeneutics, which begins by seeking an understanding of the biblical author's culture and intent in writing. This section also offers practical advice on how to choose a text, and tips like "spend as much time in exegesis as you do in preparing the outline and manuscript" (65). Faithful interpretation is described as the "first key element for faithful preaching" (72), but the second is not far behind: faithful cultural exegesis. The goal of faithful cultural exegesis is to understand the culture so that one can more effectively proclaim God's word in that culture. Kim readily recognizes that "culture" is not a monolith, so preachers must exegete multiple layers of culture including generational cultures, ethnic and racial cultures, socioeconomic and educational cultures, etc. This is framed as a deeply pastoral concern; learning to faithfully exegete the cultures in one's congregation is a way for the pastor to honor the *imago Dei* in each person and love them well. The third characteristic of faithful preaching is faithful application. Kim encourages specificity and variety in application; he directs preachers to the possibility that application does not always mean giving listeners a list of three new things to do in the coming week. For example, sometimes, application may be more about being rather than doing.

In the third and final section, Kim describes the ethos of a faithful preacher. He makes the case that a faithful preacher will be characterized as a loving pastor who is warm, direct, available to the congregation, and appropriately intimate in the sense of sharing one's life with the congregation. The point is clear: preaching and pastoring belong together. Within this section, there is ample practical advice for new and seasoned preachers alike when Kim addresses the importance of self-care and Sabbath for maintaining one's character.

This book is directed toward new preachers and students of homiletics. However, it will also help the seasoned preacher who is growing tired or who feels the burden of the weekly task before them. In the latter case, it is a helpful refresher and an encouragement to see the preaching task as the sacred and formative thing. The book does not attempt to delve into the mechanics of

sermon writing, though Kim does offer suggestions for books on expository methods for preaching. Kim's high regard for scripture as God's word comes through clearly, as does the preference for an exposition-application approach to sermon writing. This book is a valuable primer on the task of preaching and the life of the Christian preacher.

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Walter Brueggemann. *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. 80 pages. \$14.

In *Virus as a Summons to Faith*, Brueggemann invites us to see COVID-19 as a summons to the renewed and reflective practice of prophetic imagination and lamentation. For Brueggemann, COVID-19, despite its unusualness, is not strange to the biblical faith. He argues that the devastations caused by COVID-19 reflect the same plague summons that all prophets in the Bible hear in the midst of calamity. Drawing on biblical verses, Brueggemann brings forth deep biblical wisdom to provide helpful guidance to face the current virus crisis.

This volume consists of short seven chapters. The first three chapters explore the nature of God. The next two chapters deal with Christian relationship with God through prayer, and the final two chapters call for a new Christian imagination amid the virus. The theological themes in each chapter are closely related to each other. Brueggemann does not provide scientific and medical approaches to the pandemic, but as a Christian scholar he focuses on how one should rightly understand the nature of God in the context of the pandemic.

Brueggemann opens up the volume by exploring the kind of God in whom we believe in the context of the pandemic. He uses mercy or kindness (*hesed* in Hebrew) to define the nature of God and God's tenacious covenant with humans. The author employs Leviticus, Exodus, and Job narratives as the biblical sources for God's tenacious covenant with God's people. Central to Brueggemann's understanding of God is a merciful God whose presence amid disaster is dynamic. God is not just up in heaven without being present with people on the earth. Brueggemann's understanding of God's tenacious solidarity with God's people serves as a motivating power for Christian hope and action in the face of the virus (1–20). Interestingly, Brueggemann's understanding of God is similar to Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel and German Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann in their understanding of the God of *pathos*—the God who shares an active suffering and tenacious solidarity with God's people.

After exploring the nature of God's tenacious relationship with humans in general, Brueggemann discusses the task of a Christian's ontological relationship with God through prayer. This is the central theme of his book, which sees the "virus as a summons to faith." Readers will find the chapter on prayer and faith amid the virus especially helpful for their spiritual journey as a personal practice, and as a communal practice. Brueggemann sees prayer as a primary way Christians can deepen covenantal attentiveness. Through prayer, Christians grow in finding truth in God, and in their awareness of God's comfort and compassion amid the virus. Brueggemann emphasizes that the goal of prayer is not that a given request be granted, but rather that a covenantal relationship of lamentation is enacted. Building on Psalm 77, he argues that prayer is not simply a devotional act, but is the self's total reliance on God's love amid the virus (35–46).

Brueggemann's concluding two chapters address a summons to a new future. The virus has caused problems for people in different ways. While many elderly and more vulnerable people of all races are afflicted with and oppressed by the virus, some (but not all) people of color, especially of Asian descent, have been discriminated against and marginalized. In these chapters, Brueggemann's meditation on Isaiah 43:18–19 takes us to the heart of imagining a new future. Brueggemann teaches us that the God of love and justice "may be amid this crisis to do the hard work of checking arrogance and curbing hubris" (57). He invites us to see the virus not as the last word, but as a *kairos* for imagining God doing new things among us. Brueggemann teaches us that we are not passively imagining God doing new things without participating in

God's act of the new thing, but he reminds us that our covenant with God summons us to do the twin moral habits of what he famously called "prophetic imagination"—a term he coined some 40 years ago.

Brueggemann urges that we are to lament and grieve with those afflicted with the virus and those groaning over losing their loved ones. He also encourages us to criticize forms of social injustice and racial discrimination happening amid and in relation to the virus. To criticize injustice means to expose sheer lies and to speak the truth—there is no hope of a new future without telling the truth. Hope is rooted in God's promise of a new future, and truth is to be told in order to see a feasible justice.

In short, this is classic Brueggemann—a prolific scholar, public intellectual, and churchman of prophetic imagination. His writing is accessible to both scholars and lay Christians asking questions about God, COVID-19, and Christian responsibilities. To be clear, this is not purely a scholarly book; rather, it is a meditative resource that summons every one of us to renew our covenantal and spiritual relationship with God, and to renew our moral and social responsibilities for hospitable relationships with our neighbors in a time of loss, grief, and uncertainty. Pick up the book, read it, and meditate on it with your families, friends, and the church. If you do, your relationship with God and with your neighbors across religious and racial differences in the contemporary context of the coronavirus crisis will not be the same!

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HyeRan Kim-Cragg. *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018. 171 pages. \$19.20.

In her latest work, HyeRan Kim-Cragg argues for interdependence as a means of navigating the communal way of life that Christians and Christian churches seek to model. The primary purpose of *Interdependence* is to suggest that practical theology should include postcolonial feminism as a critical optic for viewing our interdependent lives, in which the power differentials of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation intersect and interconnect in complicated ways. From her critical analysis of why contemporary practical theological approaches have failed to recognize the connection between colonialism and the complex problems of life, Kim-Cragg seeks to construct a practical theological concept of interdependence. She then suggests how we might practice it for the sake of recovering, renewing, or rebuilding community in the intercultural, interreligious, and postcolonial context.

The audience Kim-Cragg has in mind is practical theologians and ministers who are asked to examine the roots of the injustice leveled against those who remain outside dominant academic and ecclesial discourses. In this book, Kim-Cragg attempts to create an alternative space for the lived experiences of those who have been overlooked by the colonial gaze, and uses a variety of methods to do so, such as case studies, interviews, and narrative approaches. Moreover, she encourages practical theologians and ministers to find routes for teaching and practicing interdependence in specific settings.

This book consists of six important chapters. Kim-Cragg does not merely attempt to unveil power structures from a postcolonial feminist perspective, but remains thoroughly focused on those who are marginalized by the dominant practical theological discourses: children, youth, non-Christians, immigrants, and non-human species. Shortly after opening with a personal account of a car accident that led her to identify interdependence as the main theme in her practical theological work, Kim-Cragg presents such interdependence as a key approach in negotiating “a wholeness of personhood” (9). In the first chapter, she sharply criticizes the modernist notion of personhood that normalizes the autonomous and independent self. Drawing wisdom from East Asian anthropology and Jewish literature, she attempts to characterize interdependence as a way of seeking justice in the form of right relationships. In the following chapters, Kim-Cragg poignantly criticizes asymmetrical power structures in multiple disciplines of practical theology and then keenly explores the ways in which differences and the agency of marginalized groups are recognized and revived. In chapter 2, she presents queer and mixed-race youth as narrative agents whose experiences of hybridized identity can be used to criticize white heterosexual family norms and raise a claim for the recognition of differences. Chapter 3 characterizes children as equal members of the church, whose participation in liturgical practices can contribute to both wholesome worship and participatory community. Non-Christians then challenge the logic that disregards the possibility of multiple religious belongings and commitments in chapter 4, while non-white immigrants, who are often represented as strangers, aliens, or villains, are creatively seen as equal members of society in chapter 5. Finally, non-human species that challenge anthropocentrism and reset humanity’s mission of reconciliation with all creatures occupy chapter 6. In those six chapters, Kim-Cragg persistently argues that recognizing differences of overlooked groups of people is the prerequisite for building interdependent relationships and even for constructing just communities in an individualized and fragmented world.

In crafting the work of practical theology in relation to existential, socio-political, and ministerial concerns, Kim-Cragg's contribution to the field of practical theology is significant. On the one hand, she demonstrates the relevance of postcolonial feminist methodology by analyzing the complex issues arising from the situated and embodied context of humanity. Her urgent request for postcolonial feminism helps equip us with cross-boundary approaches to the problems of life that compensate for compartmentalized hierarchical approaches. On the other hand, Kim-Cragg's exploration of ways of seeking interdependence with those who are overlooked in the dominant discourses of practical theology is remarkable. By treating children, youth, non-Christians, immigrants, and non-human species as agents who can challenge us to imagine our communities in different ways, Kim-Cragg's attempts to suggest mutual ways of rebuilding communities are worth our full attention. I strongly recommend this book to all readers who are engaged in reimagining an alternative way of living together.

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Frank A. Thomas. *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. 162 pages. \$18.

In *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon*, Frank A. Thomas continues a conversation begun in his 2018 book, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon*, seeking to answer the pressing question: “How do you survive (remain employed) after preaching a dangerous sermon?” (xvii). Thomas defines a dangerous sermon as one “based in the preacher’s moral imagination that upends and challenges the dominant moral hierarchy that operates in the church and/or cultural context of the preaching event” (xvii). Ultimately, his goal is to equip preachers who are “aware of different moral orders and working gospels [and so] ha[ve] the ability to develop messages that invite people beyond accidental and unintentional divisive rhetoric and polarizations by speaking to the heart of the inclusive faith tradition that brings people together by inspiring wonder, mystery, and hope” (68).

In the Introduction, Thomas outlines the book and revisits the concepts of moral imagination, empathy, and the church explored in his previous text. He reminds readers that moral hierarchies are often intermingled with dominance hierarchies and notes the way the church has “participated in establishing a theological dominance hierarchy closely aligned to the [cultural] dominance hierarchy” (xxv–xxvi). These realities require preachers to cultivate a moral imagination necessary to move towards a more inclusive church. In chapter 1, Thomas relies on the work of Andre Resner and Edward Farley to explore the idea of a “working gospel” and a critique of the bridge paradigm. Taken from Resner, Thomas understands a “working gospel” as the “imaginative and theological hermeneutical force” that shapes a preacher’s sermons and serves as a sort of “synopsis” or “encapsulation” of faith (9). Thomas suggests examples of “working gospels” in the American context such as the gospel of American exceptionalism, the gospel of denominationalism, or the social justice gospel. He then moves to discuss and illustrate Farley’s critique of the “bridge paradigm,” the construction of the “preachable ‘X’” or practical life lesson extracted from the text and preached to the detriment of the proclamation of the gospel. This conversation continues in chapter 2, as Thomas explores Paul’s “working gospel,” clarifies Farley’s critique of the bridge paradigm, and offers his own “working gospel.” In chapter 3, Thomas turns to consider the unconscious moral worldviews present in communities and congregations. Utilizing the work of George Lakoff, Thomas explores the dual moral orders in America, specifically the “Strict Father” morality of conservatives and the “Nurturant Parent” morality of progressives.

The final two chapters of the book move towards more concrete examples and practical suggestions. In chapter 4, Thomas considers the Rev. Jasper Williams Jr.’s eulogy of Aretha Franklin, a sermon that caused much debate and division, especially in the Black community. Thomas analyzes the sermon and extreme responses using Lakoff’s dual moral worldviews and Resner’s concept of a working gospel. In the final chapter, Thomas offers a series of practical suggestions on preaching dangerous sermons and then provides two of his own sermons as models for this challenging and important work.

Thomas’ *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon* is a timely, invitational, applicable, and broadly accessible contribution to the field of homiletics and preaching literature. Even as Thomas encourages preachers to offer “dangerous sermons,” he is acutely aware of the divisive state of congregations as well as the urgent questions and concerns of preachers seeking to offer proclamation in the present social and political climate. This book is also deeply invitational even as it is instructive and informative. While Thomas moves through a series of large, complex

concepts including moral hierarchies, working gospels, the bridge paradigm, and dual moral worldviews, he continually invites preachers to consider their own location and convictions by modeling this work. Whether sharing his own working gospel as encapsulated in the Gospel of Luke or offering models of dangerous sermons that embody awareness of competing worldviews and working gospels, Thomas invites preachers towards reflexivity and welcomes them into this difficult but necessary work. While the book is certainly written for preachers and seminarians who are called to preach dangerous sermons amidst divided congregations, Thomas names his hope that lay people will also utilize this book to support and encourage preachers to help congregations “more carefully discern their moral hierarchies” (xx).

Just as Thomas encourages ongoing conversation and reflection for readers, this work opens up a couple of possibilities for further integration and exploration. First, preachers and persons of faith might benefit from a stronger consideration of the connection between one’s unconscious worldview and working gospel. While Thomas briefly suggests this interconnection in his analysis of Williams’s sermon, a further exploration of this intersection could be insightful. Second, this ongoing work might benefit from more substantial consideration of those who do not fit the binary conservative/progressive worldviews as adopted from Lakoff. As Thomas names, preachers will be hard-pressed to reach “hardcore believers” of a differing worldview. Instead, the opportunity for inclusive dialogue is more possible with those who are “bi-conceptuals” or “pragmatic moderates” (44). Therefore, it may be helpful to explore those more moderate or bi-conceptual worldviews and offer examples that disrupt or complicate the conservative/progressive binary.

In the end, Frank Thomas utilizes insightful theoretical and theological concepts to offer an informed invitation to preachers, seminarians, and lay leaders to discern their own moral hierarchies, worldviews, and working gospels towards the goal of preaching messages that move beyond “unintentional divisive rhetoric and polarizations” towards proclamation of an inclusive and hope-filled gospel (xxix).

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Gayle Fisher-Stewart, ed. *Preaching Black Lives (Matter)*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2020. 284 pages.

“Black Lives Matter” is more than a catchphrase; it narrates the persistent struggle of Black people in the United States and around the globe as we demand that individuals and systems acknowledge our humanity. *Preaching Black Lives (Matter)* begins with the understanding that a range of institutions were built on the backs of Black people, and at our expense, and that Black people are still situated in these institutions, trying to find generative space.

The book is framed by the introductory reflections of the Rev. Kwasi Thornell, an Episcopal priest and lecturer in pastoral theology. Thornell recounts the death of an elderly Black Episcopalian layperson, whose funeral, which is both classically Episcopalian and authentically rooted in the Black church tradition, prompts an internal tension in him, leaving Thornell to wrestle with the question, “What does it mean to be Black the Episcopal Church?” This question is proverbially picked up by Fisher-Stewart, who constructs a paradigm of the church that challenges broader institutions to question embedded white supremacy and calls on stakeholders to take seriously a call to name and live into the reality that Black lives matter as a theological presupposition.

Fisher-Stewart draws on Bonhoeffer’s offering of Black Jesus, who understands the suffering and isolation of a people. She reminds the reader of Bonhoeffer’s sense that Black Jesus gave African Americans room to construct a theology outside of white social norms and thus gives Black people both philosophical and praxical space to deal with the imminence of God, who cares about justice in the here and now and not just in the afterlife. Fisher-Stewart then outlines a brief history of Rev. Florence Spearing Rudolph, an AME Zion pastor from the early-to-mid-twentieth century, and the Rev. Dr. Anna Pauline Murray, an African American Episcopal priest from the 1970s and 80s. Here, Fisher-Stewart briefly uses a sample of their sermons as examples of how Black Jesus challenges the white paradigm. Finally, she lays down a challenge for her contributing authors and readers of the book to consider the responsibility of the preacher, regardless of their race, class, and/or gender, to examine the need to preach that Black lives matter.

Subsequently, the first section of the book includes a series of sermons and short homilies from Episcopal clergy from a range of social, racial, and geographic locations. The sermons do not always explicitly name the context of preaching; however, they are seemingly situated in a variety of contexts: some are clearly addressing the Black church while others are situated in white or multiracial congregations. They offer biblical reflection within the worship context of ordinary time and the liturgical calendar.

Part 2 focuses on what it means to advocate for a message of Black Lives Matter in and around the church. The section addresses the history between Black activism and the Black church, highlighting both the symbiotic and contentious relationship between the two. In particular, authors like Claudia Marion Allen, a Seventh-day Adventist activist, name the silence of large pockets of the church in the wake of Ferguson. Allen traces a history of Christian silence in reference to Black suffering and death. Various authors also pick up on issues of intersectionality, naming the ways that the church has been complicit in said suffering and offering ways the church can participate in cultivating systemic change.

In part 3 Fisher-Stewart begins with a brief conversation about how Black scholars have changed the landscape of theological education, specifically naming James H. Cone, Kelly

Brown Douglas, and Cain Hope Felder as pioneers and leaders in shifting theological imagination for Black people. This section also includes reflections by Kelly Brown Douglas who offers a four-part framework for theological institutions and teaching. Brown Douglas says that seminaries need to facilitate moral dialogue, which affirms the whole of humanity as divine creation and sacred. Next, seminaries need moral memory which requires an honest telling of our histories without an intention to exonerate or valorize institutions and individuals but simply for the sake of truth-telling. Third, there is a need for moral proximity, which requires theological institutions to create environments where people can be around others who are different from themselves. Finally, theological institutions should see themselves as called to co-labor with God in racial healing and reconciliation, which means that institutions must actively participate in difficult, generative dialogue about racism and racial trauma for the sake of communal healing.

Fisher-Stewart et al. offer a series of faithful sermons and prophetic social commentary about how the church and theological education must proceed if there is any desire to be relevant in our contemporary context, be faithful to a witness of God, or make any claims on the nature of morality and ethics. Each section of the book offers concluding reflection questions to help guide the reader into an interrogation of how they are situated within the racialized paradigm of the church. Fisher-Stewart and her co-authors help guide a deeply practical, theological conversation about who the church will be in the midst of an American reckoning around race and race politics.

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Cleophus J. LaRue and Luiz C. Nascimento. *The Future Shape of Christian Proclamation: What the Global South Can Teach Us About Preaching*. Eugene: Cascade, 2020. 253 pages. \$29.

The editors begin this collection of essays with this opening statement: “Christianity is turning brown and moving south” (1). They rightly maintain that as it does, preaching is going to be one of those practices affected by that movement. The book contains eleven essays, all from individuals who in one way or another are deeply connected to the global South as professors of homiletics and theology.

Catherine Williams, who teaches preachers on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, expresses well the challenge to Westerners in her essay. She writes, “North American religious life often suffers from a silo effect...boundaries keep the people of God from the rich cross-pollination that can fertilize and multiply our efforts at spreading God’s good news” (131). These essays affirm that there are a myriad of ways to communicate the Gospel.

This volume demonstrates the diversity of preaching in the Southern Hemisphere and challenges this silo mentality that seems to dominate in Western culture. One size does not fit all. The contributors offer ways of broadening one’s homiletic perspective. They do not write off homiletic theory produced by Western cultures. They acknowledge how the global South has benefited and been heavily influenced by the homiletic theory of that culture. Yet, they advocate customizing it to new contexts in the South. Eliseco Pere-Alvarez pleads for the South to honor their own homiletic authorities and reminds them to pray, “Lead us not into imitation” (33).

This book introduces homileticians to a rich cross-cultural experience. It explores preaching within a number of different countries, including Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, India, Nigeria, Singapore, Indonesia, and Fiji.

In his opening essay, Pere-Alvarez envisions the world map being flipped upside down with the Southern Hemisphere on “top” of the map and the Northern Hemisphere on the “bottom.” He calls this “flipping over the tortilla” (13). His basic appeal is to recognize the South as being on equal footing with the North because the South has much to offer the practice of preaching and the theories of homiletics. Among its offerings is the methodological framework out of which it works. Whereas Western thought polarizes knowledge and experience, thinking and doing, theory and action, countries of the South do not. Whereas the Western world polarizes speculative theology from practical theology (e.g., the PhD versus the DMin), the two are one and the same for those in the South (16). Thus, the way to know Christ is not just through theology but through discipleship that incorporates both theology and practice. Flipping the tortilla “fries thinking and doing in the same skillet” (16). Flipping the tortilla also means flipping the Wesleyan Quadrilateral that prioritizes scripture over experience. Southern homiletics prioritizes experiences and, in addition, uses plural nouns: experiences, hermeneutics, traditions, and reasons (24). The emphasis is on interpreting “life with the help of the Bible” (66). Flipping the tortilla also challenges the preacher in the face of oppression and injustices to deliver a message and not a massage (26). Northern homiletics endorses acculturation, whereas Southern homiletics opts for enculturation “or treating all cultures as co-equals, since all of them are vehicles of God’s grace and, at the same time, all of them are tainted by sin” (28). Southern homiletics is fundamentally communal. Northern homiletics is fundamentally individual.

The essay by Carlos Emilio Ham, “How Are They to Hear without a Preacher?” comes from a Cuban Protestant perspective and shows how preaching in Cuba is dependent on many mainline homileticians and theologians, such as Tom Long, Leonora Tisdale, Richard Hays and

James Sanders. Ham combines these Western mainline perspectives with Latin American and Caribbean theologians of liberation (70–91).

Carol Tomlin's essay, "The Hermeneutics of African Caribbean Homiletics," discovers the roots of their preaching tradition in African American homiletics as described by Cleophus LaRue. In addition, she affirms Fred Craddock's model of fusing form and content together, and espouses his inductive method of preaching. Deductive is more normative, but she wants to see more Jamaican preachers use the inductive. She takes issue, however, with Craddock's view of deductive preaching, arguing on the basis of LaRue's description of African American preaching that deductive sermons in Black preaching are dynamic and not static (97). She also believes that following the lectionary can stifle preaching. She writes, "African Caribbean clergy... maintain that the Holy Spirit should be at liberty to change the direction of the sermon completely, including the topic theme, or actual content, which sometimes happens minutes before the actual delivery of a sermon" (99). She believes that episodic-type preaching has been a staple form. However, more recently preaching has emphasized spontaneity and improvisation (100).

All through these essays there is a cry for global South preachers to understand and value the context, traditions, and the rich culture into which they preach. Readers, in addition, will find a lot of emphasis on the role and the power of the Holy Spirit in preaching and in the teaching of homiletics. These essayists, however, do not describe global South preaching through rose-colored glasses. They acknowledge weaknesses and express concern over syncretistic preaching, prosperity gospel, sloppy hermeneutics, overdependence on the Holy Spirit, and preachers who continue to preach from a colonial perspective, just to mention a few.

The book does have some minor limitations. For one, it is not clearly organized. No chapter numerations are included in the table of contents nor in the body of the volume, except in the introduction by the editors. The second "essay" is not an essay but a sermon preached by the author who wrote the first essay, and seems out of place. For another, how and why these contributors were chosen is not answered. The editors say these individuals are not necessarily representative of global South preaching. Nor are they inclusive. So why these contributors? Also, very little is said about the practice of confession, self-disclosure, or the role of ethos. Rather, the focus is primarily on sermon form, context of the listeners, experience, and the theology behind the sermon.

Overall this volume is a welcome addition to assisting Western homiletics out of our silo mentality. More exposure to the preaching of different cultures needs to be pursued.

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Eric C. Miller and Jonathan J. Edwards, eds. *Rhetoric of the Protestant Sermon in America: Pulpit Discourse at the Turn of the Millennium*. London: Lexington Books, 2020. 181 pages. \$90.

This volume had its inception in 2018 just preceding the National Communication Association Convention in Salt Lake City. Later the papers were revised, edited, and published in this volume. Nine essays make up the volume and look at the preaching of more “notable figures” such as Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Jeremiah Wright, Mark Driscoll, Nadia Boltz-Weber, Brandan Robertson, and Otis Moss III. These individuals represent certain genres of sermons such as the opportunistic sermon, the apology sermon, the political sermon, the self-help sermon, the confessional sermon, the “leave taking” sermon, and the “coming out” sermon. The book basically organizes these sermons and preachers in chronological order. The editors call their approach a case study.

Eric Miller argues in the introduction that the American sermon has been marginalized by scholars because they are more interested in rhetorical events that focus on diversity. The Protestant sermon by contrast has been dominated by white males (x). However, Miller makes the case that the American Protestant sermon has wielded tremendous influence on the surrounding culture and on politics as this “sermonic discourse filters out into the Public Square” (xi). He maintains that the sermon demands another look.

The first essay begins with Lauren Lemley looking at Puritan preaching, which she believes served as the foundational blueprint for Protestant preaching in North America. The “Puritan rhetoric inaugurated enduring themes of American identity” (3). She identifies three themes that continue to be fundamental to contemporary Protestant preaching: a desire for simple and practical theology that is based on scripture; the use of the jeremiad, which holds up the flaws of the present-day community against an idealized standard and the importance of reestablishing that ideal; and the complex relationship between politics and religion (6).

Following the opening chapter, Meridith Styer focuses on the opportunistic preaching of Jerry Falwell. Styer reveals how Falwell uses the sermon as an enthymeme for God’s voice and offers listeners a respectable justification for racism and for opposing the civil rights movement. Mark Ward follows in chapter 3 with another evangelical preacher, Jimmy Swaggart, and the apology sermon. Ward analyzes the strategies that ultimately enabled Swaggart to continue to maintain his audience.

In chapter 4, Luke Winslow and Daniel Young provide an overview of the self-help and prosperity gospel preaching of T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, and Joyce Meyer. Their assessment finds that self-help and prosperity gospels share basic common themes. One theme is that both are “uniquely individualistic”; the individual is autonomous (70). A second is that both base their strategy on “magical voluntarism” (72), that is, it is all in your mind. When listeners transform their mindset, they can change their reality “through conscious and willful choices made independently of others” (74). A final theme that connects the two is that it is God’s will that you be wealthy but not for your own sake. Rather it is for the sake of demonstrating God’s favor (76).

Jonathan Edwards investigates the political sermonizing of Jeremiah Wright in chapter 5. Edwards identifies the dangers of not considering who the audience is, and the context. In Wright’s case, the media did not understand the audience or the context, and thus maligned Wright. Edwards concludes, “A political sermon, like any other sermon, is most commonly a message for a particular community which carry particular assumptions, doubts, needs, and aspirations” (96).

In the “leave taking” sermon in chapter 6, Robert Reid assesses Mark Driscoll’s sermon in which Driscoll tells the congregation that he is taking a temporary leave of absence because of accusations of abuse leveled against him. What Reid discovers is the clear distinction between a preacher who believes he or she is displaying sincerity and an audience’s perception of a preacher’s authenticity (104). The shift of focus is found between what happens within the preacher to what happens within the listeners (109). Authenticity is something listeners experience when they leave the sermon. Sincerity is related to the way in which the preacher delivers the sermon with passion, conviction, and clarity.

Kelsey Minnick, in chapter 7, engages in a case study of Nadia Bolz-Weber and her use of the confessional sermon. In assessing Bolz-Weber’s sermon, Minnick discovers, among other things, that the longstanding advice to make sure your public confession is about past and not present transgressions is effectively and successfully violated by Bolz-Weber. Minnick concludes that listeners have the responsibility of deciding if the confession is nothing more than self-absorption or if it is authentic.

In chapter 8, the coming out sermon, Cory Geraths studies the sermon of Brandan Robertson, an openly bisexual man, four days after the Obergefell ruling. Geraths identifies how the rhetorical tools of *kairos*, *akairos*, and *metanoia* are instrumental in the effectiveness of his sermon.

In chapter 9, Theon Hill examines Otis Moss III’s style of Black preaching. He shows how “Blue Note preaching” is a paradigm for addressing social injustice. Hill unpacks how the Blues influence preaching and how a “Blues moan” must occur before hope can be offered.

The contributors to this volume are all reputable scholars in the field of rhetoric and communication theory. They uncover underlying rhetorical strategies in sermons preached by well-known pulpiteers in the United States toward the end of the twentieth and first part of the twenty-first centuries. They are to be applauded for their efforts not to discard the sermon as a critical rhetorical form that has profound influence in the public square.

There is, however, at least one glaring omission in their choice of preachers to include. One of the most “notable preachers” of the late twentieth century is Billy Graham and the evangelistic sermon. Graham influenced millions of people and served as spiritual advisor for every U.S. president from Harry Truman to the present. Any study of representative preachers in the United States during that time must of necessity include Graham.

In addition, the title of this book, *Protestant Sermons in America*, is misleading. That is because all the preachers included come exclusively from a specific location in the Americas, the United States. No preachers from South America or a big part of North America (viz., Canada) are included. A more restricted or specific title would be preferable.

Overall, this book should generate more interest in investigating the powerful influence the Protestant sermon has had on religion and politics in both the public and private sphere. As Miller says in the introduction, we want to “revitalize pulpit rhetoric as an object of critical inquiry”; “Perhaps more than any other rhetorical genre, it shapes worldviews, reinforces values, and informs the civic practice of millions of citizens” (xvii–xviii).

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Michael Pasquarello III. *The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2020. 288 pages. \$26.79.

As I was learning how to preach, somewhere I absorbed the lesson that each sermon should respond to the question, “What is the good news?” In a way, this is Michael Pasquarello’s vision in *The Beauty of Preaching: God’s Glory in Christian Proclamation*. Pasquarello is intent on helping preachers behold and proclaim the beauty of God in their sermons, and for Pasquarello that beauty is nothing more—and nothing less—than the gospel message that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (19). Beautiful preaching is doxological speech that glorifies God and shares the good news of the arrival of God’s beautiful, saving reign in Jesus, who is “both the messenger and message of God’s joy” (33). “Proclaiming the fullness of God’s work in Christ,” Pasquarello writes, “summons listeners to perceive the beauty of Jesus’s self-emptying death on a cross” (40).

*The Beauty of Preaching* elaborates this theme using scripture and the writings of historical figures including Augustine of Hippo, John Wesley, and Martin Luther. In chapter 1, Pasquarello examines the text of Isaiah 52:7 and the meaning of the “beautiful feet” of the messengers who announce God’s reign of peace. In his focus on the arrival of God’s reign, Pasquarello draws a connection between the life and death of Jesus and the beauty of humility and self-emptying for God’s glory, demonstrated by the widow in Mark’s Gospel who gives her last two coins to the temple treasury. Similarly, in chapter 2 Pasquarello lifts up the woman in Mark 14 who anoints Jesus with expensive nard, an act Jesus calls “a beautiful thing.” For Pasquarello, the woman’s self-giving act reflects those who are called by the Spirit to delight in “participating in the Son’s offering of himself back to the Father in undivided love” (62).

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the life and works of Augustine, particularly his shift from a love of the “natural beauty” of human wisdom, elaborate language, and created things, to praising God as the Creator of all that is beautiful. Pasquarello reflects on Augustine’s love of attention and approval, noting that the primary obstacle to hearing and seeing God was his pride. For Augustine, right appreciation of created things required humility to see the beauty of the “weakness” of Christ and thus the glory of God. Pasquarello writes, “To see the goodness of things is to see them in God, to delight in them in God, to enjoy them in God, and to proclaim them in God” (97). Preaching, then, humbly follows “the wisdom, language, idiom, and movement of Scripture that points beyond itself to Christ” (113).

In chapter 5, Pasquarello looks to John Wesley’s preaching, which offers the beauty of Christ’s holiness to hearers so that they might be convicted and pardoned of their sins, and empowered to live holy and grace-filled lives. Preachers themselves must be suffused with the beauty of divine love because “Beautiful preaching springs from the faith and love of preachers who have been swept up by the Spirit in the church’s offering of itself in prayer and praise to God through the ministry of Christ” (160). In chapter 6, Pasquarello reviews the preaching of Martin Luther, who suggests that in Christ the “ugliness” of sin is transformed by grace through faith into beauty that praises God and loves neighbor.

Pasquarello follows other postliberal homileticians in affirming the “strangeness” of the gospel and its peculiar power to shape and convert the hearer in its retelling, and as such he does not give much attention to issues of interpretation or language. Additionally, Pasquarello makes assertions that may not feel universal to readers, such as that the “primary” sins are pride and self-centeredness—sins which though grievous tend to reflect the experiences of those in power and privilege, rather than the lives of those suffering hardship and oppression. Even

Pasquarello's treatment of the Magnificat emphasizes the ways in which Mary is humbled by her encounter with God, rather than lifted up. Additionally, his orientation toward personal conversion from sin and his occasional correlations of humility with poverty and suffering leave unaddressed questions about systemic sin and injustice.

*The Beauty of Preaching* is a profoundly theological and spiritual text, and as such is not a handbook of advice on how to preach beautifully. However, Pasquarello's gift to preachers is the reminder that "We cannot preach that in which we do not participate through the work of the Holy Spirit" (147). Key is the formation of preachers shaped by scripture and prayer, and who are engaged in a life of holiness and faithfulness to the Triune God. Within this frame, preachers are relieved of having to impress or dazzle with their skill and wit. The beauty of preaching is a theological aesthetic in which we "attune our perceptions and words to the incarnate beauty of Christ, who is the image and expression of God's glory in human form" (193).

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Joni S. Sancken. *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 122 pages. \$15.20.

*Words That Heal* by Joni Sancken is the fifth volume in the Artistry of Preaching Series, edited by Paul Scott Wilson. This book is a practical but insightful resource to equip preachers to speak the gospel of healing to congregants who bear wounds caused by past personal and collective traumatic events. In this volume, Sancken seeks a trauma-sensitive preaching model that can foster healing from trauma.

First, Sancken defines trauma as “circumstances in which a person survives a life-threatening experience or loses a loved one suddenly, where one’s ability to process experience is surpassed by the breadth or depth of the experience itself” (xiii). Further, she renames them “soul wounds,” referring to unattended and unhealed pain that lingers within those who survive traumatic events and other wounding experiences (xiii–xiv, 2). Based on this understanding, throughout four chapters she develops a strategy for trauma-aware preaching.

Chapter 1 offers the theoretical groundwork for trauma-informed preaching, providing theories associated with trauma studies to enhance preachers’ trauma awareness. Sancken explains trauma’s causes and effects: traumatic events inscribe ongoing and unhealed soul wounds in the whole body of survivors, which can trigger physical, mental, emotional, and relational responses, as well as spiritual questions to God. Asserting the role of the church for healing trauma, she discusses how therapeutic approaches, mainly based on works by Kaethe Weingarten and Deborah Hunsinger, and theological frameworks, such as Andrew Park’s theology of *han* (20–21) and Shelly Rambo’s theology of remaining (22–24), could help preachers address the wounds of those who bear trauma.

Chapter 2, based on Sancken’s conviction that the Bible has the potential to bring trauma awareness and healing into the sermon, develops a trauma-informed exegesis by presenting five interpretive tools that help preachers read the Bible through the lenses of trauma and resilience. Using these interpretive tools, preachers can find and use biblical language to name the pain of traumatic experiences today, make sense of its causes and effects by assigning blame to God and self, and expect that the scriptural promises of God’s healing will be fulfilled in the agonized world by recounting biblical stories typologically, particularly the redemptive story of the cross and the resurrection.

Taking sexual abuse in the church as an example, chapter 3 addresses the church’s role in causing or deepening traumatic wounds and suggests how to approach trauma-sensitive preaching that can foster healing. Sancken recognizes the resistance to addressing wounds in the church and describes the dynamics between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, which work to protect the institutional church and, in return, to silence victims and disrupt healing. She then presents practical suggestions for preaching that enable the voices of the trauma survivors to be heard without retraumatizing them or silencing their voices. It begins with listening to the survivors, hearing the confessions and apologies of the church for its failure to protect them, and speaking for the restoration of justice.

Finally, chapter 4 discusses how preaching can lead hearers to a deeper experience of the gospel and facilitate congregational resilience, and offers approaches and examples of preaching that can promote healing from trauma. Sancken claims that preaching the gospel has the power to heal traumatic wounds, break the violent cycles that reproduce trauma, and nurture resilient faith that can help wounded people embrace life again. Also, she gives practical tips for trauma-aware

preaching with exemplary sermons, starting from preaching in the immediate aftermath of a wounding event to a sermon series for healing soul wounds through the Apostle's Creed.

Overall, the main virtue of this book is that it employs trauma theory to approach healing sermons in a new and accessible manner. It makes this work valuable since it is still rare to find a homiletical discussion of healing by applying trauma theory, though pastoral preaching of healing has been dealt with by many homileticians and preachers. Moreover, this book is a timely resource for preachers who struggle to speak the gospel amidst a traumatic global pandemic. I believe they can gain useful insights on how to approach the traumatic experiences of congregants and preach more effectively in the face of those situations. It would be helpful if this volume included a deeper discussion of the plot of the gospel as preachers address the process of healing from trauma. That is, Sancken could discuss further how preachers can design a sermon that moves in reflection of the healing process from trauma. The homiletical move from lamentation to celebration, which Luke Powery suggests in *Spirit Speech*, or the four pages sermon movement from trouble to grace, could be models for how to embody the healing process from trauma in the sermon.

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David Ward. *Practicing the Preaching Life*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 193 pages. \$21.49.

Homiletician David Ward (Indiana Wesleyan University) issues an invitation to preachers to step off the preaching treadmill and reconsider what makes preaching “good.” This may seem a tame project, except that the driving question Ward pursues is not at all tame: What if a good sermon is not, after all, the product of a failsafe homiletical *method*, but the byproduct of a soul-feeding, engaged, sustainable *life*? Ward’s argument draws deeply on Augustine and other homiletical sources, as well as social practices theory with its recasting of virtues as practice-sustaining *habitus*. In the course of his discussion of practices, Ward renders readers a double service, providing not only a fresh view of preaching, but a sound introduction to social practices theory. His discussion is both constructive and duly critical, drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Pierre Bourdieu.

Ultimately, Ward invites us to spend less time tinkering with homiletical innovations and more investing in life practices that contribute to spiritual depth, compassion, and justice. This is what makes lives good, and good lives get to Sunday with something good to say.

Ward is persuaded that, for too many preachers (including seasoned ones), preaching preparation is a desperate scramble toward Sunday, haunted by a sense of obligation to outdo oneself in the pulpit, week after week. Addressing the problem with the empathy and insider perspective of someone who has worked this territory, Ward urges preachers to forego making every week one more quest after the holy grail of the perfect sermon. Instead, Ward invites preachers to pursue a handful of life- and spirit-formative practices, including ones that engage us deeply with God as well as with radically “other” persons and communities. These include prayer and meditative reading of scripture, but also relationships of openness, care and service within and beyond the Christian community. When the preaching life is shaped by such practices, Ward contends, unexpected pastoral obligations are less likely to feel like unwelcome intrusions on preaching preparation, holding promise, instead, of relational wisdom and grace-filled surprise.

Following MacIntyre’s lead, Ward elaborates on three virtues he sees as essential to the practices that sustain the preaching life: “centered humility,” “compassionate empathy,” and “participatory wisdom.” Yet, following Bourdieu, he stresses that their expression must be calibrated contextually. Ward’s modifiers (centered/compassionate/participatory) signal that virtues are not ethereal abstractions, but take shape in and through sustained action. Active demonstrations of compassion develop empathy; openness to the life and perspective of the radically other develops wisdom; and intentional engagement with God through prayer and scripture study deepens humility by exposing one’s own limited vision and fallible judgment.

Somewhat controversial will be Ward’s caution against what he regards as overly broad lists of “Christian” practices propounded by such advocates of the Christian social practices movement as Dorothy Bass, Craig Dykstra, Miroslav Volf, and others. Ward stipulates, in line with the Wesleyan tradition, that practices only count as *essentially* Christian if “commanded” by scripture. Yet, surprisingly, he singles out the practice of “saying yes and saying no” as a non-essential practice, even though it appears to meet the Wesleyan “command” criterion (“let your yes be yes, and your no, no,” Matt 5:37). Moreover, for a preacher to speak a clear, discerning “yes” or “no” to dozens of good causes and harmless diversions seems crucial if she hopes to maintain the sort of sustaining and sustainable life Ward commends.

Some readers may find Ward’s vision for practicing a good, productive preaching life energizing, yet be at a loss when it comes to restructuring their complicated lives to

accommodate the web of sustaining practices Ward commends. Preachers' lives, like everyone else's, are sites where multiple communities of obligation and expectation overlap. Family expectations, ongoing networks of friendship and collegiality, ecclesiastical roles, and pastoring itself pull in all directions. Ward acknowledges this complexity to an extent in his brief discussion of bivocational pastoring; but a more stepwise map toward sustainable patterns that take competing demands seriously would have been welcome.

That said, Ward succeeds in liberating his readers from the notion that the truly "good" sermon must dazzle the listener with theological sophistication, beguiling poetics, or a spitfire delivery. A life of sustained and sustaining Christian practice interweaves naturally with everyday experience, scripture, and the wider world sending the preacher to the congregation ready to testify. Such preaching builds good lives, not only in the pews, but in the pulpit as well.

Sally A. Brown, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

Joseph Evans. *The Art of Eloquence: The Sacred Rhetoric of Gardner C. Taylor*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2020. 176 pages. \$19.99.

Five years after his death, the great preacher Gardner Taylor continues to inspire deep research and reflection among homileticians. Dean of the Morehouse School of Religion and ITC homiletics faculty member Joseph Evans carries Taylor's luminous reputation forward in this discerning volume about the rhetorical genius, the style, and the eloquence of a man long known as American's Dean of Preachers. With his close reading of Taylor's sermons and deep insight into white racism in America, Evans helps Taylor to shine, yet again.

The chapters of the book proceed ostensibly according to the five canons of rhetoric—though even this frame proves inadequate for describing Evan's work. From chapters 2–6 Evans reviews and deepens appreciation for Taylor's rhetoric by appeal to well-known elements of rhetoric: invention, discovery, style, memory, and delivery. That said, Evans does three things that make this five-part review unique and powerful in the case of Gardner Taylor. First, Evans reframes the rhetorical tradition itself: discovery is viewed as roughly equivalent to arrangement, eloquence to style, and memory viewed chiefly with respect to helping *listeners* remember an argument. Evans's choice is not arbitrary, but serves chiefly the task of understanding Taylor himself and his rhetorical genius. Second, the vision of rhetoric that lies at the heart of Evans's talent for grasping Taylor is the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition, but with an important twist. Evans pushes back on the notion that such a view can contain Taylor's genius—in fact by appeal to the work of rhetoric of nineteenth-century African American leaders like William G. Allen and Frederick Douglas, Evans makes the point that the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition of rhetoric is transformed precisely in the breach that is social marginalization and deep struggles with matters of liberty and slavery. Evans's vision of Taylor's eloquence comes from just such hybridized rhetoric. Third, Evans is unflinching in relating all matters rhetorical to positionalities under oppression. In Taylor's hands, or better through his voice and preaching, the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition gives way to an eloquence which can only be known in the context of oppression. Evans's encompassing rhetorical concern sometimes takes him to the work of other leading lights: bell hooks, for example, whose writing bears witness to key rhetorical features like “narrative voice.” This is Evans's work at its best: helping the reader to understand Taylor's eloquence through the five canons of rhetoric without reducing Taylor's genius but refracting it through the prism of race in America.

There are admittedly points in the book where Evans's labor of love sounds more like an encomium. But that is not to detract from his contribution at all—this book is not mere hagiography. Speeches of praise, like the encomium, are deeply tied to character to which true eloquence bears witness. How did Quintilian put it?: eloquence is the good man speaking well. Evans assists us to see Taylor up close through his rhetoric, his style, his eloquence.

I find myself grateful for such a work as Evans's. In my work with doctoral students I will play Taylor's sermon on Job 19, “I Know that My Redeemer Liveth,” which appears in two parts on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s14G9EWujJY>. The portrayal on the video is odd: alternative weathered and fading still photos of Taylor accompanied by a crackly recording of a voice that cracks itself...with truth. Yet what it shows is far more than just how it appears. In his fourth chapter on Taylor's style and eloquence, Evans compares eloquence to a beautiful flower held by deep roots in a pot with cracks (79). The cracks reveal something special: the pot's “character helps to understand its narrative.” Evans bids us look deeper to

eloquence as character and to narrative as the “fault line” which helps us to open up eloquence’s peculiar beauty in the rhetoric of Gardner C. Taylor.

David Schnasa Jacobsen, Boston University School of Theology, Boston MA

James Henry Harris. *Black Suffering: Silent Pain, Hidden Hope*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020. 200 pages. 24.99.

In *Black Suffering*, James Harris uses a variety of genres to reveal how the pervasive reality of Black suffering is widely normalized. The normalization of Black suffering means that it is accepted rather than resisted. He argues that people from various races and backgrounds are numb to Black suffering. This numbness allows Black suffering to persist, despite efforts of liberating resistance. To address the normalization of Black suffering, Harris takes a twofold approach. He explores the phenomenology that prevents Black people and communities from awareness of their suffering, and underscores the dire necessity of liberation.

*Black Suffering* consists of thirteen chapters. Harris weaves theoretical chapters with narrative-based ones. This creative mixture offers the reader new lenses to understand and address Black suffering. Beyond describing the extent and nature of Black suffering, the first two chapters depict how much of Black suffering is silent and evil. The silent aspect means that it often goes unnoticed and unnamed. Harris argues that Black suffering must be seen as real. It cannot be reduced to the language of symbols or alterity, which tends toward abstraction. The concrete history of Black suffering in the United States has been simultaneously institutionalized and denied by whiteness. Despite this, Black communities have been places of forgiveness and hope. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the development of Black consciousness, which can prompt hopeful resistance. Harris calls for change within Black communities, even while his work acknowledges how modern situations came to be. In other words, Harris offers guidance to communities instead of merely critiquing them. The sixth chapter correlates Nat Turner's understanding of freedom as a resistance to the colonizing "otherness" of the colonizers. Otherness as freedom, for Harris through Turner, becomes a Hegelian thesis for Black people instead of being an antithesis to whiteness.

In chapter 8, Harris engages with Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. He recounts struggling to read the book for decades. *Beloved* is a place where Black suffering is concretized in and through Black cultural sources. Despite grappling with the harshness of Black suffering, Harris underscores the hope these Black sources cling to and provide for the Black community. The ninth chapter correlates Black suffering and hope with the suffering and hope of Job. These correlations come to full fruition in chapter 11 where he writes about the necessity of preachers addressing silent Black suffering and pain. Just as the personal and creative narratives do throughout the book, Harris encourages preachers to create "a critical consciousness by awakening those who have become numb to their pain and suffering" (144). Harris continues to be optimistic that Black liberation preaching can provide the possibility of new ways of being. The penultimate chapter situates the task of Black preaching as addressing the silent suffering through preaching Christ. He calls for greater clarity and efforts in interpreting, understanding, and explaining Black suffering. The final chapter discusses the biblical hermeneutic of liberation through Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

While readers who are familiar with previous works by Harris will recognize his utilization of Hegel, Ricoeur, Turner, and Cone, *Black Suffering* also engages Morrison, Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and other Black women. These voices continue to recognize the importance of intersectional realities and the need for greater inclusion. Harris works to bridge gaps between the academy and Black communities. The work does not presume that the academy or the church has all the answers. They are two voices in an ongoing conversation, and his place in both communities contribute to *Black Suffering*. Harris models how the church and

academy can converse to the mutual benefit of each. This contribution is needed because the church and academy must work together, with all their beneficial tools and perspective, to address silent suffering.

*Black Suffering* is a “call to consciousness” (7). In a convincing utilization of theology, philosophy, and narratives, the reader is awakened, or reawakened, to the ongoing tragedies of Black suffering. With the experience of a gifted preacher, Harris’s utilization of various genres contributes to the awakening process he describes. Naming the numbness, and encouraging the reader to move past it, is a helpful contribution to current conversations on Black suffering. The work reminds preachers of the pervasive power of stories. While the intended audience is not exclusive to preachers, the entire work is relevant to preaching. Harris clearly centers Black liberation preaching on the task of addressing Black silent suffering through preaching Christ. *Black Suffering* is creative and incisive in its description of current issues and constructive proposals for moving forward.

Scott Donahue-Martens, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

Debra Mumford. *Envisioning the Reign of God: Preaching for Tomorrow*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2019. 242 pages. \$17.99.

Dean Debra Mumford of Louisville Seminary has written a remarkable book on eschatology and preaching. She does not so much make a case for eschatology in preaching as invite the reader to a feast of eschatologies—ways in which theologians from the nineteenth-century premillennial dispensationalist John Nelson Darby to the queer contemporary theologian Patrick Cheng deal with visions of a better world in context. If that sounds like a wild ride, you would be wrong. Mumford’s approach to the dozen eschatologies she treats is irenic, matter-of-fact, and steadfastly critical with respect to preaching. Her approach is irenic because she sees the value of all of these eschatological views for understanding the “Reign of God,” “Kin-dom of God,” or “Kingdom of God” today in light of each theologian’s context and history. Her treatment is matter of fact, because she unpacks each theologian’s eschatology carefully without rushing to judgment (an eschatological hazard in its own right!). Her work is however also steadfastly critical with its view of how it helps for preaching today. In a conclusion to each chapter, she covers what a particular eschatological view’s implications for preaching would be. She returns to the same now unpacked eschatology, but with a clear sense of how its answers to the problem of envisioning God’s reign might not necessarily be ours. Mumford does that critical theological work with grace.

The twelve main chapters are shaped by the theologians she treats: Darby and Cheng, yes, but also Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Luther King Jr., Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Walter Rauschenbusch, James Cone, Emilie Townes, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and Nancy Eiesland. Some of these theologians will be among the first to come to mind with a topic like eschatology. With some other theologians, a turn to eschatology as a lens helps to concretize otherwise already well-known features of their theological positions. Mumford’s gift is to be able to point out why all of these theologians are needed, and in fact need each other, to plumb the depths of eschatology—especially for the preaching task. For me, Mumford’s careful work with Townes, Isasi-Díaz, Eiesland, and Cheng were particularly rich chapters. Thanks to her careful and critical work, God’s reign looks differently to me now—and invites me to preach with greater range, theological precision, and steadfast solidarity.

A critical reader who is also happens to be a teacher of preachers may wonder what to do with a book like this. Most of us don’t line up for a buffet of eschatologies when we preach. That said, as someone who himself seeks to do theological work at the intersection of texts with more than a whiff of ancient apocalyptic and contemporary postcolonial identities that range from the privileged to the powerless, I think Mumford’s book on envisioning the Reign of God is promising indeed. When I teach courses on preaching Mark’s Gospel, for example, I encourage students to understand the elements of apocalyptic eschatology that Mark appeals to from the rending of the heavens in Jesus’ baptism in chapter 1 to the rending of the temple curtain that happens while the sun is darkened during Jesus’ crucifixion in chapter 15. What remains, of course, is the important theological work in making sense of such eschatological notions in today’s world: and this is the path that her dozen theologians have trod in such beautifully different and powerfully revelatory ways. Read them and you will see. Preaching Mark, better, any preaching that along with Mumford takes eschatology seriously can be richer for how it attends to God’s Kin-dom in our here and now. Or, as Mumford puts it in her concluding sermon on Mark 1:40–45, we can see Jesus and thus even today envision a “chance of reign” (215). I recommend this book highly.

David Schnasa Jacobsen, Boston University School of Theology, Boston MA

Joni S. Sancken. *Words that Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*. The Artistry of Preaching Series. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. 122 pages.

The fifth volume in the Artistry of Preaching Series, *Words that Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*, proves to be a timely, practical, and theologically accessible resource. Homiletician Joni Sancken examines the heart of human trauma, practical ways for preachers to assist individuals and communities in the healing process, and the role of resilience in healing. Sancken admits, “Those who write about healing from trauma often have a personal catalyst” (xiii). She is not exempt from her own observation. Lest readers dismiss Joni Sancken’s work as an academic exercise, she immediately reveals her own wounds and vulnerabilities: the sudden death of her sister-in-law informs her work. Sancken weaves her personal experiences throughout the book, creating a personal connection to readers and gently reminding us that all of us have experienced pain and wounds. Such personal examples establish her credibility as one who also is aware of her own pain and the connection to others (96–98).

In four chapters, Sancken explores wounds in various individual and communal contexts. Readers unfamiliar with trauma studies will find Sancken’s multidisciplinary and historical exploration of trauma informative and the examples carefully selected and presented. Sancken uses chapter 1 to introduce the idea of a “soul wound,” which she defines as “the pain that lingers within those who survive trauma and other wounding experiences” (2). For Sancken, preachers must be “trauma-informed,” compassionate, and hopeful. She navigates the causes of soul wounds, the impact of stress, and ways to recognize unhealed wounds so that preachers can preach about trauma and do so with compassion. She implores preachers to preach about the lingering effects of trauma.

How then should preachers navigate the Bible through a trauma-informed lens? Sancken moves forward by providing five interpretive tools for exploring the Bible and using that exploration to inform one’s preaching. According to Sancken, the very language of the Bible is a key to speaking about pain. Readers need not shy away from assigning blame (to self and God), are encouraged to focus on God’s power and promises, use past events to help one with present events, and explore ways to connect with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In case one is unclear about how to apply the five interpretive tools to a text, Sancken uses Genesis 22 (the binding of Isaac) to illustrate how preachers could bring such a text to a point of preaching it in the present-day context. What is most important in this chapter is “Preachers need to stay in close communication with those who carry deep wounds. Preaching is not a separate act from pastoral care...Sermons that take God’s healing power seriously must tell the truth about the deepest pain so that God in Christ can redeem even this pain” (47).

Telling the truth includes an internal examination of the church’s complicit role in causing trauma and its continued resistance to addressing trauma. In chapter 3, Sancken exposes the reality that some people have left the church as a result of wounds inflicted by the church (58), while others are less trusting of clergy. Sancken gives examples such as sexual abuse by clergy and pastors, and abuse by prominent seminary leaders. She argues, “Acknowledging the failures of the church is healing not only for survivors but also for the latent communal wounds that were caused by coverups, denial, and brokenness in the system” (61). For Sancken, preaching can provide an element of justice for those who have been victimized. She concludes the chapter with a sample sermon about trauma and provides a discussion about her thought process in crafting the sermon.

The final chapter focuses on resilience. Preachers often are eager to offer resolutions to trauma and can be afraid to preach about trauma for fear of imperfection. Sancken offers encouragement: “In the immediate wake of local or broader traumatic events, listeners would rather have a relevant word that speaks to what is happening in our world than a perfect and well-researched sermon” (80). She returns to the importance of truth-telling: “When survivors hear their truth spoken from the pulpit, it legitimizes their experiences, humanizes them, and highlights their worth to God and the church” (82). From there, she uses the Apostle’s Creed as an example, bridging biblical stories with present-day realities. Two appendices serve as convenient references for preachers to consult when crafting sermons. Appendix A is organized into strategies (such as listen, care, confess, and apologize) and applications (such as attending to triggers and encouraging survivors). Appendix B provides steps and suggestions for exegeting a text and crafting a sermon that is trauma-sensitive.

Sancken’s contribution will be welcomed by those interested in healing themselves, their congregations, and their communities. Vivid examples abound and allow readers to carefully navigate a range of challenging topics.

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Cláudio Carvalhaes. *Liturgies From Below: Praying With People at the Ends of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. 359 pages. \$29.99.

In *Liturgies From Below*, Cláudio Carvalhaes positions worship, which is integral to the life and mission of the church, as by its very nature a subversive act. In the preface of the book, Sudipta Singh rightly points, “Worshipping God is itself an act of rebellion, as Empire demands to be worshipped alone” (xi). Singh continues, “Worship inspires and anoints the community to translate this mission into radical social transformation in the here and now by enabling the agency to turn the world upside down. In worship, we celebrate the spirituality of resistance and reconstruction” (xi). Elsewhere, writing about prayer, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says this: prayer “is meaningless unless it is subversive” (xi). *Liturgies From Below* reminds us of this simple but profound truth that both liturgies used in worship and prayers are subversive acts that speak truth to power. *Liturgies from Below* is a prayer book designed with the intent to be used in worship, and it provides an alternative “to both the traditional prayer books of Christian liturgies and neo-Pentecostal cultic prayers” (5). Most importantly, the prayers included in this book, according to the author, are what come close to the gospel mandate that we are called to identify with the poor and abandoned of the world.

This book is the result of a project called “Re-Imagining Worship as Acts of Defiance and Alternatives in the Context of Empire,” which was organized by the Council for World Mission during the years 2018–2019 (7). The gathering consisted of pastors, activists, artists, students, and others from a wide variety of backgrounds from four different countries: Manila, Philippines; Johannesburg, South Africa; Kingston, Jamaica and Scicli, Italy. The group consisted of 100 participants who walked alongside people and communities experiencing extreme poverty and oppression and allowed their experiences to be the catalyst for creating liturgies. “To pray is to change,” and that is what happened to the participants who immersed in the daily struggles of these people living in the “ends of the earth.”

The book captures the significant elements of worship such as the call to worship, prayer of confession, assurance of pardon, and more that are relevant for Sunday morning. It also offers liturgies regarding baptism, Eucharist, and other services. The topical prayers such as prayers offered for healing as well as responses to mourning and anger experienced by worshippers are great resources for the congregation. They also benefit individual believers experiencing different seasons and realities of their life. I particularly resonated with the prayers of the people which expressed frustrations and anger when God seems silent to their pleas. The prayers in this book are also timely in that they voice the concerns of people living and experiencing marginalization in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic.

Congregants and congregations treasuring and conversant with the use of liturgy in worship will truly find this book a great find, even when the approach of listening and incorporating the voices and prayers “from below” that have been muffled for centuries will challenge and question the way liturgy and worship has been traditionally understood.

Liturgy, as the work of the people not only in worship but also in its design, is truly exemplified in this project. The raw honesty with which these prayers are crafted in their address to God is, in my view, the single most important aspect of this book. I truly commend the work that has been done in compiling the prayers that have made this book a valuable reality.

Born and raised with the sung liturgy in the Church of South India and now serving a congregation that blends liturgy and other contemporary forms of worship, I look for liturgical resources that enhance worship in my context of first- and second-generation immigrants of

Asian Indian descent. This book is a great find for several reasons. It creates awareness among congregational members in my context to the plight and struggles of faith communities and others living under the oppressive powers of the Empire. It builds solidarity with the disenfranchised and oppressed by resourcing the struggle of their very lives as liturgically illuminating. Finally, the collection of prayers challenges readers to “stand in the gap” as intercessors on behalf of the oppressed around the world as well as in their immediate surrounds, and to offer their struggles to the One who hears, understands, and answers our prayers.

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Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong. *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. 208 pages. \$17.99.

In *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching*, Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong introduce what is arguably the first preaching text casting a vision for Asian American preaching from authors who “espouse biblical inerrancy and infallibility without reservation” (53). Their unapologetic stance regarding scriptural authority may impair the ability of some readers to engage their work. Yet because biblicism also informs much of the ecclesiology and preaching in Asian American congregations in North America, any homiletician seeking to better understand the question of what constitutes Asian American preaching or expand the conversation regarding Asian American preaching would do well to see what Kim and Wong have to say.

Kim and Wong alternate in writing chapters that move from “experience,” “hermeneutics,” “theologies,” an assessment of Asian North American preaching today, and recommendations for the future. One contribution of *Finding Our Voice* is its insistence upon “Asian North American [ANA]” as a more accurate sociological term to describe U.S.- and Canadian-born Asians (12). Kim and Wong are writing for English-speaking ANA preachers who are “second- and multi-generational” (though this kind of generational counting differs across Asian American cultures where with some, for example, the American-born are considered “first-generation”). They write for readers with backgrounds similar to the authors, who are of Korean and Chinese North American heritages. The ANA distinction also separates their text from immigrant or what Kim and Wong might call first generation authors, such as Eunjoo Mary Kim and her *Preaching the Presence of God: a Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Judson Press, 1999), Jung Young Lee’s *Korean Preaching: An Interpretation* (Abingdon, 1997) and Sunggu Yang’s *Evangelical Pilgrims from the East: Faith Fundamentals of Korean American Protestant Diasporas* (2016). Lee even has advice for Korean American preachers to “learn to read and write English as proficiently as possible” (117). By beginning with the American-born experience, Kim and Wong write into a lacuna in Asian American preaching literature.

Kim and Wong also name 3 additional audiences: 1) guest preachers (who may not identify as Asian) in ANA congregations, 2) readers with interest in multicultural ministry and those with questions regarding how ethnicity influences ministry, and 3) Asian American immigrant pastors curious to figure out how to better connect with “their children and grandchildren” (17). Yet what is most powerful in the book are the biographical disclosures that often drive lines of argumentation from Kim and Wong.

Readers familiar with the impossible and multiple-vectored tug-of-war of trying to be Asian enough, American enough, Asian American enough, Christian and Asian, and Asian Christian, or just yourself and so forth will understand the turmoil behind Kim admitting that sometimes he still wants to be white or feel his frustration as he sees his children treated like exotic creatures in their mostly white neighborhood. Readers will get it when Wong writes of being heckled as “Ching-Chong Chinaman” at school and then finding himself lost during the indecipherable Cantonese-language sermons of his home church (10-11). I am here sticking with introductory material so as not to give away some of the most powerful anecdotes. Noticeably absent, however, are substantive considerations of ANA female and LGBTQIA+ preaching experiences, as well as substantive consideration of ANA preachers who may not have grown up

in Christian churches. There is, however, swift discussion of bi- and multiracial ANA complexities (97).

As for the intellectual program of *Finding Our Voice*, the book has a defensive suture running through it. It seeks to legitimate ANA preaching and empower ANA preachers on the whole. Yet it also responds to the idea that “[i]n some evangelical circles, contextualization is a dirty word” (61). The precedent of their text therefore acquires its significance in large part as an attempt to fit in a particular evangelical understanding of Christianity. Hence, they double-down on commitments to biblical inerrancy and infallibility and have moments in the text where they worry that “namaste” used by Christians dilutes the faith (80).

The marketing of *Finding Our Voice* also communicates volumes. Eunjoo Mary Kim’s *Preaching the Presence of God* begins with a forward by Thomas G. Long. Wong and Kim have assembled nearly four full pages of endorsements from recognizable Asian American and evangelical voices. Amazon reviews exceed what fits on my laptop screen. Kim and Wong not only assert the place of ANA preaching in evangelical circles, they claim a particular slant of Christianity as a majority and authoritative voice in ANA preaching.

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Gwyneth H. McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl. *From Pews to Politics: Religious Sermons and Political Participation in Africa*. New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 2019. \$39.99.

*From Pews to Politics: Religious Sermons and Political Participation in Africa*, by Gwyneth H. McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl, examine selected sermons from Pentecostal (60 sermons out of 100 churches visited) and Catholic and mainline Protestant churches (24 of 50 churches visited) in Nairobi, Kenya, in order to test how and whether sermons shape political engagement from their hearers. According to the authors, a primary question driving their research is, “Does exposure to contemporary sermon content have an impact on political participation and, if so, how?” (107). What McClendon and Beatty find in field and laboratory work at the Bursara Center for Behavioral Economics at Nairobi undertaken from 2013–June 2014 and July–August 2016 is that religious belief, even when long held, can fluctuate. Sermons help to “reinforce” or “recharge” faith (138).

The reenergizing of congregants’ faith also takes place in contrasting ways. For the Pentecostal preachers that McClendon and Riedl heard, messages asserted that inward change produces outward transformation in the name of God. For the Catholic and mainline Protestant preachers studied, preachers encouraged their listeners to name and address systemic social problems in order to pave the way for building a society that more resembles what God intends. McClendon and Riedl exemplify the contrast by highlighting different interpretations of Job from Pentecostal and Catholic and mainline Protestant preachers. Pentecostal sermons see in verses such as Job 22:28—where Eliphaz the Temanite replies to Job, “You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you. And light will shine on your ways”—a challenge for believers to change their circumstances with more dedication to God. For McClendon and Riedl, Pentecostal preachers proclaim how the verse “underscores the power of positive thinking and prophetic prayer: have faith that something will happen, speak that it will happen, and God will make it happen, the passages says” (80). McClendon and Riedl see in such Pentecostal sermons a consistent message that problems on earth are due to a lack of faith or inward turmoil. Stronger faith brings “imminent success” (80). By contrast, when mainline Protestants and Catholics preached from Job, they shared that sometimes even the faithful suffer. Nevertheless, God sustains the faithful in the face of trial (79–80). For McClendon and Riedl, the ideational content of the sermons they studied provided “metaphysical instruction” that they then correlated to political activity documented in survey data, focus groups, and examining the divergences of political behavior across Pentecostal and mainline Protestant and Catholic citizens, political candidates, activists, and others as documented by local newspapers and other media repositories.

The fieldwork and laboratory testing driving the findings of McClendon and Riedl give weight to their conclusions about trends and political implications of Pentecostal and mainline Protestant and Catholic preaching. Their methodology also provides a measurable apparatus for tracking how trends in sermonic messaging from varying traditions appear to influence individual and group political engagement. In short, the technical detail fortifies their thesis that sermons influence the political behavior of hearers. Yet homileticians already familiar with the difference in ideational content between Pentecostal and mainline and Catholic preaching may wonder how the discovery of McClendon and Riedl regarding the differences between Pentecostal and mainline Protestant and Catholic sermons is breaking new ground. In other words, McClendon and Riedl do not uncover something unknown, but provide a sociological apparatus to give weight to what many homileticians have likely already intuited about

Anglophone African preaching and about preaching in Pentecostal and mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations around the world. Also, the overall sample size of 84 total sermons, as well as building the link from sermon analysis to political engagement primarily through laboratory study, makes their claims less striking. Still, any preaching scholar interested in resourcing empirical approaches to make a social argument regarding the relevance of preaching would do well to see how McClendon and Riedl arrived at their conclusions.

*From Pews to Politics* could provide a contemporary and sociological counterpoint with female authors to titles like *The New Measures* from Ted A. Smith, *Preaching Must Die* from Jacob D. Myers, or initiatives such as the *Listening the Listeners* project from John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Mosely, and G. Ramsey, Jr.

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Diann L. Neu. *Stirring Waters: Feminist Liturgies for Justice*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020. 339 pages. \$39.95.

*Stirring Waters: Feminist Liturgies for Justice* is a compilation of fifty-two feminist liturgies for justice that have been co-created and celebrated by members of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), often in collaboration with other groups. Together these liturgies celebrate WATER's thirty-fifth anniversary. They are written for women and others who have felt excluded from various religious traditions, and for those who are bored by the hackneyed platitudes heard in their own and others' prayers. The hope is that readers will see and be inspired to imagine further what it can look like to have a "rich spirituality" while simultaneously holding "inclusive, Earth-loving politics" (xi). Diann L. Neu encourages readers to use these liturgies as prototypes, freely adding to, removing from, and adjusting them as needed to nourish our souls and energize us "to make the world a better place" (xvi).

The book contains four sections of twelve liturgies. Each section includes one liturgy corresponding to each month of the year. A section of four liturgies follows these, bringing the total to fifty-two, one for every week of the year. Section 1 honors and learns from "holy women," including Sojourner Truth and a woman (named by the user of the liturgy) whose work has played a vital role in shaping a community of justice. Section 2 encourages participants to disturb the status quo by actions like voting, reducing water usage, and standing in solidarity with women with breast cancer. Section 3 galvanizes participants to work for justice by, for instance, learning from Womanist Wisdom, celebrating fun as a human right, and committing to breaking the silence surrounding domestic violence. Section 4's liturgies reinvigorate tired spirits and are written primarily to function as personal meditations. Two suggest inviting "a friend or several" to join (266, 272). September's liturgy for peace on earth indicates that it could also be used at a holiday meal or other special gathering. November's liturgy invites us to prepare a Thanksgiving feast to celebrate with family and friends. Section 5 leaves us with calls to listen to those who weep, learn women's ways of praying, and honor women who are resisting sexual violence and harassment. The final liturgy is a personal meditation to center ourselves so that we do not try to satisfy others' thirst with a well that has run dry.

Noteworthy are the ways that everyone is encouraged to play an active role in each liturgy. For example, after the theme is introduced, participants share their name and say something connected to the service's theme. Prayers are usually responsive. Thematic symbols often involve direct interaction, such as eating and drinking, pouring water, anointing with oil, lighting candles, planting, or holding stones. Participants are sometimes invited to engage their bodies by taking a particular prayer posture, using hand motions, holding hands, or hugging. Rather than asking one person to offer a sermon or homily, all participants can share their reflections on specific questions. This active role moves beyond the service by providing a list of ways to "Take Action." This might include learning more or teaching others about an issue, donating to or volunteering at an organization, sharing a meal with someone, or writing to legislators.

The book concludes with concise chapters on "How to Create a Feminist Liturgy for Justice" and "How to Start a Feminist Liturgy Group, Inclusive Eucharistic Community, or House Church." The former guides readers from brainstorming the community's needs and choosing the theme, intentionally selecting the elements, environment, and leaders of the service, to smoothly ordering the liturgy. Neu provides an example for each step from one liturgy in the book so that readers can see its development from start to finish. The final two-page chapter

encourages readers to collaborate with like-minded people, secure leadership and gather members, have consistent gatherings with a specific routine, and become legal if desired.

*Stirring Waters* will be a welcome resource for those who appreciate the structure and ritual of traditional liturgies and who yearn to foster a vibrant spirituality in community but who have experienced marginalization or been offered insipid, stale water in their familiar religious tradition. It will also be a gift to worship leaders rooted in a specific tradition who feel compelled to plan services with greater attention to inclusivity, creativity, and justice. This book makes room for and lifts every voice, provides multisensory experiences to satisfy thirsty souls, and challenges participants in tangible ways to put their prayers into action.

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Matthew Salisbury, ed. *God in Fragments: Worshipping with Those Living with Dementia*. London: Church House Publishing, 2020. 152 pages. \$23.99.

How does worship work when the relationship between words and cognition is disturbed? What value are sacraments if those who receive them have lost their memory of what sacraments are? How can we worship with those whose sense of God is at best fragmentary, if not entirely absent? These are just some of the questions that *God in Fragments*—the result of a conference held in 2017—seeks to address. Speaking to the growing number of Christians with various forms of dementia and a society that is increasingly older, this volume charts a path forward for how Christian communities can design worship services that are inclusive of those experiencing dementia.

As a resource for constructing worship services hospitable to those experiencing dementia, the structure of the book is straightforward. The volume begins with a chapter that makes explicit the issues surrounding dementia as it relates to the life of the church and Christian worship. This chapter names the challenge posed by dementia for conceptions of personhood that depend on cognitive capacities for their meaning. In doing so, the chapter points a way forward in our conceptions of person that do not remove that personhood when cognition is lost. The next chapter focuses on spiritual awareness and dementia, noting again how often our understandings of spiritual awareness and growth depend on high levels of cognitive awareness. Pointing to the difficulties of such understandings, this chapter poses an alternative conception that points towards non-cognitive forms of spiritual awareness and the various ways in which those experiencing dementia can also be spiritually aware, even as the dementia runs its course. The third chapter offers a theology of worshipping with dementia that argues each member of the community, no matter their level of cognitive function, is part of the Body of Christ, and this reality calls for alternative forms and understandings of member “participation” in the life of the body. Following these first three chapters, the remaining chapters each take up some aspect of the church’s corporate life—worship, music, and community life—both naming some of the issues for those with dementia and making suggestions for how we might include them in our worship and also learn from their presence in our gatherings.

While discussions around dementia and Christian theology have been taking place for some time, this volume is a helpful addition to those conversations, for several reasons. First, it continues to emphasize that those with dementia only strike our churches as a “challenge” when we fall into the trap of believing worship is something we do, rather than something God does to us. Thus, by raising up the experiences of those with dementia, the authors actually call us all back to faithfulness in our corporate life together. And this is perhaps another helpful component of this volume: the authors remind us that worship that would “work” for those with dementia would also work for those without dementia, and this only reveals our reliance on overly-cognitive forms of worship. Thus, one consequence of this volume is a call back to our bodily engagement with worship. This is not to say I had no questions after reading this volume. Given that the authors come from a highly liturgical tradition, I was left wondering how the large number of Christians who come from free-church traditions that are not as highly liturgized might use this book as a resource. One consequence of the authors writing from and for their own tradition is that it may be difficult for others to know how to use this resource within their own traditions. But despite these questions, there is much within the volume to recommend, and ministers and other church leaders will find it a welcome resource for their congregations.

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